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Outcomes of Conversion to Judaism through the Reform Movement

1952-2002

Volume I

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PhD

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April 2013

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And to all those converts who shared their stories with me.

Declaration

I, Jacqueline Tabick, grant powers of discretion to the University Librarian to allow the thesis to be copied in whole or in part without further reference being made to me.

Abstract

I examined the characteristics of converts to Judaism through the Reform Synagogues, 1952-2002, exploring the psychological impact of conversion, the nature of their Jewish identity and the durability of their religious commitment through time. Recognising the large variation in the Jewish practice and attitudes displayed, I also examined the influence of motivational, family and biographical factors on their Jewish identity.

Motivation for conversion was multi-dimensional. The instrumental desire to create family unity was identified as the most powerful motivating factor. The strength of this variable was found to be a significant predictor of the level of behavioural changes in the converts' Jewish lifestyle. Counter-intuitively, this motivational factor formed negative correlations with ethnicity and a non-significant relationship with ritual behaviour.

The data highlight differences between the factorial structure of the Jewish identity of converts and born Jews. For converts, four identity factors were identified: ritual practice, ethnic belonging, Jewish development and spirituality. Miller et al. have identified three factors underlying the Jewish identity of born Jews under 50: behavioural ethnicity, religiosity and mental ethnicity. Survey data of converts has shown a clear division of ritual and ethnic behaviours, whilst in born Jews, the same differentiation is not demonstrated.

Like moderately engaged born Jews, converts emphasised the notion of affective identity rather than the actual performance of Jewish ritual acts, though it is clear that 'on average' converts have a somewhat more intense pattern of ritual practice than born (Reform) Jews.

The majority of the converts felt content with the results of their conversion but the relative lack of emphasis placed on Jewish continuity as opposed to the convert's individual self-fulfilment, can be seen as an indication of a possibility that the conversion process may only delay demographic decline in the Jewish community for just one or two generations.

Jacqueline Tabick

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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. Context

The British Jewish community is small in numbers, but it is a community in a state of fairly rapid demographic and religious flux and hence worthy of social scientific investigation. Some of the key trends that have been examined by contemporary researchers include:-

- *Religious polarisation*: There is a growing 'ultra-Orthodox' wing of the community and a growing secular/progressive wing. The 'traditional Orthodox' sector that occupies the middle ground in terms of religious belief and observance is large but shrinking (Elazar, 2012). The social and psychological drivers behind this religious mobility have been examined by several scholars (Gitelman, Kosmin and Kovacs, 2003; Krausz & Tulea, 1998; Graham, 2003).

- *Growing secular and ethnic identity*: Historically Jews viewed themselves essentially as a religious minority ('Englishmen of the Jewish persuasion' according to Alderman, 1994). Contemporary research has plotted a dramatic growth in ethnic and cultural expressions of Jewish identity with ritual practices increasingly used to represent ethnic rather religious modes of association with the community (Miller in Gitelman et al, 2003; Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Cohen & Kahn-Harris, 2004; Boyd, 2003).

- *Demographic erosion and out-marriage*: Demographically the community has been in steady decline since the mid 1900s, reducing from approximately 480,000 at that time to the current level of about 270,000 (2001 census). Studies of the 2001 census also reveal that the nuclear family is no longer the norm for British Jewry and other research has shown that, since the period 1960-64, the average number of persons marrying in a synagogue has fallen from around 3700 per annum to circa 1800 over the period 1998-2001 (Board of Deputies, 2001).

The key factors contributing to this demographic erosion have been out-marriage, net emigration and assimilation. The JPR survey of 1996 (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996) showed that 50% of married/partnered Jewish men under 30 years old were in interfaith partnerships compared with 38% of all married/partnered men. The figure for women was 'more difficult to estimate' (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996, p.12) and was placed in the range of 20–25%, suggesting a rate of intermarriage of 30% for men and women of all ages together. In addition, 8% of the sample reported having had a steady relationship with a non-Jew at some time in the past, rising to 60% among those currently single and 68% for unmarried respondents aged between 22 and 39 (Goldberg & Kosmin, 1997).

Similarly, although the 2001 census did not provide data on rates of intermarriage, the data did reveal that only 72 percent of married or cohabiting Jews had a Jewish partner. Further, 68% of those cohabiting with a partner, who in general are younger members of the community, had a

partner who was not Jewish (Azria, 1998).

0.2. Focus of the research and theoretical approach

These trends in interfaith partnerships are not surprising. Jews increasingly see their Jewishness as a matter of choice rather than obligation, or perhaps as one facet of their multiple identities. As Modood wrote, describing the African Caribbean community in Britain:

> *…It is clear that these identities – what one calls oneself, to which community one thinks one belongs, which norms and sanctions are operative in one's life and to which minority causes and struggles one is willing to give time and energy-are open to adaptation and negotiation… An even more powerful current is the movement from narrow identities to wider ethnicities or to extra-ethnic identities, to locating one's ethnic distinctiveness in a wider set of linked ethnicities…* (Modood, Beishon, & Virdee, 1994, p.7)

As sections of the Jewish community move towards more ethnic (or religio-ethnic) conceptions of their own identity, resistance to partnership with non-Jews might be expected to diminish.

However, whilst the resistance to out-marriage may have declined considerably in recent years, the desire of out-married Jews (often reinforced by their parents) to continue to associate with the Jewish community can be very strong, as this research will demonstrate, especially in Chapter 5 (pp.142-183). And this is the context in which numbers of non-Jewish partners of Jews have come forward to seek conversion to Judaism through one of the recognised groups in the Jewish community, including the Reform Movement.

Whilst the operational process of conversion is clearly set out by the ecclesiastical authorities, there has been no systematic research in the UK into the motivation of converts or the impact of conversion on their subsequent Jewish belief, practice and identity. Social researchers such as Cohen, (2000) Kahn-Harris (2004) and Miller (in Gitelman et al, 2003) have developed quite sophisticated models of the nature of Jewish identity from an ideographic perspective, and scholars such as Webber (1994) and Schweid (1994) have adopted nomothetic approaches which seek to relate an understanding of Jewish identity to the historical and social environment in which Jews find themselves. However, neither ideographic nor nomothetic models of Jewish identity provide an obvious starting point for examining the behaviours, beliefs and identity of converts to Judaism (for an explanation of these terms cf. Section 3.1, pp.52-55)

Indeed, as this is a new field in sociological academic research in this country, there are no detailed theoretical positions to refine. This study has therefore had to look mostly to research in the United States where, with its bigger population of converts, such research has been sponsored by a number of different religious and academic institutions (Mayer, 1985 and 1992; Lerner, 1983; Diamant, 1998; Lamm, 1991; Kling & Perkins, 1999; Epstein L. J., 1994).

Some of the sociologists have developed localised theories to explain some aspects of conversion, such as Foster and Tabachnik's work (1991) in which they developed a theory dominated by 'push' and 'pull' factors, that is, the actions of family, partners, communities and rabbis that might attract or repel converts or Fishman's qualitative study of 2006, in which she described converts through three main typologies: the Activist, the Accommodating and the Ambivalent. However, these theories have not proved to be good levers for this study, partly because they are localised theories, and partly because the American religious scene is so different from Britain. In the UK, those who describe themselves as non-religious have risen from 31% to 50% between 1983 and 2009 (28th Report of British Social Attitudes Survey, 2011), and among people aged between 18-24, the incidence of religious affiliation is only 36% whereas in the United States only 3% of people questioned in the American Religious Identification Survey (2008) stated they did not have a belief in God, while a further 8% were doubtful. Cohen also talks about British Jews being, unique amongst Jewish communities, particularly as they are 'religious outside, ethnic inside', (Cohen in Boyd, 2003, pp.26-34) that is they identify themselves as members of distinct religious institutions, but their behaviour is largely dictated by ethnic concerns, not theological ones.

In addition, much of the research into converts in America, such as those carried out over a number of years by Egon Mayer with different partners (Lerer and Mayer, 2008) is empirical in nature and is not located within any meta-theoretical context. Where the categories described coincide with those employed in this study, their results have provided useful comparisons which will be explained when relevant to this study, but some of their research has included those who have chosen not to convert but who are still linked with the Jewish community, which was not possible for this study.

Thus, in seeking to understand what is essentially an un-researched phenomenon in the UK, it seemed to the writer more appropriate to adopt an empirical and relatively descriptive approach, rather than attempt to generate tight hypotheses to be tested by the data. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on:-

(i) The biographical characteristics of those who seek conversion through the Reform Movement in the UK,

(ii) Their motivation to convert and the role of their spouse/partner and his/her family,

(iii) Their perceptions of the conversion process,

(iv) Their patterns of belief and practice subsequent to conversion, and

(v) The impact of motivation, family pressure and experience of the conversion process on subsequent belief and practice.

In considering each of these issues, I have drawn parallels where appropriate with data on British 'born Jews' and sought to compare the behaviours of converts with the community as a

whole. I have also sought to develop 'micro-models' to explain particular relationships where I felt that the data warranted this approach. But I have left until the final chapter any attempt to develop a more general account of the nature and dynamics of the conversion process.

0.3. Overview of data sources and methodological techniques

The first chapter will contain a longer description of the evidence base and methodology employed, but here, just to note briefly, this study generates findings from four sources of information:-

- Interviews with converts and where appropriate, their partners,
- The application forms converts have provided when they applied to the Beit Din,
- The records of the Beit Din over that period providing basic demographic information, and
- A postal survey directed at past converts, which has been used to support in-depth analysis of the motivational patterns of the converts and the personal and Jewish characteristics of the population.

By combining all these approaches, the report provides:-

- A description of the population of converts to Judaism through the auspices of the Reform Movement and, where applicable, of their Jewish partners and their families,
- Analysis of the factorial structure of their motives for conversion,
- Analysis of the factorial structure of the converts' Jewish identity and a comparison with born Jews, and
- Data on some of the determinants of Jewish identity behaviours.

0.4. Research goals

As noted above, theoretical understanding of the conversion process operating in British Jews is embryonic. The main goal of this research is to establish the empirical relationships between the background characteristics of converts, the motivational drivers and outcome measures in terms of identity, belief and practice. At the same time, some theoretical relationships have emerged from the data – for example in relation to developing the virtuous circle formed by changes in behaviour that leads to positive feelings about the conversion which then leads to more changes in behaviour – and these could provide starting points for the development of a more holistic model of the conversion process in the British Jewish context.

In addition, the expectation was that these findings would have practical implications for

congregational rabbis in helping to expose the nature of the changes that may occur in the Jewish life-styles of the families involved. It should also reveal something about the impact of current conversion procedures on the Jewish identity of those who pass through them.

In the context of Jewish community planning, as larger numbers of Jews enter inter-faith partnerships, it is also important to determine whether conversion offers an effective route to retain those families within the community, or whether the outcomes of conversion are short-lived, a one generational event, and unlikely to impact on the prevailing demographic trend.

1. EVIDENCE BASE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

1.1. General considerations

This thesis has been based on a cross-sectional study of the population of Reform converts in Great Britain. Given the rich variety of the sources available, I decided it should be a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, providing an opportunity to explore an individual's understanding and perception of their unique experiences as a proselyte, supported by statistical analysis. There are some tensions that arise from using both of these methods, where sometimes one of the methodologies naturally comes to the fore, but each can support and enlarge the other. I felt that, by using both methodologies, a fuller picture would emerge that would prove more helpful in elucidating the questions which first prompted this research. As Lincoln and Denzin state, 'There is no single interpretative truth' Denzin & Lincoln 1998, p.30 and p.408).

1.2. The four different sources

The four primary sources available for this study, in the order in which they were examined, are:-

- Interviews with past converts and, where applicable, their partners. The starting point for this study was a series of interviews with a sample of converts from a wide range of circumstances. These were held both to explore the parameters of the subject and to develop specific hypotheses that would help frame the survey. These interviews were conducted in the period 1999-2001.

- The Ledgers of the proceedings of the Reform Beit Din. There are some case notes available from 1944 which have been referenced in the qualitative sections but basic biographical data on the converts accepted by the Beit Din is available from 1948. More complete data is available from 1953. The tables are labelled appropriately according to which data set has been used for that analysis. I have included data from the Ledgers up to and including 2002.

- A sample of the application forms filled out by those appearing before the Beit Din. In addition to the same biographical information as the Beit Din records these contain personal statements given by the converts as to their reasons for seeking conversion. These were only used by the Beit Din from 1958.

- A postal survey largely distributed through Reform synagogues. The questionnaires asked about the background of the converts, their reasons for conversion, their experience of the conversion and outcome measures including current attitudes and ritual practice. Where applicable, background information of the converts' partners was

also obtained. This was circulated to the congregations in 2005.

These are summarised in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1. Summary of the four methods of data collection

	Sample/sample size	Data collected	Value of sample
Interviews…conducted 1999-2001	Sample of converts and their partners representing different marital and age profiles. Sample size: 18 interviews with converts, 5 interviews with their partners.	30-80 minute recorded interviews. Opportunity to investigate conversion process and outcome and formulate hypotheses.	Small sample but providing rich qualitative information.
The Ledgers of the proceedings at the Reform Beit Din 1944-48 case notes 1948-52 very basic information 1953-2002 standardised pattern of date available.	Covering the years 1944-2002. Sample size: 5197 entries.	Demographics (age, gender, marital status, previous religious upbringing, synagogue of conversion).	Complete count of demographic information up to 2002.
Beit Din Application Forms… only available since 1958	11% stratified sample of all application forms. Sample size: 512 forms.	Reasons for conversion.	Representative sample (stratified by 5 year periods) important information; records subject to interpretation.
Postal Survey…distributed 2005	Questionnaires distributed largely through synagogues but also through snowballing techniques. Sample size: 366.	Written questionnaire. 390 items	Sample unlikely to be representative of all converts, but sample sufficiently large to examine features of main sub-groups statistically..

1.3. The interviews: Methodology

Semi-structured personal interviews were conducted with 18 converts and, where appropriate and possible, with their partners (see Appendix 1, Vol. 2, pp.5-7). The interviewees were selected so that they represented different eras, circumstances, gender, age and marital status. **Table 1.2** shows an overview of the interviewees' circumstances.

Some of the interviewees were self-selecting, the respondent having heard about the research and offering themselves for interview; others were recommended by colleagues or found through the Beit Din. Thus my interviewees represent the result of purposive sampling, in that

they met the needs of the study, possessing particular experiences and knowledge. In addition, all have to be regarded as willing volunteers who felt that they had something, positive or negative, that they wished to share. This personal wish to contribute is illustrated in a point made by Angela:

> *...No, there was no role model at all. That was one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you about. I feel terribly strongly that I am not going to be the first and last person who has this particular predicament…* (Angela, converted 1981 when 31 years old, married p4)

1.3.1. Procedure

Before each interview took place, the interviewees were asked to fill in a short questionnaire (Appendix 2, Vol. 2, pp.9-10). This document also reassured them of the confidentiality of the process.

The interview protocol is shown in **Table 1.3**. Questions were addressed in a free flow manner that followed the natural line of conversation hopefully thereby encouraging fuller responses. Prompts were employed when necessary (Appendix 2, Vol. 2, pp.8-9).

The interviews took between 40 minutes to 80 minutes to complete and were held when possible in the homes of the interviewees to promote a relaxed atmosphere. One interview with an older convert was held over the phone as it was difficult to meet personally. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then key words and phrases were identified and sorted into categories to ascertain the main themes (Appendix 3, Vol. 2, pp.11-29). From this, sub-themes were identified (Appendix 4, Vol.2, pp.30-2). The interviews took place in the period 2000 to 2001. There was awareness that not all themes were spread across all the interviewees, since not all of the interviewees had had the same life experiences.

The theoretical model followed for the interviews was that of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), as defined by Smith and Jarman (1999, pp.218-40). That is, discussions were held using personal experience as a starting point with the intention and hope of eliciting rich insights into the process of conversion and its outcomes. These interviews were then submitted to a process of close analysis (see Appendix 3, Vol. 2, pp.11-29). The respondents were selected so as to sample the diverse range of candidates who apply to the Beit Din and were therefore not representative of the typical profile of candidates that present themselves to the court. These were admittedly limited case studies but Stake's warning still holds true: '*We can use case studies to understand the larger whole, but must be careful not to overlook uniqueness of <u>that</u> case when trying to draw conclusions*' (Stake, 1998, p.88).

Table 1.2. Different categories of converts represented in the interviews

	Gender	Date of conversion	Age at conversion	Marital status now	Involvement with Judaism now	Reasons for conversion	Where converted	Partner interviewed
A Angela	F	1981	31	Married	Slight involvement	• Family • Spiritual void	London suburbs	Yes: Andrew
B Betty	F	1989	27	Partner	Some	• Family	Central London	Yes: Bob
C Carol	F	1997	55	Married	Very involved	• Belief • Her destiny (Jewish family roots)	Central London	
D Denise	F	1993	44	Married	Very involved	• Children's request	Provinces	Yes: David
E Eli	F	1994	33	Separated	Involved	• Family	Provinces	
F Fay	F	1987	28	Married	Some	• Family	Provinces	Yes: Feybush
G Guy	M	1993	36	Married	Moderate	• Family	London suburbs	Yes: Gabby
H Harry	M	1996	65	Married to former convert Hetty	Very involved	• Spiritual search	Provinces	
H Hetty	F	1987	55	Married to Harry	Very involved	• To fill spiritual void • Jewish father	Provinces	
I Ian	M	1995	35	Married to convert K	Very involved	• Seeking community • Attracted by social justice issues	London suburbs	
I Ivy	F	1993	35	Married to convert J	Very involved	• Seeking community • Attracted by social justice	London suburbs	

						issues		
J Jack	M	1984	33	Married	Involved	• Seeking ethical framework • Father Jewish refugee	Central London	
K Katy	F	1979	21	Divorced	None	• Family	London suburbs	
L Liz	F	1986	45	Married	Involved	• Widow of Jew • Seeking community	London suburbs	
M Mary	F	1956	33	Widow	Very involved	• Family	London suburbs	
N Natalie	F	1966	20	Widow	In no man's land	• Family • Spiritual void	London suburbs	
O Olive	F	1948	24	Widow	None, feels Jewish	• Family	Provinces	
P Pat	F	1994	29	Divorced	Reverted to Christianity	• Family	Central London	

Table 1.3. Questions employed in the extended interviews

Topic	Points covered
1. The conversion experience	• Why the conversion? • What aspects of Judaism attracted you most? • Partner support. • Partner's family support. • How the course was taught and what the proselyte thought of the learning offered. • Attitude of congregation. • Involvement in congregation. • Difficulties/pleasures of course. • Appearance before the Beit Din. • *Mikveh*: what the proselyte thought of this experience. • Acceptance ceremony.
2. Cultural, religious setting and traditions	• What cultural/religious beliefs were passed on to you and by whom? • What beliefs or ideals did your parents try to teach you? • Feelings about religious services. • Feelings about religious rituals. • Jewish links.
3. Jewish life now	• Member of synagogue. • Which aspect of Judaism appeals most? • What rituals? • Synagogue attendance. • Other involvement in synagogue. • Involvement in wider community. • Support and acceptance of partner. • Support and acceptance of partner's family. • Support and acceptance of community. • Feelings of own family. • Involvement of children. • Marriage of children. • Crises and/or joys. • How strongly Jewish do you feel now? • Would you advise others to convert? • Language integration.
4. Spirituality	• Do you have a concept of God? • Do you feel you have an inner strength, if so, where does it come from? • What role does spirituality play in your life now? • What primary beliefs guide your life?

1.3.2. The pattern of results from the interviews

The process of IPA (as explained in Section 1.3.1, p.21) was used to generate a thematic structure within which individual responses could be located. These themes will be examined in more detail in conjunction with the full results of the survey data and as they become more relevant. The initial structure is set out in **Table 1.4.** (More details in Appendix 4, Vol. 2, pp.30-2).

1.3.3. Practical problems affecting accuracy

The assurances given about confidentiality were important because the Jewish community is

very small; I already knew some of the interviewees or was acquainted with members of their families. Even those that I did not know had often heard of me, or attended lectures or services that I had led. In other words, it was known that I was an insider, a professional who had been and still was very involved in the process of conversion. This must be taken into account when interpreting the material, remembering that a high degree of reflexivity must have been present at each interview, that is, I, as the researcher, did affect what was being researched, shared, interpreted and omitted. The fact that I am a rabbi must have had an influence on what transpired and imposed some limitations on the data that was shared (Holstein and Gubrium, 1998).

Table 1.4. Themes and sub-themes as identified in the interviews

Main theme	Sub-themes
1. The conversion experience	• Reasons for conversion • Reactions to the course • Reactions to Beit Din and *mikveh* • Jewish family involvement, positive and negative
2. Cultural, religious setting and traditions	• Reactions of family of convert • Relationship with Jewish partner's family religious identity pre-conversion • Upbringing of Jewish partner as seen by partner • Upbringing of Jewish partner as seen by convert
3. Jewish life now	• Religious identity post-conversion • Social/ethnic identity • Family involvement of convert and partner now
4. Spirituality	• Religious identity of convert pre-conversion

However, it cannot be definitively decided whether my status influenced people to answer the questions in a more positive manner to please me, or in a more negative manner to shock me, or indeed, to answer as truthfully as possible. Certainly, the interviews cannot be seen as being totally isolated from the wider context of community life (Smith, 1995, p.10).

A very clear example of the skewing of the facts in a positive manner occurred when Angela, in her interview, said, '*Synagogue attendance – I think you have seen I go fairly regularly*' (Angela, converted 1981 when 31 years, married, p.8) when it was known to me that in fact she rarely attended and indeed, she gave up her synagogue membership within a few months of the interview. What cannot be ascertained is whether she was knowingly trying to deceive me or whether she was in fact deceiving herself.

1.3.4. Use of data collected

The material from the interviews has been used in different ways as it became relevant. Firstly, to generate many of the hypotheses that were tested in the survey. Secondly, to give greater depth to the relationships identified in the survey phase. The latter has been achieved by presenting commentary and quotations from the qualitative phase alongside the results of the

quantitative phase under each section of the findings.

1.4. The Ledgers of the Proceedings at the Reform Beit Din: Methodology

The second source of data was the court records of the Reform Beit Din as transcribed in their Ledgers.

The Reform Beit Din first met February 1st 1948, though notes of conversion cases, dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis, survive from 1944. It was established by the rabbis of the West London Synagogue for British Jews who needed a non-Orthodox court where they could feel confident that *halachic* matters, especially those concerning conversion and divorce, would be dealt with according to progressive ideals.

Rabbi Reinhart, senior rabbi of West London, was the prime mover behind this initiative. Coming from the United States, where there was no central rabbinic organisation and therefore a plethora of standards that undermined the credibility of the Reform Movement, he wanted to establish a Beit Din so that the Reform Movement could be seen as heir to normative Jewish tradition.

The court originally served just the needs of the West London Synagogue but, as the Reform Movement gained new synagogues and a central organisation, the court began to serve the needs of all British Reform congregations (for a full history, Romain, 1990).

Up to 1953, the information was sparse. From 1953, the following information, where applicable, is provided through the court ledgers:-

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Marital status
- Previous religion
- Patrilineality
- Approaches to the Orthodox Beit Din
- The synagogue in which they studied
- Their partner's synagogue
- Their partner's parents' synagogue, and

- Any children involved.

Thus the Ledgers provide basic demographic details forming the foundation for more detailed research made possible by the Survey.

1.4.1. Procedure

All the information from the Ledgers from 1953-2002 was entered into an SPSS database where it was available for detailed analysis. Where Ledgers were not available in the period 1944-1953, information was gleaned from court notes presented to the Beit Din by the teachers of the converts or by the converts themselves.

1.4.2. Practical problems affecting accuracy

Statistics available for the period 1948-52 are very limited. In the majority of cases, all we have are the names and the date of the candidate's appearance before the rabbis. To fill out some of the details, notes brought before the court or made during the hearing have been utilised. In addition, few of these early candidates will be able to speak for themselves now, due to the lapse of time, either through interviews or in the material garnered through the survey.

We have no record of how many cases were deferred or refused as the Ledgers only note the successful cases.

1.4.3. Pattern of results from the Ledgers (1948-2002)

5197 adults were accepted for conversion. Of those whose gender was recorded, 1073 (21%) were males and 4125 (79%) were females. In 1326 instances the information about children is missing, but we are informed that 2964 of the adults had no children at the time of their own conversion while 476 converted with one child, 317 with two children and a further 120 with three or more children. It has been the custom of the Beit Din until recent times to only allow conversion if the religious unity of the family unit is maintained or created by such a move. Thus all young children were automatically included with their converting mother.

Again, this material was subjected to further examination under the relevant headings (Chapter 2, sections: Number, 2.1.1, Gender 2.1.2, Age 2.1.3, Marital status 2.1.4, Gender and Marital status 2.1.5, Religion of birth families 2.1.6, pp.41-51).

1.5. Application Forms: Methodology

The Ledgers provide basic demographic information which the application forms, including completed candidates since 1958, can amplify. In particular, these forms provide a chance to see the motivations of the converts, as expressed in their own words. These forms are our third source of data.

The forms, in bundles corresponding to the year in which the applicant was accepted by the court, are stored in boxes in the archives of the Movement for Reform Judaism. A few application forms appear from 1953, but not in meaningful numbers till 1958. Though reference will be made to the earlier documents, I have concentrated on the forms from 1958, when they became a routine part of the process.

1.5.1. Procedure

The sample of application forms was selected in a two-stage process. We know from the Beit Din Ledgers how many converts were accepted in each year 1958 to 2002. The first stage was to select application forms from the boxes equal to 20% of the known total for the year. The selection was made manually, trying to select as randomly as the physical circumstances allowed. The forms were then subjected to a computerised selection process to identify a randomised sample stratified by five year periods.

The final sample size was 512 application forms from the total of 4,635 converts recorded in the Ledgers for the period 1958-2002, equivalent to an 11% sample. These forms were matched to their entries in the Ledgers. This proved impossible in 7% of the cases. The difficulties may have been due to physical error for several reasons:-

- The forms and the Beit Din legers were hand written and sometimes difficult to read,
- Clerical error in that some application forms were found filed in the wrong bundles,
- It is possible that some female applicants married after sending in their application forms and are then listed in the ledgers by their married name, or
- I even know personally of one candidate who is known by two completely different names in each of the sources (application form 1995, single woman with child, data base no. 848).

The written motives for conversion were sorted into five main categories and then further into sub-categories. This was helpful in ordering the survey questions and also so that quotations could be used to enrich the statistical results of that survey (specifically in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1, pp.199-211). These themes can be seen in **Table 1.5**.

Table 1.5. The motivational themes identified in the Application Forms

Main themes	Sub-themes
• **Interest in learning about Judaism**	
• **Motivation arising from contact with Jews or Jewish Family**	Wish to establish a Jewish home, admiring Jewish family life Pressure from a partner or partner's family Enjoyment of partner's family's way of life or Jewish family life Statements about experiencing no pressure from Jewish family. A desire to bring up children in a religiously united family
• **Previous connections with Judaism**	Jewish father or other family connections Friends or work associates Jewish Connections to Israel Interest in the holocaust
• **Spiritual or religious interest expressed as a source of motivation**	Identification with Jewish moral values Enjoyment of festivals, rituals and/or Jewish traditions Loss of previous faith or no previous faith Identification with Judaism, seeking faith Enjoyment of Jewish community Enjoyment of Jewish Culture
• **Having been previously rejected by the Orthodox Beit Din**	

1.5.2. Practical problems affecting accuracy

In the selection of the forms, a slight bias may have crept in concerning smaller synagogues who tend to present all their candidates at the same court. It is possible therefore that some years will contain a greater concentration of their candidates. The other possible bias is the inclusion of a greater proportion of couples than in the main population, as they are stored stapled together and often both appear in this sample. But as the couples form a very small proportion of this sample, 4.9% of the whole, this did not represent a major bias.

Another problem was the absence of forms from 1998 and 1999. This was compensated for by the addition of extra forms from 1997 and 2000.

The question has to be raised as to how honest people might have been when ascribing their reasons for seeking conversion. They knew the forms were going to be presented to the Beit Din and they might have been concerned as to how their given motivations would affect their reception. Within the Orthodox tradition, conversion to facilitate a Jewish marriage is generally forbidden. Nevertheless, the applicants cited in this study are not shy in presenting such motives, which speaks to their honesty or maybe their ignorance. In 1963 one engaged young woman stated quite baldly, '*For marriage and keeping a Jewish home*'. But it is possible that they suppressed other factors that they might have felt would harm their application.

The other major issue is that there is no way to tell if the application has been filled out at the beginning, middle or end of the process, which may well have affected their motives.

This is important as from some of the forms, we can see that for some people, the gaining of knowledge and Jewish experiences certainly did influence the changing nature of their motivation. In 1957, for example a candidate wrote:

> *…I had intended at the beginning to change my faith on marriage as I felt we should both have the same religion. Having studied Judaism, I sincerely feel it is my religion and would wish to become a Jewess, even without being married…* (Application Form, 1957, married woman)

At the beginning of the process, the image of a family united in their religious path took precedence, but by the time the form was submitted, either during or at the end of the course, she expressed the wish to convert to satisfy her own religious needs. Though again, it is possible that she felt that the court would be more sympathetic to her if she expressed her reasons in this more personal way.

This changing landscape of reasons for conversion does not end even with the appearance before the Beit Din. Denise, who converted in 1993, commented:

> ...*And so I was aware that this was beginning to mean a lot to David* [husband] *in terms of commitment. And I was aware that Danny* [son] *was very impatient to convert. And so I decided to convert if I could, really to accommodate Danny…I wouldn't say at this stage that I was in any sense religious. So this made me seem as someone converting as a means to an end…I wouldn't say that these would be the reasons that I'd give now…reasons change all the time because I think being Jewish is a process…* (Denise, converted 1993 aged 44 with two children)

Then again, while some employed many pages to express their reasons fully, most only wrote a few lines, so their full motivation may not be expressed on these forms. Indeed, 12.9% (66) of the forms are missing all such information.

1.5.3. Data collected

Nevertheless, we can still note those reasons which were deemed important enough by the applicant to be presented to the Beit Din as presenting an interesting and useful thread in the story from 1958. They were used primarily to explicate and enrich the quantitative findings on motivation in Chapter 6, pp.184-241.

1.6. The Postal Survey: Methodology

Following the interviews and the analysis of the Ledgers and Application forms, a survey was distributed, mostly through synagogues belonging to the Movement for Reform Judaism, to collect data for detailed statistical analysis. This is the last and most detailed source of data for this study.

1.6.1. Procedure

The challenge was that no other research has been commissioned to look at the experience of conversion to Judaism in Britain, so there were few previous questionnaire items, scales or coding that could be utilised, leading to extra challenges establishing measures of reliability and validity. Recently there were, however, several other surveys on the general Jewish population of Great Britain (Schmool and Miller, 1994; Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996), and these provided a number of established measures whose reliability and validity have been demonstrated.

Prior to the survey, the exploratory interviews had helped to identify relevant hypotheses and constructs, and the questionnaire was designed to incorporate appropriate operational measures and allow for hypothesis testing.

The main topics that emerged from the exploratory interviews were those that concerned:-

- Motivation: personal reasons for conversion and pressures from the Jewish partner and his family,
- Examination of the backgrounds of both the converts and, where applicable, their Jewish partners,
- Process: the need for support; quality and content of the teaching process and concurrent and subsequent involvement in the community,
- Current identity: as expressed through actions (ritual and synagogue involvement), friendship patterns and attitudes towards Jewish concerns,
- Long-term outcomes: in terms of ritual behaviour, involvement in community and Jewish family and the involvement of children and grandchildren in the Jewish community, and
- Concerns about integration into and acceptance within the wider Jewish community.

General relationships that were developed and explored:-

- Trends in ritual and ethnic identity with time since conversion,

- Age-related variations in ritual, spirituality and ethnicity among converts compared to born Jews (comparative data derived from previous surveys),
- The effect of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (for conversion) on the likelihood of sustained commitment,
- Differences in the character of Jewish identity between born Jews and converts, and
- Perception of the Jewish community by converts and its relationship to post-conversion religious and ethnic behaviour.

1.6.2. Overall structure of the questionnaire

Table 1.6. Overall structure of the questionnaire

Sections	Content
1. THE CONVERSION PROCESS AND HOW TO IMPROVE IT	Motivation Attitudes to the course Feelings and experiences relating to their appearance at the Beit Din
2. JEWISH EXPERIENCES AFTER CONVERSION	Exploration of the need for post-conversion support Exploration of how the converts feel now about their conversion
3. YOUR CURRENT BELIEFS AND LIFESTYLE	Social/cultural measures of Jewish identity How conscious are the converts now of their Jewish identity? Attitudes to intermarriage Current religious practice Trends in their observance: have these increased or decreased since their conversion? Activities outside the home, Jewish and/or non-Jewish Jewish adult education courses attended Proportion of Jewish friends
4. THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY.	The role of their birth family: how they felt about the conversion The role of the Jewish partner's family and how that changed during the course of the conversion process The type and level of support afforded them by their Jewish partner's family and by their Jewish partner
5. YOUR JEWISH PARTNER'S LIFESTYLE	The level of Jewish education and youth club participation of their Jewish partner The perceived level of the partner's Jewish upbringing
6. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY	Religious upbringing of the convert Marital status of the convert at the time of conversion Current marital status Previous and current relationships Children of the convert and their Jewish identification Grandchildren of the convert and their Jewish identification
7. BIOGRAPHICAL FACTS	Current synagogue membership Educational level, occupation Age, gender Personal comments

The questionnaire contained approximately 390 items, not all of which applied to every respondent. It took some 40 to 45 minutes to complete. The complete survey can be found in

Appendix 7, Vol. 2, pp.38-89)

1.6.3. Piloting of the Survey

The Survey was pilot tested on ten people as it was developed. Four respondents filled in the questions in my presence so that comments or difficulties could be discussed and noted immediately; the remaining six respondents completed the draft survey at home and sent it back with notes.

It was recognised that this was a relatively small number of people to be used in a pilot study, but given the known properties of many of the attitude items derived from previous surveys, it was felt to be sufficient.

Through these pilot studies, the survey was refined and developed into its final form. Ambiguities were corrected and intrusive questions, judged to be of limited value (e.g. income) were removed. Some sensitive questions were reconfigured to lead more gently to the potentially emotive material.

1.6.4. The target population

The target population were those who had converted through the Movement for Reform Judaism, irrespective of their current religious or ethnic identity. The size of this population is estimated to be about 4,250 based on Beit Din statistics and on crude assumptions about mortality. Unfortunately, there is no practical way of determining how many of this group are: currently affiliated members of Reform synagogues; non-members who retain their Jewish identity in some form; and non-members who have given up their Jewish status for all practical purposes and may have converted to other faiths. However, anecdotal evidence within the Reform rabbinate suggests that the vast majority of Reform converts remain within the community in some form.

Reform rabbis give estimates that between 10% and 20% of their membership are converts. Given that the total size of the affiliated community is 23,000 adults, and assuming that about 15% are converts, the total affiliated group of converts is about 3,500 – i.e. about 80% of the converts in the target group are likely to be found in synagogue communities.

Since the research is intended to examine the consequences of conversion in all its forms, it was important to sample converts in the three categories above. We recognised at the outset that it would be impossible to obtain a probability sample of these sub-groups, but we wished to ensure that all three types were represented in the sample, so that the impact of various factors on conversion outcomes could be determined.

1.6.5. Sampling strategy

Accordingly, respondents were recruited in two ways:-

(i) A stratified sample of approximately 26% of affiliated Reform Jews was contacted (i.e. 6,000) by a postal survey distributed through Reform synagogues. The sample was stratified by synagogue size, selecting synagogues so as to ensure that approximately 26% of the membership of large (14,573 adult membership in 2002), medium (6,936) and small (3,041) synagogues was approached. Recipients were asked to complete the survey if they were converts to Judaism.

(ii) A snowballing method was used to obtain a sample of people who were known to have converted but were not currently associated with a synagogue. The snowballing approach was intended to capture individuals who had 'left' Judaism and those who remained Jewish but were no longer formally affiliated to a synagogue.

In accordance with the estimated proportions of converts within and outside the affiliated community, an attempt was made to ensure that the total sample included 20% non-members. In the event, this was not achieved: the actual proportion was 5%.

366 completed questionnaires were returned, of which 348 are current members of Reform synagogues. Around 6000 survey forms were originally distributed to the synagogues. If we assume that 90% of these were actually distributed to households of members, and that approximately 15% of the recipients were converts, then the survey reached about 800 Reform Converts – i.e. the response rate is therefore in the order of 44%.

1.6.6. Operational details of the sampling

(i) The synagogue sample

Information about the proposed survey was sent out to all the synagogues belonging to the Reform Movement with the support of the rabbis and the Council of the Reform Movement. Synagogues within the Reform Movement are autonomous units and a small number chose not to take part. Despite this, there was a good balance of communities, representing different sizes and both provincial and London congregations. Indeed, some of the congregants from synagogues who had chosen not to cooperate still chose to take part, hearing of the survey from friends or family or seeing it on the Reform Movement website.

Survey forms were sent to 14 synagogues in London and 10 in the provinces. Generally these were despatched to members' homes as part of a synagogue mailing.

Participating synagogues were asked to distribute the forms to a third of their membership

and a suggested article was sent for inclusion in synagogue newsletters. Some synagogues complied with these suggestions; others, as autonomous organisations, chose different ways of distribution, from simply leaving the forms on a table in their front halls and informing their congregation as to their existence, to actually targetting people whom the rabbi knew to be converts.

It is difficult to mitigate the problem of bias that may have occurred through non-response. Where there had been a particularly low response from any congregation, a special appeal was made to that rabbi for help. It is possible that the involvement of the rabbi or congregational staff in the distribution exacerbated a problem of non-response from those not involved with the religious life of the community and increased the response of those who wanted in some way to 'please' their rabbi.

The total number of questionnaires distributed to synagogues was 6,000 of which an estimated 5,400 were posted to potential respondents. The respondents were granted anonymity which meant that no reminders could be sent to those who did not respond to the initial posting.

(ii) Snowball sample

This was used to try and capture the views and characteristics of those who were no longer involved in the Jewish community and who were therefore separated from the obvious means of contact, the synagogues themselves.

A snowball sample was developed by

- Asking all those who received the survey but for whom it was not relevant, to pass it onto others for whom it was relevant. It was realised that few would respond to this request, but it was felt to be worthwhile.
- The rabbis were asked to identify individuals whom they knew to be no longer involved in Jewish life and personally ask them to take part in the survey. This too was acknowledged to be highly unlikely to yield many results as, by very nature of the fact that these converts had dropped out of congregational life, it was unlikely that the rabbi would have contact details.
- Where proselytes volunteered to help (around twenty offered assistance), they were asked if they knew anyone who had converted but was no longer involved in Jewish life. Using them as initial referrals, these uninvolved individuals were contacted and asked to share their experiences of the conversion process.
- A few contact addresses were provided by the Beit Din.

- The preliminary findings of the demographic material were presented at the annual conference of the Reform Movement, at a rabbinic gathering and at a British Jewish educational conference. Spare survey forms were distributed and appeals were made for help in contacting proselytes no longer involved in the Reform Movement.
- It was not possible to use converts who are no longer affiliated to Reform synagogues as the initial referral points as they are very unlikely to be in contact with other proselytes in a similar situation. Their Jewish social networks are likely to be lessened by their decision not to be involved in synagogue life.
- In addition, the survey was mentioned on the Reform movement's website and some non-members responded through that medium.

1.6.7. Outcome of the snowballing exercise

The snowballing method had limited success as those who had migrated from the Jewish community had a low chance of being known to the people who acted as referral points. It is also possible that those who did know of such people felt loathe to contact them as that might seem as if, as 'gate-keepers', they were not respecting the decision to remove themselves from the community. Such referrals might have seemed unethical.

In addition, of those approximately 50 people identified and contacted, a very low response rate was obtained. It is possible that the addresses were no longer valid or that the people concerned did not trust the process or they simply had left the whole issue behind them.

It was tempting to keep trying more devious routes to contact these missing converts, but aware of what has been called 'scrounging sampling' (Groger, Mayberry and Straker, 1999, p.830), it was decided to cease such efforts after the primary links had been tried.

Thus we do not know the true proportion of those who have reverted to their former religious identity or have left behind any active expression of their Jewish identity. We have had only limited success in obtaining data on their beliefs and practices. The sample size in this category is small (5% of the respondents) and almost certainly unrepresentative. We have however used this data to provide a speculative account of how these 'lost' proselytes see their identities and Jewish connections.

1.6.8. Practical problems affecting accuracy: Sampling bias

Given the under-representation of converts who have drifted out of the community, the generalisability of the findings with respect to absolute percentages of converts with particular characteristics is limited. However, the correlations between predictor variables (at the time of

conversion) and subsequent religious behaviours is not necessarily distorted by the under-representation of non-affiliated converts. If these are regarded as the extreme of a continuum of non-involvement in Jewish life, then their under-representation would tend to attenuate the strength of relationships, but not necessarily influence their general nature.

A second bias arises from the fact that those who are actively involved in the communities are more likely to have responded to rabbinic pleas to take part in the survey than more passive members. That too would be expected to attenuate observed correlations between predictors and outcome measures rather than change the nature of the relationships.

In addition, it was realised that due to natural aging and mortality rates, those who converted many years ago were bound to be poorly represented and this too might attenuate the strength of some observed correlations with time since conversion.

1.6.9. Response bias

It was important to note the possible bias that may have influenced the results:-

- It is clear that there has been a greater representation of those who converted in the last 20 years, but this could be attributed as much to age as to anything else as there is no way to determine if non-response from those who converted earlier is in any way linked to particular opinions or behaviour patterns.

  While we noted above that the conversion process was an emotive time and therefore likely to be salient to the convert and the details to be remembered, it is still possible that many of their answers will reflect more what they feel now, or that their memories and feelings will be affected by intervening events, such as divorce, bereavements or remarriage and personal and/or family growth.

Table 1.7a. Number of converts by years in the different data sources

Number of converts by years	Pre-1948	1948-1952	1953-1962	1963-1972	1973-1982	1983-1992	1993-2002	2003 onward	All years
Ledgers (%)	-	4	15	20	20	21	20	-	100
Application Forms (#)	-	-	(from 1958) 47	112	117	119	113	-	512
Application Forms (%)	-	-	9	22	23	24	22	-	100
Survey (#)	4	2	17	20	45	81	108	68	345
Survey (%)	1	1	5	6	13	23	31	20	100

Table 1.7b. Comparison of data sources by gender

	Gender		Sample size	Chi Square
	Female	Male		
Ledgers	78.2%	21.8%	-	-
Application Forms	80.2%	19.8%	465	1.1 (1 df) $p > 0.1$
Survey	77.0%	23.0%	361	0.3 (1 df) $p > 0.1$.

Table 1.7c. Comparison of data sources by age

Age	16-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51+	Sample size	Chi Square
Ledgers	4.2%	53.2%	27.2%	9.6%	5.8%	-	-
Application Forms	0.6%	48.7%	32.3%	11.2%	7.1%	464	23.1 (4 df) $p < 0.001$
Survey	2.6%	48.2%	25.9%	13.2%	10.0%	340	18.8 (4 df) $p < 0.005$

Table 1.7d. Comparison of data sources by marital status

Marital status	Single	Engaged	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Sample size	Chi Square
Ledgers	11.1%	37.6%	47.9%	2.3%	1.1%	-	-
Application Forms	8.6%	44.1%	44.1%	1.9%	1.3%	463	9.4 (4 df) $p > 0.05$
Survey	14.4%	52.4%	33.2%			355	38.2 (2 df) $p < 0.001$

Table 1.7e. Comparison of data sources by previous religious affiliation

Prior religious affiliation	Church of England	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	Non-believers	Jewish	Other	Sample size	Chi Square
Ledgers	51.5%	15.5%	13.5%	10.5%	5.9%	3.1%	-	-
Application Forms	57.8%	14.7%	5.4%	12.3%	7.3%	2.5%	464	29.8 (5 df) $p < 0.001$
Survey	54.7%	15.6%	14.7%	9.2%	1.9%	3.9%	360	11.8 (5 df) $p < 0.05$

- There are also the widely observed difficulties with all surveys of the imagined interviewer, as Oppenheim (2001, pp.102-3) has observed. Certainly 'demand characteristics' will be more potent when the imagined questioner is a rabbi. In the interviewing stage, there was some evidence of interviewees wishing to 'shock' or 'please' the rabbi, and that might have also been true in the answering of the survey questions.

- Conversely, the question of 'social desirability' bias must be considered (Oppenheim, 2001, p.138-9). It seems probably that some respondents may have claimed that they observe a higher degree of kashrut or attend synagogue far more regularly then they do

in reality. This phenomenon certainly occurred in the interview stage and though it is less likely with postal questionnaires, it is possible that the pattern is present.

- It is also possible that fears over confidentiality may have affected the way in which the respondents chose to answer. Certainly, some 11% of the respondents commented on the fact that if they had answered particular questions, e.g. year and place of conversion, then their confidentiality could be breached. Also, some have requested a copy of the results without actually providing contact details; presumably they too felt that they could be traced without too many difficulties.

- Another possibility for bias arises out of our wish to determine not just factual information, but also attitudes and motivation. Not everyone is equipped to be able to describe their theological beliefs or their feelings with any great degree of accuracy, or they may be hostile to such a request. They may also feel that the possible responses suggested in the questionnaire may not quite capture the attitude or emotion that they would wish to express. As Bruce has noted (1996, p.32) it is difficult to ascertain reliable information on such matters through the use of surveys.

All these factors concerning questionnaire response bias must be borne in mind when these results are considered.

1.6.10. Data collected

366 forms were returned. Most of them were complete; some had even appended copious extra notes.

All the information was coded into an SPSS database. Some of the information, e.g. the size and the location of the synagogues where the conversions took place or where people are members now, or the ages of the converts or the years when their conversion occurred, were recoded to match similar coding in the data taken from the Ledgers of the Beit Din. Composite measures and other analytical tools were used to create new variables when required for the exploration of the material. The actual data recorded will be examined in detail under the appropriate headings.

1.7. How representative are the two samples, the Application Forms and the Survey?

The Ledgers provide a complete count of converts 1948-2002. The demographics provided are therefore population characteristics; there is no sampling and no sample variation.

In contrast, the application forms and the Survey both constitute samples from the population of converts represented in the Ledgers (though it must be noted that the data from the Ledgers

only includes information of those who converted up to 2002 while the Survey includes respondents who converted up to and including 2007 and of course, many of those who converted in the earlier periods whose details are recorded in the Ledgers will have died). Hence both of these samples are subject to sampling variation and potential sampling bias. In view of these uncertainties, it was considered important to check whether these samples matched the total population of converts, at least with respect to their demographic characteristics.

1.7.1. Summary of the representative nature of the two samples

Table 1.8. Summary of the representative nature of the two samples

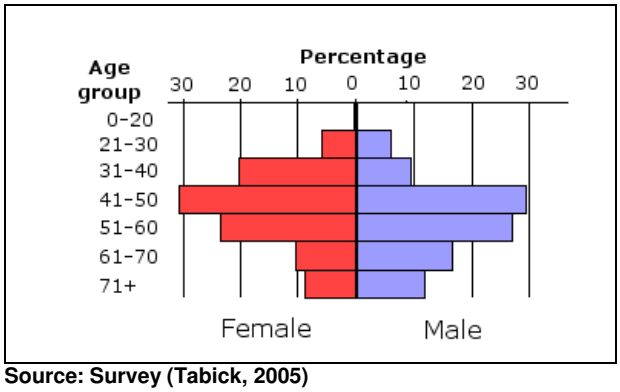
Category	Application forms	Survey
Years	Cannot be a good representation throughout the period as the Application forms did not begin till 1958. From 1963, good representation.	Cannot be a representative sample as many of the converts who came to the Beit Din in the early years will have died and some respondents have answered post 2002. However, we are showing the two distributions to provide some context to the research.[1]
Gender	Good representation.	Good representation.
Age[2]	Fair representation; but under 20s under-represented in sample.	Fair representation; but converts aged over 50 at the time of conversion are slightly over-represented in the Survey.

[1] Those who converted between 1983 and 2006 are the most fully represented in this survey (75%, sample size of 242). This imbalance may have come about through natural mortality affecting those who converted earlier, or through attrition, i.e. people leaving active participation in Judaism behind them as their families grew up, or it may be that those who converted a long time ago feel so much part of the community that they did not wish to respond. It may also be that those who have just converted feel a more pressing desire to respond to their rabbi's request to help with the Survey. The sample therefore under-represents conversions in earlier years and over-represents more recent conversions. The consequences of this imbalance means that there will be more information about recent converts, who may be more enthusiastic and less information about earlier converts who may no longer be practising Jews. There will also be less information available about longer term outcomes.

[2] The distribution of age by gender at the time of answering the survey can be seen in **Figure 1.1.** The median age at that point for men is 52, for women 47.

The largest *current* age group in the Survey sample was the 41-50 year olds, naturally echoing the passing of the years from the date of conversion. In the survey the youngest respondent was 18, the oldest 86.

Figure 1.1. Age and gender distribution of respondents at the time of answering the attitude survey



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Marital status[3]	Good representation.	Some mismatch. The number of converts who are "engaged" at the time of conversion in the Survey is significantly greater than the proportion in the Ledgers; the number of "married" converts is less than would be expected from the Ledgers.
Religion of birth family	Fair representation of broad groups, though distribution within "Other Christian" group not accurate.	Reasonable representation of the converts by religion of birth family, though the Survey under-represents converts with a Jewish upbringing.[4]

1.8. Conclusion

These four sources of data provide a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data that will be explored and utilized as the information becomes relevant to the presentation of the various research topics in this study.

[3] NB. in previous eras, engagement was a precise state, reflected by the fact that many candidates wrote such phrases as '*not yet formally engaged*'. In modern times it is hard to distinguish between singles and engaged in that the concept of 'engagement' no longer seems to have the same precise meaning. Where it was obvious that there was a fiancé in all but name, the status has been registered as 'engaged'. It must also be noted the growing number of long-term relationships not marked by the act of marriage. But as marriage has distinct legal characteristics, the connection between these two categories could not be blurred and those in long-term relationships were entered as 'engaged'.

One interesting addition is that two forms were submitted 1993-2002 from lesbian candidates, reflecting the greater openness in society. In previous years, these forms might have appeared as 'singles'.

The number who describe their status as "engaged" at the time of conversion in the Survey is greater than would be expected from the known proportion in the Ledgers. However, the question in the Survey asked the respondents to describe their status '*when they first decided to start the conversion process*', that is, at an earlier stage than when they appeared at the Beit Din. This shift in proportions from 'engaged' to 'married' is entirely consistent with the thesis of developing relationships leading towards marriage.

As it was known from the Ledger data that only a very small proportion described themselves as 'widowed' or 'divorced', it was decided that in the first question on marital status in the Survey to limit the categories.

[4] This under-representation might be because while those patrilineal Jews brought up as Jews had to appear before the Beit Din to confirm their Jewish status for the purposes of joining a synagogue or getting married in a synagogue, they might not have thought of themselves as 'converts', i.e. as suitable candidates for this research programme.

2. DEMOGRAPHICS – LEDGERS OF THE BEIT DIN

2.1. The population of converts as recorded in the Ledgers of the Beit Din

This forms the primary source for the research forming the backdrop against which the other sources must be examined and validated, though it must be mentioned that the examination of these records concludes in 2002 while some responses to the survey come from converts who appeared before the Beit Din as late as 2007 and therefore will not be recorded in this data.

2.1.1. Number

From 1948 to 2002, 5197 adults successfully converted to Judaism through the Reform Beit Din. While there was a significant rise in absolute numbers after 1962, the number of candidates in each of the subsequent decades has remained fairly constant, about 100 each year, as shown in **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1. The number of converts accepted by the Reform Beit Din 1948-2002

Year	Female	Female %	Male	Male %	All	Average # per year
1948-1952	183	80	45	20	228	46
1953-1962	652	86	110	14	762	76
1963-1972	839	82	184	18	1,023	102
1973-1982	848	80	217	20	1,065	107
1983-1992	839	77	248	23	1,087	109
1993-2002	763	74	269	26	1,032	103
All years	4124	79	1,073	21	5,197	94

Source: Ledgers (1948-2002)

There is no complete answer as to why there were so few candidates in the early years. It is possible that this is due to the lack of knowledge as to the opportunity for conversion; the lack of local Reform congregations where this could be managed; a lack of enthusiasm by synagogue leadership to facilitate such an innovative measure that had not hitherto been part of Anglo-Jewish culture; or simply a lower rate of intermarriage producing less of a demand for the service.

2.1.1.1. Probable increase in out-marriage

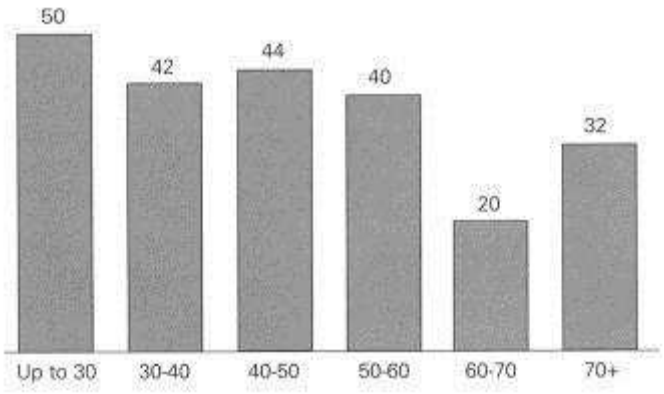
The constancy in the numbers who have converted in each of these time periods after 1963 is somewhat surprising given the probable growth of out-marriage in the epoch under scrutiny.

This increase in out-marriage is supported by research both in America and Britain. In the JPR (1996) report, the authors wrote:

> *Of those men who are married or living in a stable relationship, approximately 38 per cent have non-Jewish partners. The corresponding figure for women is more difficult to estimate at this stage of the analysis, but it is probably in the range of 20-25 per cent. Hence the overall rate of intermarriage across the entire age range is about 30 per cent...The US figure of 52 per cent is based on marriages in the period 1985-90 and therefore tends to represent the marriage patterns of younger Jews. Although this group cannot be isolated with complete accuracy in the JPR sample, nonetheless, analysis of the data suggests that the intermarriage rate in young Jewish men (under 40 years old) is 44 per cent – not far short of the US figure... (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996, p.12)*

They illustrated this growing trend with **Figure 2.1**.

Figure 2.1. Variation in rates of intermarriage with current age in per cent (married men, sample size 938)



Source: JPR (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996)

Of the situation in the USA, Fishman observed:

> *...Conversion into Judaism is a topic of intense interest in the American Jewish community today because more than one-third of American Jews are married to non-Jews and close to half of recent 'Jewish' marriages are mixed marriages between persons of Jewish and non Jewish descent. Furthermore, many as-yet-unmarried, cohabiting Jews are involved in interfaith relationships, and one recent study suggests that ''of all cohabiting adults who say they are Jewish by religion or of Jewish parentage or upbringing, 81% are living with a partner who is not of Jewish*

origin...however, while the number of Jews marrying non-Jews has climbed from decade to decade, the proportion of spouses deciding to convert into Judaism has not risen commensurately... (Fishman, 2006, p.3)

Logically if, as I will suggest later, women convert largely to ensure the Jewishness of any family they may have, then, as the percentages of out-marriage in the community increases, thereby increasing the number of non-Jews married to Jews, this should result in an increased number of proselytes. Since there is no empirical evidence on these issues, the possibilities below are speculations based on experiences over many years as a rabbi in congregational life. They are presented here as the issues affect this study.

2.1.1.2. Why the constancy of conversion numbers?

There is insufficient reliable data to determine precisely what is happening, but if, given the increase of out-marriages there is an overall decrease in the proportion of candidates for conversion, this may be due to:-

1. The Liberal synagogues in this country (following the lead of the Reform synagogues in America) now recognise the paternal line if the child is exposed to Jewish education. This means that for them, the necessity of the mother converting to ensure the Jewish status of the children, no longer holds true.

2. Also the Reform Movement in this country now allows the conversion of minors provided that the non-Jewish mother has attended a class in basic Judaism and she agrees in writing to facilitate the Jewish upbringing of the child.

3. Or indeed it may be one of the long-term results of earlier mixed marriages. It will be demonstrated that the absolute majority of conversions concern women involved with Jewish male partners. In those marriages of Jewish women to non-Jewish men, which logically must have taken place but of which we have no record, where conversion was not seen as a necessity, some of those children would have been brought up in mixed marriages. In recent research in the United States, an American sociologist, Steven Bayme, noted that '*one sobering statistic emerges from the city of Philadelphia: According to their 1984 demographic study, in the entire city not a single grandchild of a mixed marriage without conversion identified as a Jew*' (ed. Ktav, 2002, p.228).

4. There is also the possibility of growing percentages of conversion cases being dealt with by other Jewish religious authorities.

5. In addition, there is increasing secularisation in society as a whole (Crabtree, 2008). that may explain both an increase in out-marriage AND a decrease is the appetite for conversion following an out marriage.

6. As women form the largest proportion of the converts, the change in status of women in society may also be important here. It is possible that in the earlier period, the woman saw their role in society as one where they had to conform to the wishes or identity of their spouse, as Mrs X wrote, '*I want to be of the same faith as my husband and serve him as a Jewish wife should*' (application form 1969, Italian woman, married, aged 49 with a son of 23) Now, the power balance between the sexes has been somewhat altered and women may not feel quite so obliged to fulfil their husbands' wishes for Jewish children.

7. Or it may have come about because of the decrease in the overall size of the community due to demographic erosion.

2.1.2. Gender

Table 2.1 demonstrates that the percentage of female candidates for conversion far outnumbered the men (although this proportion has decreased slightly from around 80% to about 74% over the period). In the LPBD, 1948-2002, the females number 4124 (79%) and the males 1073 (21%).

The gender imbalance has also been noticed in wider research in the States. Greenwood notes that:

> *…The most current data that places Jewish conversion in a wider American context come from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS2001) and the American Jewish Identification Survey (AJIS 2001). In the United States, 17% of Americans change their religion and more women than men switch religions, 56% women, to 44% men. The AJIS indicates that about 7% of those who consider their religion to be Judaism are converts (Jews-by-choice), with a 70/30 ratio of women to men. Statistics gathered from 7 citywide Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Introduction to Judaism classes show a similar preponderance of non-Jewish women – both single and coupled with Jewish men – studying Judaism…However, and this finding may be the most disturbing, among Jews who convert to another religion, close to 2% of all American religious switchers, 55% are men, 45% are women. Judaism in America is disproportionately gaining women and disproportionately losing men.* (Greenwood, 2002, pp.4-5).

Miller, Schmool and Lerman have also commented on the greater rate of out-marriage, or intermarriage as they call it (that is: marriages where no conversion follows) for males than for females and have commented on the possible consequences of this phenomenon for the British Jewish community. They noted that:

> *...Of those men who are married or living in a stable relationship, approximately 38 per cent have non-Jewish partners. The corresponding figure for women is more difficult to estimate at this stage of the analysis, but it is probably in the range of 20-25 per cent. Hence the overall rate of intermarriage across the entire age range is about 30 per cent...The significantly higher rate of intermarriage of Jewish men than of Jewish women has clear implications for communal marriage patterns. Either the rate of intermarriage of Jewish women will move towards that of men because of the unavailability of Jewish partners, or a higher proportion of Jewish women than men will remain unmarried, or Jewish women will be less likely than men to remarry a Jew following divorce. Some combination of these effects is, of course, the most likely outcome...*
> (Schmool, Miller, & Lerman, 1996, p.12).

It would follow that there are two gender imbalances that have to be considered, the one concerning conversion, the object of this study, the other out-marriage.

There may be a factor at work here specific to Judaism rather than a more traditional gender issue of 'powerful' males asking their 'less powerful' non-Jewish wives to convert. That is partly because male proselytes, if not already circumcised, have to undergo circumcision which is a major medical procedure for adults with financial and emotional implications. In addition, according to traditional *halacha* the children of a Jewish female are always counted as being Jewish, so there is possibly less importance given to the necessity of male conversion in a mixed relationship. If that is the case then there are naturally fewer non-Jewish men undertaking conversion.

But this does not explain why men are more likely to out-marry than Jewish women. According to the matrilineal argument, Jewish women should be less worried about the effect on their children than Jewish men. Again, full examination of this topic lies outside the scope of the thesis.

However, it is also possible that some traditional gender issues may be present in the decision of the females to convert. Certainly, some of the earlier application forms clearly show the dominance of the male partner when conversion was considered. For example, a married woman in 1957, said: '*I have married a Jew who has strong feelings for his heritage. I have decided for his sake to adopt the Jewish faith*' (Application Form, 1957 married).

The idea of male dominance has been much explored in sociology (Oakley, 1972). More recent research has concluded that a much more complex situation now exists in our post-modern Western society. Crowley (1992) endorses this change in society and Kirchler (2002), writing about the influences spouses have over each other when making purchases and the plethora of strategies that they employ, states that they seem to show that gender, marital happiness, and

power patterns are of minor importance but rather that influence and tactics differ with the importance of the purchase and the state of the relationship between the spouses.

This more contemporary research would seem to suggest that for those converting in more recent times, the gender question is of less importance than perhaps in earlier times.

The other difficulty in exploring the possibility of male dominance in the conversion of female non-Jewish partners is that we only have evidence from those relationships where the Jewish male's religion did predominate, we have no evidence from relationships where the male chose to follow his non-Jewish partner's religion or the couple decided to follow no religion. But it is legitimate to speculate as to whether there might be less of an imbalance in gender if more non-Jewish men married to Jewish women thought that it was important to convert.

Greenwood, quoting Wuthnow, notes that American research suggests that:

> *…women are most often at the centre of family religious life. Why?…Mothers assumed responsibility for child rearing to a greater extent than men; if religious training was to be given, it was done by mothers more than by fathers. In the process, mothers' own religious commitment was often reinforced. They were on the front line in dealing with illnesses, death, and emotionally difficult subjects, such as courtship, marriage, and childbirth. Many of them prayed for strength to handle these situations. Mothers also prepared the feasts for religious holidays, decorated the house, and made sure children were bathed and dressed properly for religious services…Gender differences also perpetuated themselves in the expectations to which girls and boys were exposed. Girls saw their mothers praying and heard them talking about God more than they did their fathers…and girls assumed such behaviour was appropriate for women. Boys saw the same behaviour, but assumed they should behave more like their fathers…It is this American culture in which American Judaism expresses itself and which forms the context in which men and women choose their religious commitments…* (Wuthnow, 1999 in Greenwood, 2002, p.7).

That is, home childhood experiences may draw women rather than men to seek participation in religious life.

In addition, she draws on other research by Saxe and Kelner which seems to point to a different trend for adolescent males to:

> *…withdraw from organised Jewish activity at a significantly higher rate than girls and, in explaining the discrepancy, they draw on the psychological distinction between men's intellectual/instrumental/productive orientation and women's affective/social/nurturing orientation. They note that boys view*

> *Judaism and Jewish activity in a more negative light than girls do and that they gravitate* towards *individual activities, while girls prefer social outlets…* (Saxe and Kellner in Greenwood, 2002, p.11)

That is, girls find their way towards participation in community life more than their male counterparts.

Cohen and Eissen (2000, p.26) also refer to the gender imbalance within the Jewish community, with so many women taking a leading role, and the ambiance of synagogue life so often concerned with family matters.

Similar research has not been carried out here in Britain but it is possible that these attitudes may have a role in the gender imbalance we find in the proselyte population. Maybe non-Jewish women see a more positive role model available to them in Reform congregations where there is gender equality and women often play a leading role in management and ritual, than non-Jewish men for whom such role models may be lacking.

A suggested trend of males converting because of a growing sense of spirituality was supported by the interview findings. For example, Harry, an older man who converted some years after his wife, talks of his gradual awareness of spirituality. They have no children so his motivation is totally devoid of any wish to ensure their status, though of course it might have been influenced by a wish to share religious identity with his wife. But when discussing his conversion, he emphasised the importance of a growing feeling of spirituality.

> *...I was still having trouble with God, I really was. Of course this subject was discussed at length and I always said, 'No, no, God's not for me'...it took ten years virtually for me to come to the point and first I had to find God, and I was slowly coming round to it, and I was attending shul...* (Harry, converted 1996, aged 61 married, pp.3-4)

Jack, a patrilineal Jew who converted *lishma* – as he said for '*spiritual and ethical reasons*' – met and married a non-practicing Jew whom he discovered did not fully accept his Jewish status. This has led to Jack having a real feeling of isolation, of always being an outsider, both amongst Jews and amongst non-Jews, among his own family and even in his new marital home. One can see a high degree of tension in his answer to my question:

> *What about the spiritual/ethical path that you sought?*

He answered:

> *Ethically yes, yes very much so…Spiritually, that's very difficult. I'm quite a quiet person. If I can say this I find synagogues sort of quite chatty…I'll have to compare it to with Christianity although my experience of Christianity is now over thirty years ago and it was my adolescence in boarding school in*

> *London. The spirituality in Judaism, I mean prayer, is the Jewish attitude of prayer is reading out pre-written words. And I've never, never heard anyone, maybe I've not been to, but I've never heard anyone talk about how to pray whereas in Christianity it's one of the first things you learn. There is an enormous emphasis on action, on activity, on behaving ethically. And there isn't an emphasis on the the sort of, quiet secluded hermit. Which for better or worst is, is very strong in the Western tradition and is what I was brought up with and probably what on one level I'm drawn towards…* (Jack, converted 1984 aged 33 Patrilineal Jew, married p 5)

One can see his overriding desire to satisfy his spiritual needs, that as a teenager he had been able to satisfy through Christianity. Through conversion, he hoped he would find an ethical framework and answers to his spiritual search. He found a strong ethical framework, but despite his regular attendance at services, his spiritual needs were not met. Greenwood suggested that it is possible '*men who are raised Christian or Hindu speak more easily of spirituality than those born into Judaism*', again pointing to a lack of positive Jewish male role models for putative male converts.

2.1.3. Age

In the period, 1953-2002, there is a clear preponderance of young adults applying for conversion. The median age at conversion has increased over time from around 24 years in 1953-1962 to 37 years in 1992-2002. The changes in the age distribution through time are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 384.7$ $p \leq 0.001$). This trend can be seen in **Table 2.2**.

Table 2.2. Age at conversion – Age distribution in successive decades 1953-2002

	% in age group						Total	Median
Year	**≤ 20**	**21-30**	**31-40**	**41-50**	**51+**	**All ages**	**number**	**age**
1953-1962	7	59	20	11	3	100	724	23.5
1963-1972	7	64	20	6	3	100	1,020	28
1973-1982	7	61	22	6	4	100	1,061	26
1983-1992	2	50	31	11	6	100	1,086	31
1993-2002	2	38	35	14	11	100	1,031	37
All years	5	54	26	10	5	100	4,922	30

Source: Ledgers

Since it seems that the main motivation for conversion is to facilitate marriage or enhance the quality of married life, it is not surprising that the trends in age at conversion should mimic the societal trend for marriages to be contracted at an increasingly older age for both sexes.

From the Ledgers it can be seen that the average age at which women convert is generally younger than the men. In all, 60% of the women are under 30 when they convert, 53% of the men. The median age for women proselytes is 28, for men 33. These figures again reflect the hypothesis that most conversions are undertaken with marriage in mind in that men usually

enter marriage at a slightly older age than women.

Table 2.3. Age at conversion – Proportion of converts in each age group, by gender (all years)

Year	% in age group						Total number	Median age
	≤ 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51+	All ages		
Female	6	54	25	10	5	79	3905	28
Male	5	48	26	12	9	21	1023	33
All	5	52	26	10	7	100	4,928	30

Source: Ledgers

As Pat stated in her interview:

> ...*When I did convert it wasn't through believing it, it was because that was what I thought I ought to do because of my marriage and my children...* (Pat, converted 1994 aged 29, p.1)

The fact that the proportion of converts in the oldest age groups have also increased could be influenced by the growing number of active older people in society, ready to face new challenges.

2.1.4. Marital status

The Ledgers capture the marital status of 4,943 converts at the time when they presented themselves to the court (**Table 2.4**).

Table 2.4. Marital status of converts by year of appearance before the Beit Din 1953-2002

	Single		Engaged		Married		Divorced		Widowed		All	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1953-1962	55	7	318	43	354	48	4	1	7	1	738	100
1963-1972	95	9	440	43	473	46	7	1	8	1	1023	100
1973-1982	114	11	376	35	558	52	6	1	10	1	1064	100
1983-1992	102	9	394	36	536	49	43	4	11	1	1086	100
1993-2002	155	15	373	36	448	43	39	4	17	2	1032	100
All years	521	11	1901	38	2369	48	99	2	53	1	4943	100

Source: Ledgers

Between 1953 and 2002, just under half of the converts (2,369 or 48%) were married when they came to the Beit Din. The second largest group, 1901 (39%), were engaged. These percentages did not vary greatly through the period.

Within each decade, the proportion of all singles, male and female, has shown a steady increase. The percentage has doubled from1953-1962 when 7% of those seeking conversion were single to the latest period under study, 1993-2002 when 15% of those seeking conversion were single ($\chi^2 = 52.9$, $p \leq 0.001$). This demonstrates either that there is a genuine increasing trend in the numbers of people seeking personal religious fulfilment through Judaism and/or that couples are tending increasingly to delay engagement until after conversion.

As can be seen in **Table 2.4**, the proportion of divorcees increases over the years, perhaps influenced by the increase of divorce in the wider society. However, there were some difficulties in interpreting the marital status of the applicants, especially when dealing with those who stated 'divorced' on their forms as from the data we have no way of knowing if this group, who were at that moment divorced, were in fact intending to go on to marry a Jewish partner. As they form only a small subgroup, 99 individuals of the 4,943 (2%) who state their marital status, they do not distort the overall picture.

There is also a tiny group (1%) of those who converted when they were widowed. This decision can be seen in simplistic terms: that they converted so that they could be buried in the same cemetery as their deceased Jewish partners when the time came for their own burial or that they were seeking closer identification with their deceased partner. From the interviews we can see that sometimes a very complex set of feelings and experiences surrounded that decision.

Liz converted after her second husband, a non-practicing Jew, had died. She had already thought of becoming Jewish before his death, but had been waiting for the son from that marriage to finish his stint as a choir boy in his Christian school before she approached a synagogue. Indeed, she recalls having mixed in Jewish circles from her childhood, often having Jewish boyfriends, though her first husband had in fact been a non-Jew. After her second husband's death, Liz was highly moved and impressed by the rabbi's eulogy and the support he gave the family. She started attending synagogue regularly and joined the conversion class, but, she said:

> *...After about 6 months of coming to classes I began to worry a bit. I don't want to do this just for sentimental reasons for my late husband's memory...If I am going to do this it has got to be entirely my decision and so for a few months I actually backed off and then I started again because I really wanted to make sure it was myself and me alone who was doing it…* (Liz, converted 1986 aged 45, married)

2.1.5. Gender and marital status

Some interesting statistics emerge when the relationship between gender and marital status is considered, and illustrated in **Table 2.5**.

When considering all the candidates 1948-2002, the percentage of single males who converted is greater than the percentage of single females (15% of the males, 9% of the females). Again, the percentage of engaged males is similarly greater (44% of the males, 37% of the females). This comparison of percentages is naturally reversed when considering those who converted when already married (39% of the males, 50% of the females). These differences are significant ($p \leq 0.001$).

Table 2.5. Marital status of converts when they appeared before the Beit Din, by gender, all years

	Single		Engaged		Married		Divorced		Widowed		All	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Male	157	15	448	44	399	39	19	2	2	0	1,025	100
Female	364	9	1,454	37	1,970	50	80	2	51	1	3,919	100
All	521	11	1,902	38	2,369	48	99	2	53	1	4,944	100

Source: Ledgers

This difference might reflect the greater reluctance of Jewish women to marry non-Jews. In that case, the women might be more insistent on conversion before marriage than the men and hence a higher proportion of non-Jewish men would be in the single or engaged category. This may also reflect a trend for men to be more interested in conversion for other than family motives, as Greenwood suggested above (1999), for their wives are Jewish and their children are already therefore going to be Jewish, so some other factor must be at work. It may indeed be that they are converting because of some stronger intrinsic reasons leading to their conversion as singles, or when they are just engaged rather than waiting for the more formal ties of marriage.

2.1.6. Religions of birth families

The subject of the religions of the birth families of the converts that presented themselves to the Beit Din will be fully discussed in Chapter 4. Here, only a brief summary will be given in **Table 2.6**.

Table 2.6. The religions of the birth families

Religion	**#**	**%**
Anglican	2,535	52
Roman Catholic	761	15
Free Churches/Protestant	614	12
Non-believers	517	11
Jewish upbringing	289	6
Mixed	116	2
Non-Trinitarian Christian groups	28	1
Orthodox Christian	24	0
Eastern	24	0
Islam	14	0
Not stated	22	-
All	4,944	100

Source: Ledgers

Note: “Not stated” has been omitted in calculating the above percentages.

Other tables concerning the **location and size of synagogues** where the conversions took place can be seen in Appendix 8, Vol. 2, pp.90-2.

CHAPTER 3. THE NATURE OF JEWISH IDENTITY

3.1. Introduction

Jews in the modern world, are not just a religious group, nor are they purely an ethnic, nationalistic, cultural and certainly not a racially pure group. Rather, all of these characteristics in varying degrees form part of their identity.

Broadly speaking there are two paradigms within which scholars have attempted to define and explore Jewish identity:-

The nomothetic approach: The first takes as its starting point a particular historical or socio-political context and seeks to relate features of the Jewish condition to that chosen context. In general, the analyses which follow this approach treat Jews as a relatively homogenous group and focus on how the group as a whole construes itself or relates to its host society. The way psychologists use the term, one could call this a nomothetic approach to Jewish identity because it seeks to characterise Jews in general, or perhaps large movements within the whole, rather than individuals.

There are those who argue that even at this nomothetic level, it is not meaningful to try to characterise the general nature of Jewish (or indeed any other) identity independently of the particular individuals expressing that identity. Thus Webber argues:

> *...Identities do not have an existence independently of the people who embrace them…identities are constructs that are shaped and fashioned by the people who rely on them…they are cultural attempts, based on the specific social, political and economic circumstances of a particular moment in time, for people to make sense of the world in which they live in terms of their past and their hopes and expectations for the future…*
>
> *Therefore there is no one identity; today traditional identity has been broken up if not broken down*... (Webber, 1994, p.4)

Sinclair and Milner (2005, pp.97-8) noted that in Britain, amongst the 18-25 year-olds, not only is there no single definition possible of what is meant by Jewish identity, but that members of minority groups '*develop and construct hybrid identities incorporating an individual's engagement with multiple cultural identifications within a plural society*.' Young Jews living in a pluralist society carry many different identities that are brought into play according to the circumstances in which they find themselves at that moment.

In the USA, similar heterogeneous concepts of Jewish identity have emerged in recent analyses. Steven Cohen and Eisen (2000), in their seminal research on moderately affiliated American Jewry, conclude that Jewish identity, though important to the current generation, is far more fluid than ever before. Reflecting what is happening in other aspects

of social life, they argue that it has become even more complex to try to define what is meant by the term, 'Jewish identity'.

On their analysis, there is profound individualism in the quest for Jewish meaning, though the quest is influenced strongly by their personal stories and also by the memories they have of their childhood upbringing, especially the religious models presented to them by their grandparents. To this assemblage, group affiliation and loyalty are less important than the satisfying of personal meaning. Their attachment to Judaism is 'voluntarist' in the extreme. They have a strong sense of the inviolability of personal autonomy. Cohen has adopted the term, 'autonomous sovereign selves' to describe this new expression of Jewish identity (2000, p.35).

This emerging emphasis on reflexivity, the weakening of tradition as a framework within which individuals define their Jewishness, and the growth in choice and autonomy, owe much to the concepts of modernity and post-modernity (Giddens, 2009 p.97ff, Lyotard, 1984).

The link between modernity and the observable breakdown in certainty and traditionally-defined conduct is recognised explicitly by Jewish thinkers, sometimes with a degree of regret. Thus, for example, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks observes that:

> *...[post]modernity is the transition from fate to choice. At the same time it dissolves the commitments and loyalties that once lay behind our choices. Technical reason has made us masters of matching means to ends. But it has left us inarticulate as to why we should choose one end rather than another…Now we choose because we choose. Because it is what we want, or it works for us, or it feels right to me…the erosion of the bonds of loyalty and love which religion under-girded has left us increasingly alone in an impersonal economic and social system...* (Sacks, 1990, p.6)

Steve Bruce comments on this fluidity in religious identity in general society with a graphic analogy:

> *...The diminishing number of people who continue to do religion do it in an increasingly individualistic and idiosyncratic manner. The best image I can find for this is the 'pick and mix' sweet counter…customers could now construct precisely their own desired mix of sweets. This eclecticism is the characteristic form of religion in the late modern period…the world of options, lifestyles and preferences....* (Bruce, 1996, p.233)

Postmodernism is, of course, a more general conceptualisation of the human condition than is implied by the above quotations. It has been described as a '*fragmented movement in which a hundred flowers may bloom*' (Gott, 1986, p.222) or an age where *'one of its*

distinctive characteristics is a loss of rational and social cohesion in favour of cultural images and social forms and identities marked by fragmentation, multiplicity, plurality and indeterminacy' (Thompson, 1992, p.223).

Perhaps the most general formulation of the character of post-modernity is Lyotard's (1979) description of it as "*an incredulity toward metanarratives"* (Lyotard 1979 p xxiv) and a preference for "the plurality of small narratives that compete with each other" (Lyotard 1979 p xxiv). In the Jewish context, such a formulation adequately describes the replacement of a set of normative behaviours enmeshed in an extensive and coherent historical and theological belief system by the numerous permutations of belief and practice that now characterize the position of individual Jews.

Despite the attraction of a post-modern interpretation of Jewish identity at a philosophical level, the tradition of attempting to define Jewish identity in generic and fairly universal terms continues to drive empirical research. There is some concession to the more fluid and pluralistic approach of Cohen and Eisen, for example by recognising major schisms or trends within the umbrella of Jewish identity as well as the increased role of individual choice. But these models still employ high-level generic concepts and processes in attempting to capture what it means to be Jewish. Thus Liebman argues that in Europe, including Britain, Jewish identity is characterised by a trend towards traditional (but non-Orthodox) lifestyles driven by social and personal rather than religious imperatives. He sees Jewish identity as reflecting an increasing separation between Judaism and Jewishness:

> *...whereas the tradition is attractive to many Jews, they increasingly sense that it is they who choose the tradition or whatever aspects of the tradition they choose to celebrate; the tradition does not have the force of an imperative and cannot impose attitudes and forms of behaviour...* (Liebman, 2003, p.343)

Similarly, Cohen and Kahn-Harris attempt to characterise Jewish identity in the UK (for less engaged Jews) as follows *'identity is orientated to family, community, peoplehood and Israel, as well as more broadly, group membership, belonging and difference – in a word, "ethnic'"* (Cohen and Kahn-Harris, 2004, p.19).

Cohen and Kahn-Harris have postulated that there are two sociological concepts that can help in developing a fresh perspective on British Jewry, that of the 'dweller' and the 'seeker':

> *…Dwellers live in a stable place and feel secure within its territory; for them the sacred is fixed, and spirituality is cultivated through habitual practice within the familiar world of a particular tradition. Not that they are untouched by social change, but they are relatively well-anchored amid the flux. By contrast, seekers explore new vistas and negotiate among alternative, and at*

times confusing, systems of belief and practice; for them, the sacred is fluid and portable, and spirituality is likened unto a process or state of becoming. The language of the journey fits their experience... (Kahn-Harris, 2007)

Although the dweller-seeker distinction represents a degree of complexity in the proposed model of Jewish identify, it nonetheless exemplifies an attempt to provide an overarching characterisation of what it means to be Jewish.

This brief summary of nomothetic approaches to Jewish Identity is included simply to give the flavour of the theoretical constructs that have emerged over the past few decades. As an intellectual project, evaluating the tension between overarching models of Jewish identity and the 'small narratives' of a post-modern approach would be a formidable task. To do so in relation to converts to Judaism would be even more challenging. My goal however is more modest than this.

In essence, this thesis is concerned with the empirical features of the Jewish attitudes and lifestyle of converts – and more specifically with variations in those attitudes and behaviours. Accordingly it belongs within the second paradigmatic approach to Jewish identity.

The idiographic approach: The second approach is less concerned with the inter-relationship between the Jewish community and its social environment, and more interested in the way Jews differ from one another after taking the environment as a given. The key issue is not to understand the interplay between Jews as a community and their host society, but rather to understand the variations between the Jewish characteristics of individuals within the Jewish community itself – essentially an idiographic approach. My specific approach in this study is to seek to create a multi-dimensional model of identity which allows us to locate individuals at particular points on the dimensions that make up the construct of Jewish Identity. In particular, I will be following Miller's approach of looking at attitudes and behaviour as a way of exploring the Jewish identity of the converts.

Before embarking on this analysis, and by way of context, it is important to understand the traditional *halachic* definition of Jewish status. That definition has an effect on our proselyte's motivations, self perception and conduct.

3.1.1. Orthodox and Progressive definitions of Jewish status

Though not a definition of identity in psychological or sociological terms, the external *halachic* definition of who is a Jew impinges on how the various groups and even individuals within the different branches of Judaism view their own and proselytes' identity. A very thoughtful

comment on how this *halachic* definition impinges on a convert's feelings of Jewish identity was made by Denise: '*I think it's definitely lower status to be a convert than to be a born Jew. Lower status in the sense that I feel people are on the margins of Judaism and remain so for their lifetime.*' (Denise, converted 1993 aged 44, married, p.29) For that reason, it is important to understand this formal, legal, traditional understanding of Jewish identity.

In traditional *halacha*, the definition of a Jew is very clear: A Jew is either:-

- A person born of a Jewish mother, or
- A person who has joined the Jewish people through acceptance of the basic religious tenets and the carrying out of ritual as demanded in *halacha*.

To become a convert through an Orthodox Beit Din, total acceptance of the commandments is required. This is the background against which many proselytes in the Reform world, or their partners' Jewish families, examine their sense of Jewish worth.

The Movement for Reform Judaism, unlike the Union of Reform Judaism in the USA or Liberal Judaism in the UK which both accept patrilineal descent as sufficient, follows the traditional matrilineal definition of Jewish status – that is, it demands that those wishing to claim Jewish status must either have a Jewish mother or have undergone conversion through a recognised Jewish religious organisation with *tevilah* (immersion) and for males *milah* (circumcision) for the sake of conversion. However, as the British Reform Beit Din does not demand that the proselyte accepts the entire *ol mitzvot* (yoke of the commandments), its proselytes are not recognised as Jews by Orthodox authorities.

This study, grounded in the world of British Reform Judaism, has examined how proselytes have reacted to the formal Reform Jewish legal procedures and standards that have been established by the Reform Beit Din for the acceptance of proselytes. It also sheds some light on how their non-acceptance by the Orthodox establishment has affected their feelings of self-worth and their understanding of their Jewish identity vis-à-vis the wider Jewish community and their partner's Jewish families.

3.1.2. The dimensions of Jewish identity

Returning now to the idiographic approach to Jewish identity, and before considering the specific case of Reform converts, I set out below the empirical approach I have adopted in attempting to measure Jewish Identity.

An appropriate starting point is the question posed by Hamilton (1995) which is highly relevant to the Jewish community. He asks: '*Is religion what people do or what people believe?*' Are rituals or beliefs the primary mark of a religion?

Historically, there was no clear dividing line between rituals and belief; both aspects of religion were often seen as being part of a particular group, certainly that was true in Judaism until the modern period.

Durkheim taught that rituals lead to group cohesion:

> *...the true justification of religious practices does not lie in the apparent ends which they pursue, but rather in the invisible action which they exercise over the mind and the way in which they affect our mental states*... (Durkeim, 1915, p.360)

Now there is a partial, although incomplete, separation of these two aspects of religious identity, and in modern Britain, for many Jews, the carrying out of rituals is part of their ethnic rather than their spiritual identity. As Cohen and Kahn-Harris perceived, '*British Jews manifest a strong sense of ethnic cohesion and of inalienable and primordial Jewish difference. Yet this ethnic difference is not based upon any sense of ideological or theological distinctiveness*' (Cohen and Kahn Harris, 2004, p.84).

Meyer agrees with this conjecture when he states,

> *...It is however the sense of Jewish Peoplehood that represents the strongest component of Jewish identity today…synagogue activities are a way of expressing ethnicity. Attending religious services is something Jews do as members of the Jewish people...* (Meyer, 1990, p.84)

3.1.3. Behaviour: A basis of definition

Miller has concentrated on this empirical aspect in his many studies of the modern British Jewish community; he has studied Jewish identity on the basis of quantitative studies of what people do and what they say they believe. He has written that:

> *...Following the American pattern, those practices which interfere least with normal social discourse are the most persistent, whilst those that impact most heavily on daily life are prone to extinction. The implication would seem to be that religious rituals have come to serve some purpose other than* halacha*, at least among the non-Orthodox. Those that are retained are unlikely to be seen as religiously prescribed rituals, but rather, are loosely defined ethnically based ceremonies. It has been argued that such selective practices constitute a constructive adaptation to modernism since they permit the maintenance of identity without the inconvenience of precise ritual observance...* (Miller, 1998, p.231)

In many previous surveys carried out on born Jews, three main factors arise when Jewish

attitudes and behaviours are analysed using factorial methods:-

- **Belief** – strength of faith or belief
- **Ritual practice** – level of religious observance
- **Ethnicity** – strength of belonging to the Jewish people or identifying with other Jews.

Basing his work on the 1996 Institute of Jewish Policy Research, Miller has shown that the conjunction of (i) a moderate level of practice (little observance of the more demanding rituals such as *kashrut* or regular attendance at synagogue), (ii) low scores on belief and (iii) high scores on ethnicity (e.g. having many Jewish friends or feeling very Jewish) is the most common pattern among Jews in the United Kingdom.

He also observed that the three factors are not statistically independent of each other:

> *...the strongest relationship is between ethnicity and practice (r = 0.8, belief held constant) rather than belief and practice (r = 0.1, ethnicity held constant). This suggests that variations in religious practice among British Jews reflect differences in the intensity of ethnic involvement rather more than differences in religious faith. Put more starkly, Jewish observance is an expression of belonging rather than an act of religious faith and this contrasts strongly with say, Catholics, where the reverse is the case...* (Miller, 2000, pp.20-32 and quoting Ozorak, 1989, pp.448-463)

In later studies, Miller (2003) has modified earlier work on the factors behind British Jewish identity. He now suggests that a generational shift may be occurring in the British Jewish community. In the over 50's, he observed four main factors:-

- **Practice –** i.e. degree of involvement in simple rituals and synagogue life. This expresses belonging through simple rituals and ceremonies, in many cases devoid of religious commitment.
- **Religiosity –** i.e. degree of faith in God and observance of demanding rituals.
- **Mental Ethnicity –** In this factor the strongest items relate to the more affective and internal aspects of ethnic identity, e.g. the strength of personal feelings of belonging.
- **Social Ethnicity –** incorporating such items as having Jewish friends and feeling of reliance on fellow Jews.

In the under 50's, Miller found that there were slight but arguably important changes in the factorial structure of Jewish identity. He suggests that the religious elements are becoming less differentiated while ethnic identity is growing more variegated. Thus he observes three main factors:-

- **Behavioural ethnicity** – strength of involvement expressed through social and synagogue involvement and performance of light rituals.

- **Religiosity** – degree of faith in God and observance of demanding rituals.

- **Mental ethnicity –** strength of belonging expressed as personal Jewish feelings.

One of the key findings in this research was that mental ethnicity is not closely related to behavioural manifestations of belonging so that, for example, out-married Jews have very similar scores on the mental ethnicity dimension to Jews with Jewish partners. Thus Miller postulates:

> *...It would appear that feelings of Jewishness function much like other personal attributes – perhaps like personality, nationality or intellectual style: they may be deeply embedded psychological characteristics, intrinsic to one's own sense of identity, but not seen as directly relevant to the choice of partner.* (Miller, 2001)

In the findings that follow, the attempt will be made to see if the Jewish identity of those who converted to Judaism through the Movement for Reform Judaism conforms to the same groupings, trends and definitions as have been categorised in the more general studies of Jewish identity both here and in the USA.

In this exploration, the research has focussed on two main areas: how proselytes empirically express their new identity in terms of behaviour;[5] and how they feel about their new identity.

In relation to affective dimensions of identity, Surve has defined this as providing a '*sense of pride and belongingness to the group and reflect[ing] the value of that identity to the group member*' (Surve in Whetten et al, 1998). That is, affective identification is associated with having positive feelings about the group to which you belong, with a sense of deep connection being high on the agenda. For converts, it is important to see how they feel about the process they have undergone and how they describe their connections now with the Jewish people

The connections between feelings about their new identity and changes in behaviour will also need to be examined. One hypothesis is that new Jews will follow the pattern adopted by many born Jews in that they feel Jewish, but do not support such feelings with many specific demanding ritual actions.

[5] Given the nebulous nature of belief and the secondary role that they seem to play according to the theoretical models presented especially by Miller and Cohen, this research has not attempted a thorough investigation of that area.

3.2. Findings: Jewish identity outcomes in Reform converts, the results of the factor analysis and related qualitative and analytical data

In order to establish a factorial structure of the nature of the converts' Jewish identity, I subjected Q18, Q22, Q24-Q27, Q31, Q33 and Q34, to an Oblimin Rotated Structure Matrix. The 21 individual items cover: (i) ritual practice, both demanding and light rituals (e.g. keeping kashrut and affixing a mezuzah to their doorpost); (ii) ethnic behaviours (e.g. attachment to Israel and feeling loyal to their Jewish heritage and culture); (iii) belief systems (e.g. the status of Torah and the religious rites accompanying the future funeral of the convert); and (iv) emotional/mental states (e.g. feeling close to other Jews and feeling Jewish). Many of these measures have been used in previous surveys of the British Jewish community.

The results of the Factor Analysis are shown in **Table 3.1** which suppresses factor loadings below 0.35. The analysis reveals four factors which together account for 49% of the variance in the responses to the questionnaire items.

Table 3.1. Pattern matrix based on Q18, Q22, Q24-Q27, Q31, Q33 and Q34 in the Survey

	FACTOR LOADINGS			
	Factor 1 Ritual	**Factor 2 Ethnicity**	**Factor 3 Growth**	**Factor 4 Spirituality**
Doesn't work Rosh Hashanah	0.698			
Kosher meat at home?	0.667			
Fasts Yom Kippur	0.624			0.464
Mezuzah on some doors	0.622			
Home Friday night	0.581			
Lights candles Friday night	0.578			
Attends Passover Seder	0.526			
Involvement in Jewish home life	0.465			
Loyalty to my Jewish heritage		0.863		
Interest in Jewish culture		0.774		
Attachment to Israel		0.736		
Feeling Jewish 'inside'		0.648		
Closeness to other Jews		0.637		
Attended a Jewish education Course			0.822	
Synagogue attendance			0.807	
Importance of participation in Jewish religious life			0.386	0.369
Believes Torah is of Divine origin				0.637
Wants Jewish funeral				0.547
Has Christmas decorations/activities	-0.328			
Proportion of Jewish friends	0.350			
Would try to prevent child's intermarriage			0.368	

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

The descriptive labels applied to each of the factors follow clearly from the nature of the items which load on each one. The four factors have been designated:-

- **Ritual observance**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Jewish Growth**

- **Spirituality**

As can be seen, these factors mimic the conventional model but with the emergence of an additional, somewhat diverse construct, Jewish Growth, which seems to reflect the level of commitment to Jewish development through education and participation and, to a lesser extent, the involvement of children in Jewish continuity. That a developmental theme should emerge in a sample of converts is not unexpected, though as will be seen in section 3.6.1 (pp 83-86) this factor is not an independent element of Jewish identity, but has a moderate correlation with the ethnic and ritual observance dimensions.

3.2.1. Ritual observance factor

This factor is concerned with the extent of the proselytes' **Ritual Practice**, explaining 26% of the variance**.** The variables which load highest onto this factor include:-

- **Doesn't work Rosh Hashanah (0.698)**
- **Kosher meat at home? (0.667)**
- **Fasts Yom Kippur (0.624)**
- ***Mezuzah* on some doors (0.622)**
- **Home Friday nights (0.581)**
- **Lights candles Friday nights (0.578)**
- **Attends Passover Seder (0.526)**

This factor contains a mixture of items – both demanding rituals (i.e. those taking some time and effort such as *kashrut*) and light rituals (i.e. an annual or one-time only action such as Seder or *mezuzah*).

The perceived importance of ritual behaviour, and the level of sensitivity to different degrees of observance is well attested to in the comments made by converts at the interview stage. Katy, now divorced from her Jewish husband, remembers carrying out few of the rituals, largely those that take place only once a year:

> *...I think we did used to light the candles sometimes, not every week, but we certainly had Chanukah candles, and we used to go to family Seders, you know, with his family, I don't think we ever had one in our house. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we observed obviously...* (Katy, converted 1979 when she was 21, divorced, p.8)

In contrast Eli describes how she carries out both demanding and light rituals in her home, such as keeping milk and meat separate and lighting candles and making *kiddush* every Shabbat as well as affixing a *mezuzah* on her door, even after her Israeli Jewish husband had left the marital home. She feels it is her prerogative to make choices as to what rituals she observes, in that way she is reflecting Cohen's model of the 'autonomous sovereign self', but she has chosen to make Jewish rituals part of her daily routines. She says:

> ...*Well I don't keep a kosher kitchen, I don't buy my meat in a kosher butchers. I do keep milk and meat separate...We have two fridges. We have two sinks, so in theory we could actually if we wanted to be a little bit more kosher than we are...I feel that in Reform Judaism that is my prerogative. I think it's more important what we feel and believe and that's my personal opinion...So I light candles every Friday night and say the blessing over wine…I like to think that people would come into my house and be able to identify that there is a Jew who lives there, by the books on the shelf, by the mezuzah on the door...* (Eli, converted 1994 when she was 33, pp.8-9)

In addition to the direct measures of ritual observance incorporated in the factor analysis, Q23 asked respondents to classify how they saw their own level of observance. The question allows for 6 levels of Jewish religious observance. The fact that some respondents felt the need to insert additional levels of observance (in *italics*) at the boundaries between the original categories indicates how salient this question was to their self perception as Jews. It is of course no surprise that the absolute majority, 81%, see themselves as belonging to the Progressive sector of Judaism. In that sense, it could be said that the conversion process that they had undergone had achieved its immediate purpose and created new Jews who ally themselves to the Movement for Reform Judaism.

Table 3.2. Self-perception of religious observance (Q23)

Description of level of religiosity	**#**	**%**
I no longer regard myself as Jewish	3	0.8
Non-practicing (i.e. secular) Jew	8	2.2
Non-practicing/just Jewish	*1*	*0.3*
Just Jewish	39	10.7
Just Jewish/progressive	*4*	*1.1*
Progressive Jew (e.g. Liberal or Reform)	281	77.0
Progressive/traditional Jew	*10*	*2.7*
Traditional	18	4.9
Strictly Orthodox	1	0.2
Total	**365**	**100**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

3.2.2. Comparison between the ritual observance of converts and born Jews

Of particular interest is the comparison between the converts' absolute levels of ritual observance (both light and demanding rituals) and that of the Jewish community in general, which is largely a 'born Jewish' population. The data in **Table 3.3** below are taken from the 1996 JPR survey, although similar results have been recorded in several other surveys both here and in the United States (Lerer and Mayer, 2008).

Table 3.3. Ritual observance among proselytes as against born Jews

Ritual		**Proselyte survey**	**JPR survey (1996): identifying as "Progressive Jew"**	**JPR survey (1996): identifying as "traditional Jew"**
Q24.3. Attend a Seder (light ritual)	Every year	84%	75%	91%
	Most years	9%	12%	5%
	Some years	5%	12%	3%
	Never	2%	2%	1%
Q24.1. Lighting candles Friday nights (a more demanding ritual)	Always	56%	36%	69%
	Sometimes	38%	46%	24%
	Never	8%	18%	7%
Q24.6. Stay home Friday nights for religious reasons (a more demanding ritual)	Always	34%	Yes 65%	Yes 88%
	When I can	40%	No 35%	No 12%
	Doesn't matter to me	27%	-	-
Q26. *Kashrut* (a more demanding ritual)	Vegetarian	11%	11%	6%
	No *Kashrut*	19%	26%	2%
	Biblical *Kashrut*	50%	48%	17%
	Total *Kashrut*	20%	15%	75%
Q24.4. At Christmas, take part in any seasonal activities in OWN home, e.g. hanging up stockings or having seasonal decorations		31%	31%	31%

Source: JPR (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996) and Survey (Tabick, 2005)

When comparing the results here with the JPR data it must be noted that the JPR research captured the patterns of observance of the entire range of the self-identifying Jewish community, including Strictly Orthodox, Traditional, Progressive, secular and weakly affiliated Jews. However, in **Table 3.3**, I have compared the Proselyte sample with the JPR data for the two most relevant comparator sub-groups, namely those who identified themselves as 'progressive' Jews and those who identified themselves as 'traditional' Jews. Naturally, the Progressive Jews surveyed would have contained a proportion of converts, and this may be reflected in the results. It is notable that comparing the results from our proselyte survey and those for Progressive Jews as a whole, in every case examined, the proselytes registered significantly higher levels of observance than those (largely 'born Jews') who defined themselves as Progressive. Insofar as the Progressive group in the JPR survey contained proselytes, this will have boosted observance levels (on the present data), so that the gap between Progressive born Jews and Progressive proselytes is likely to be even greater than that suggested in **Table 3.3**.

In terms of inducing Jewish behaviour, therefore, the conversion process appears to have been relatively successful in generating a cohort of new Jews whose level of observance approaches that of traditional (nominally Orthodox) born Jews. A key consideration, however, is whether this relatively high absolute level of observance matches the lifecycle trends observed among born Jews, or whether the level is boosted by an immediate post-conversion 'bonus effect' (perhaps driven by cognitive dissonance factors) that subsequently dissipates.

It is worthy of note that the item about seasonal activities at Christmas, important in a survey of proselytes of whom the majority had begun life as Christians, indicated that Christmas activities such as the hanging of decorations, took place in 31% of their homes. The JPR figure for all of their respondents is – by coincidence – exactly the same. It is perhaps difficult to explain; it may arise from the resolution of two opposing factors: the converts' enthusiasm to put old rituals behind them versus the difficulty in cutting off ties completely from parents and birth family. It is also possible that they are just following the example set by their partner's Jewish family.

In common with many surveys of non-Orthodox practicing Jews, those rituals which take the most effort (e.g. kashrut and Friday night home rituals) had the lowest levels of observance. On the other hand, the Passover Seder records a similar level of involvement right across the entire community. It is an example of a light ritual in that it takes place just once a year. The fact that it is very much a family event adds to its universal appeal.

Thus it would seem that the converts are more observant than the Progressive group as a whole, but, unsurprisingly, record a lower level of the more demanding mitzvot than those who identify as traditional Jews.

3.2.3. Multiple regression exercises on the ritual factor

On the basis of a series of multiple regression analyses, I examined the impact of several measures on Jewish ritual identity in Section 3.2.3.1 and its results in Section 3.2.3.2.

3.2.3.1. Measures used for the multiple regression

- **Level of parental observance of the Jewish partner.** Q44 Measured on a 5-point scale from Highly assimilated to Strictly Orthodox
- **Initial motivation for conversion.** A full description of the factor analysis carried out on Q1 of the survey, which explores the potency of various motives for conversion, will be given in Chapter 6 (6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2 and 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-3). Here, I will just note that three factors were found, accounting for 65% of the variance:

- **Intrinsic motivation to convert.**
- **Family pressure.**
- **Desire for family unity.** A fuller exploration of the factor analysis around the question of family support/pressure will be given in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.2.4, pp.235-9). Within this measure, three further motivational factors were identified, accounting for 46% of the variance:-
    - General family support,
    - Jewish partner's religious support,
    - Desire to satisfy expectations of the Jewish family.
- **Gender.** Ascertained in Q68b.
- **Age at conversion.** Ascertained by subtracting Q15b (year of conversion) from 2002 (year of survey) and subtracting that from Q68a (age now).
- **Marital status at conversion.** A special ordinal variable was constructed from Q58 so that it could be used in this process.
- **Experiences of the conversion learning process.** Using the Oblimin Rotated Pattern Matrix, a Factor analysis was carried out on Q5, Q8, Q11, Q14, Q16 and Q17 of the survey concerned with the process of conversion and its immediate aftermath. This analysis explains 42% of the variance. The analysis revealed four factors:-
    - **Positive feelings towards the results of the process** (later replaced by the Contentment index).
    - **Ongoing help and support after the conversion.**
    - **Support received during the process.**
    - **Positive feelings towards the Beit Din.** This factor will be fully explored in Chapter 7 (Section 7.1.2, p.241-242).
- **Contentment with being Jewish.** This 'Contentment Index' was created by combining Q17.1, Q17.4, Q17.6, Q17.7 and Q17.8. It reflects the extent to which respondents are content with their new status and their decision to convert. The higher the score on this index, the higher their level of contentment, with the index ranging from 5-25. It was subjected to a reliability test (Cronbach alpha 0.761).
- **Early or late support from the Jewish family of partner.** The variables 'Early family support' and 'Late family support' were constructed in the following manner:-

The composite scale, 'Early Family support', is an ordinal scale with eight levels of support, created from Q 37, Q38 and Q39, and defined in **Table 3.4**.

Table 3.4. The construction of the early family support scale

Measure: Strength of family support	Q37	Q38	Q39
0	Horror	Yes	Yes
1	Horror	No	No/Don't know
2	Disappointment	Yes	Yes/Don't know
3	Disappointment	No	No/Don't know
4	Reluctant acceptance	Yes	Yes/Don't know
5	Reluctant acceptance	No	No/Don't know
6	Fairly positive	No	No
7	Welcoming, supportive	No	No

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

If there was no response to these sets of questions and Q58 revealed the presence of a Jewish partner, 'early family support' was set at 3.5.

'Late family support' was calculated from the responses to Q45 and Q46 of the survey and an eight point scale was developed using the same method as for early family support. The eight categories are numbered 0 to 7.

3.2.3.2. Results of the multiple regression

The effect of the predictors is shown in **Table 3.5**.

Table 3.5. Predictors of ritual factor of identity (only significant predictors included)

Predictors	Significance	Cumulative % of variance
Contentment index	$p \leq 0.001$	21%
The level of observance of the Jewish family	$p \leq 0.001$	8%
Desire to satisfy the expectations of the Jewish family	$p = 0.021$	2%

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Common variables such as age or gender were not found to be significant, nor support/pressure from the Jewish families, instead, contentment with the conversion process, the current level of religious behaviour exhibited by the Jewish partner's family and the desire to satisfy their

expectations are the determinants of future ritual activity.

3.3. Ethnicity

The process of becoming Jewish demands behavioural, cognitive and affective changes in the successful convert's sense of identity. Not only is the convert required to gain knowledge of theology, Hebrew, rituals, liturgy etc., they are also expected to adopt changes in quite basic behaviours such as eating and the timing of festivals and rituals. Critically, they must also adopt a different set of feelings and values about life and about their sense of belonging to community.

3.3.1. The ethnicity factor

The ethnicity factor captures these ethnic acts and feelings. This factor explains a further 8% of the variance in Jewish identity measures. The variables which load highest onto this factor are those where the proselyte has expressed their feeling of Jewish identity in terms of:-

- **Loyalty to my Jewish heritage (0.836),**
- **Interest in Jewish culture (0.774),**
- **Attachment to Israel (0.736),**
- **Feeling Jewish inside (0.648),**
- **Closeness to other Jews (0.637).**

Again, in the interviews, varying positions on this dimension are easily recognisable.

It is no surprise that Fay, whose husband is a secular Israeli, describes her ethnicity in terms of feelings of belonging to the State of Israel:

> *...I think that I have some kind of feeling of belonging to the Jewish people…and it has to do with Israel as well, because I do feel I belong in Israel. In some ways the Israeliness is more than the Jewishness…I do feel closer to people that are Jewish than not, but its not because of religion, its something else, intangible…* (Fay, converted 1987 when aged 28, p.8)

Whereas Denise sees the performance of rituals as reflecting her ethnic attachment to Jewish people, which allows her, brought up in an atheist household, to belong to the community. It had, though, taken time to discover that rituals could be observed and have benefits for her and her family even when divorced from any belief in the Divine and observed as an expression of their ethnicity.

> *…I know now that these ceremonial gestures don't actually have to do with belief in God in a way, but to people expressing a sort of reverence for, you know, the teachings and expressing their identification with the community and so on…* (Denise, converted 1993 aged 44, p.23)

On the other hand, Betty wants so much to be accepted, to be part of the Jewish people, but cannot cross the barrier that she feels other people place in her way because she is a convert.

> *…I wouldn't choose to be anything else but Jewish. I just would like to see myself being able to say "I am Jewish" without saying J...J…Jewish – do you understand? I am not able to say that straight away*… (Betty, converted 1999, when aged 27, partnered by Jewish male, p.9)

There has been much debate, especially in America, as to whether or not converts can absorb the feelings of ethnicity that come so naturally to many born-Jews. Quite apart from religious rituals, most non-strictly Orthodox Jews derive their sense of identity through family links and memories and an ethnic connection with other Jews.[6] This can be a very difficult religious framework for non-Jews to acquire. As Kling noted:

> *…choosing to become Jewish is different from changing from one Christian denomination to another. A convert to Judaism not only adopts a new theology and different ritual practices and customs but also joins a different people. To be a Jew means belonging to a unique historical community...* (Kling and Perkins, 1999, p.6)

Meyer also emphasises this difficulty (1990, pp.81-82), asserting that proselytes see conversion as changing one's faith and so find it difficult to internalise '*the profound emotional tie that binds Jews to one another*'. To prove his point he quotes the fact that, as he puts it, '*the standard guide for Jews by Choice*' (Kukoff, 2005) gives no attention to the Holocaust or State of Israel.

3.3.2. Two questions about a convert's expression of ethnicity

Three main areas were identified where, as we have seen above, some question a convert's ability to adopt Jewish sensitivities. We will examine two here: forming a Jewish network of friends, and support for Israel. The third, intermarriage of their children, will be examined later as it emerges as one of the variables that form the Jewish Growth factor of identity.

(i) Forming a Jewish network of friends,

Mayer, from his latest survey work, reports that:

[6] Miller, S. JPR survey 1996, p.236: '*Simple rituals align themselves with other forms of ethnic behaviour and appear to be simple expressions of group membership, devoid of religious significance*'.

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... (Lerer and Myer, 2008, p.23)

This would lead us to a hypothesis that conversion does not lead converts to internalize the Jewish norm of having a large network of Jewish friends. This may, of course, be mitigated when they are in a Jewish marriage as their partner is likely to value such links with the community.

(ii) Support for Israel

The second area of concern is the converts' attitudes to Israel. There is some research that suggests that converts feel far more diffident in their support for Israel than do born Jews. We did find in this study that some gave as one of their motives for conversion their love for Israel (10% on the application forms and 28% in the survey). However, this issue has become very complex as support for Israel has also been challenged recently among born Jews (Chen and Eisen, 2000, p.35).

To examine these areas more closely, in addition to the Ethnicity factor, the following measures were also employed:-

a) Responses to specific items of different aspects of ethnic identity:-

Q17.3, Q17.5, Q18.1 and Q34.2 measuring the extent of Jewish friendship circles and Q18.4 measuring attachment to Israel.

All were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

b) Results from the 1995 JPR survey when available used for comparison as described above.

3.3.3. Results and discussion on the two ethnicity questions

In **Table 3.6**, the proportion of Jewish friends that the converts reported are shown and compared, where such comparisons were possible, with the results from the JPR 1996 survey.

(i) Forming a Jewish network of friends

Apart from Q.34.2 relating to their Jewish friendship network, it would seem that the converts feel very comfortable in their new environment. They even report a higher level of believing that closeness to other Jews is an important part of their Jewish identity than do the born Jews in the JPR (1996) survey (45% to 38% agreeing that it was very

important and 19% to 35% feeling it was not at all important). In contrast to this, only 19% of the converts said that all or nearly all their friends were Jewish, whereas 55% of born Jews do so, while 35% of the converts reported none or few of their friends were Jewish, with only 18% of the born Jews reporting such a low proportion. This would seem to agree with Mayer's statement above, although the reason for these differences may relate to the fact that converts may retain many friends from the non-Jewish world they inhabited before conversion, which would lower the proportion of Jewish friends in their new religious lifestyle.

Table 3.6. Responses to items dealing with friendship networks (JPR 1996 responses in italics)

	Agree strongly/ agree	**Not certain**	**Disagree/ disagree strongly**
17.3 Judaism is fine but I don't feel comfortable with the social attitudes and opinions of many members of the community	19%	15%	66%
17.5 I have never felt fully at home in the Jewish community	12%	10%	78%
	Very important	**Important**	**Not at all important**
18.1 a feeling of closeness to other Jews [how it relates to your sense of Jewishness]	45%	48%	7%
JPR Survey Results on Q18.1	*38%*	*43%*	*19%*
	All or nearly all	**About half**	**Less than half, very few**
Q 34.2 thinking of your close friends, what proportion would you say were Jewish?	19%	46%	35%
JPR Survey Results on Q34.2	*55%*	*14%*	*31%*

Source: JPR (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996) Survey (Tabick, 2005)

(ii) Support for Israel

As with the born Jewish community, feelings about Israel ranged from the very positive to the extremely negative. An older convert reported that she had been highly disturbed when her daughter, who had spent some time in Israel, was told by someone she met that proselytes were a 'running sore' for the Jewish people (an opinion expressed in the Talmud). Nevertheless she wrote:

> *...Religiously I have become more withdrawn and private, but in my strong support for Israel, I have become more aware of my Jewishness...* (Survey 259, female, converted 1963 aged 22)

In other words, she had lost the 'religious/ritual' side of her identity but had magnified her feelings of ethnicity, largely through identification with Israel.

The same feelings are expressed by a woman who converted around 10 years ago, having already been married to a non-Jew and had an adult child of that union but was now divorced, had remarried and had two young children. She seems to have lost her religious

identity but again found instead an ethnic basis for her sense of belonging. She wrote:

> *...Perhaps bizarrely I have lost religious conviction lately and so think of myself as a Jewish atheist, apparently there are lots of us! Simultaneously, I have become much more pro-Israel than I used to be, because I am continuing to read about history of Jewish people I have developed much more Zionist sympathies...* (Survey 301, female, no conversion date given)

On the other hand, a young woman who made *aliyah* to Israel and is now studying to become a Conservative rabbi wrote that what disturbed her feelings about being Jewish were:

> *...Ongoing conflict in Israel (West Bank) makes me less inclined to be Jewish...* (Survey 241, female, converted 1998 aged 35, single)

When comparing the mean values of responses to Q1.9 (*'I felt close to the Land and people of Israel'*) over the decades that have passed since the conversion took place, the results were not significant (p = 0.076) but by sight it is possible to see that, since 1982 there has been a gradual decline in this being stated as a reason for conversion.

Table 3.7. Q1.9 by decades since conversion

Decades when converted	Mean value of Q1.9
Pre-1973	3.32
1973-1982	3.50
1983-1992	3.24
1993-2003	3.05
After 2003	2.89

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This would seem to echo the reduction in the general Jewish world of support for Israel and the diminution of emotional ties towards the Land of Israel (Kelman and Miller, 2007). That is, the reduction over the years of support for Israel could be said to reflect how well more recent converts are assimilating into the present Jewish environment of their partners and their friends.

The 1995 JPR survey also gave me the chance to compare the overall attitudes of the converts to those of born Progressive and born traditional Jews regarding how important to their personal sense of Jewishness was their attachment to the Land of Israel. These results can be seen below in **Table 3.7a.**

Table 3.7a. Q18.4 – Attachment to Israel as part of my Jewish identity

	Very important	Quite important	Not at all important
Converts	28%	38%	34%
Progressive Jews	18%	50%	32%
Traditional Jews	35%	50%	15%

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005) and JPR (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996)

In this comparison between the two surveys, it can be seen that the converts' views on this matter are fairly evenly spread over the choice of responses, whereas the born Progressive Jews and the born traditional Jews responded as in a mirror image revolving round a common 50% response in the centre ground. But there is no evidence here that converts think that attachment to Israel is of less important than born Jews, it is just that their responses echo the attitudes of their fellow Progressive Jews that they meet in their own synagogues. That is, it is the type of synagogue that they belong to that forms their views, not the fact that they are converts.

3.3.4. Responses to Q20, measuring levels of feelings of 'Jewishness'

It is also of interest to compare born Jews and converts on the ethnicity factor, because, on the face of it, converts have less reason to feel intense bonds of belonging to a group with which they lack genetic and historic family ties. Whilst the ethnicity factors in the Born Jewish group (Miller, 2001) and the convert samples are not strictly comparable, it is possible to compare the responses of these two groups to a particular questionnaire item that was used in both surveys and that goes to the essence of Jewish ethnic consciousness, namely Q20, which allows closed multiple choice questions on a four-point Likert scale. There can be no standardised measurement of the various levels of feelings of Jewishness as they are ascribed purely on the basis of personal perception.

The Ethnicity factor which we examined above of course reflects the feelings of converts but we felt it important to look more closely how they now feel about themselves as Jews, using Q20 as a proxy for the ethnicity factor**.**

Again, the question of whether born Jews have a different view of their Jewishness than converts has to be considered. The results can be seen in **Table 3.8** where we have compared the responses from our survey with those found in Miller (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996).

Table 3.8. Comparison of feelings of Jewishness (Q20) between born Jews and converts

Description of level of consciousness of being Jewish	**Born Jews**	**Converts**
	Percentage	Percentages, for purposes of comparison, were collapsed into the 4 original levels
I no longer think of myself as Jewish	2%	2%
I am aware of my Jewishness but I do not think of it very often	19%	10%
I feel strongly Jewish but I am equally conscious of other aspects of my life	44%	53%
I feel extremely conscious of being Jewish and it is very important to me	32%	34%

Sources: JPR (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996) and survey (Tabick, 2005)

As can be clearly seen, there is a weighting towards the top end of the scale for converts, with a

larger proportion of them expressing a stronger feeling of being Jewish than those who were born Jewish. Based on cognitive dissonance theory, this positive stance may have been brought about by the fact that they have chosen to become Jewish, carrying out specific learning and changes in lifestyle to achieve this end, as opposed to the born Jews who perhaps unthinkingly accepted their right to be Jewish by accident of birth.

3.3.5. How feelings of Jewishness (Q20) changes over time

There was an attempt made to see how these feelings of Jewishness changed over time since conversion. Although the results were not significant (p = 0.298), this expression of how Jewish the converts feel is such a key issue, I have recorded the results in **Table 3.9.**

Table 3.9. Q20 as a function of years since conversion

Q20	Years since conversion		
	0-10	11-20	21+
	%	%	%
I no longer think of myself as Jewish	1	2	1
I am aware of my Jewishness but I do not think of it very often	15	9	8
I feel strongly Jewish but I am equally conscious of other aspects of my life	46	55	57
I feel extremely conscious of being Jewish and it is very important to me	39	34	34

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

By sight, one can see that consciousness of being Jewish is generally very strong across all the time bands marking years since conversion. Indeed, there seems to be a gentle increase over the years, possibly affected by the natural increase of such feelings associated with time spent in the Jewish community.

The qualitative data gives many examples of the pride many converts display in their strong feelings about being Jewish. As Eli remembered:

> *...It's funny actually because I was on the tube, when I went down to London on Monday and there was a lady sitting opposite me who was also wearing her chain with a* Yad *and we both just looked at each other, and I could see she was looking at my chain and I was looking at hers. It was like we identified and we just smirked at each other. Because we knew "yes we are Jewish" It's nice that...* (Eli, converted 1994 aged 33, p.3)

Indeed for some, they feel that their confidence as Jews has risen to such heights that they can now join in general Jewish discussions and communal arguments.

> *...Overall I have become more confident as a Jew, i.e. I feel I now also have a right to an opinion on Jewish issues which I did not at the start...* (Survey 108 female, converted 1998 aged 21)

Even Katy, now remarried to a non-Jew and whose lifestyle in no way reflects any Jewish practice, still *feels* Jewish. She said:

> *…I sort of got used to it, I can't think of a way of putting it but now after all this time when I don't really practise it any more for other reasons I still feel as if the Jewish is in my bones so it [conversion] did something to me…* (Katy, converted 1979 aged 21, p.3)

It is clear from this part of the research that the affective identity of these converts is generally very strong and positive even when no other elements of Jewish behaviour are present in their lives.

3.3.6. Regression exercise on the ethnicity factor

The results of a multiple regression exercise to find predictors of the Jewish ethnicity identity factor reveal two items: the contentment index explaining 50% of the variance, and the intrinsic motivation factor explaining a further 8% of the variance.

Table 3.10. Predictors of ethnicity

Ethnicity factor	Predictors	Significance	Cumulative % of variance
	Contentment index	≤ 0.001	50%
	Intrinsic motivation factor	≤ 0.001	8%

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

3.4. Growth

Converts and, where appropriate, their partners, commit themselves to a period of not less than a year of regular attendance at services and educational classes specially geared towards their needs. It is therefore quite predictable that they would include a factor measuring the strength of their involvement in further education and in the continuity of their Jewishness as part of their identity structure.

3.4.1. The growth factor

The third identity factor expresses a measure of the strength of involvement in activities that promote **Jewish Growth and future development** including the variables:-

- **Attended a Jewish education course (0.822),**
- **Synagogue attendance on Shabbat (0.807),**

- **Importance of participation in Jewish religious life (0.386),**
- **Try to prevent the intermarriage of children (0.386).**

This factor explains 7% of the variance.

Evidence for the salience of the need for continuing Jewish education can be found in the qualitative data. For example, on an application form, a woman wrote:

...I am applying to the court for recognition as a Jew because I feel it is my chosen path, a personal journey that I am enjoying very much. It has given me spiritual enlightenment and I am looking forward to a lifetime of study and learning... (Application form 814, female, converted 2000, aged 32, married to non-Jew, no children)

Many in the survey commented on educational activities playing a part in their evolving Jewish identity, for example:

> *...Education, I have continued to study Hebrew and general Jewish studies since my conversion and this counts a lot towards my feelings of Jewishness...* (Survey 139 female, converted 1989 aged 29)

36% of the converts and 20% of their partners do say that they have attended an education course within the past two years but this may reflect the high proportion of respondents who have just finished their conversion courses.

Looking at the other most potent item involved in this factor (attendance at Shabbat services) it is interesting to compare the results of this survey with those of the JPR 1996 survey. However, we should note that, according to the factor analysis, this is part of the growth factor, i.e. a learning and Jewish development activity rather than a religious/spiritual occasion. It is obviously closely related to the item concerning the importance of involvement in Jewish ritual, but for the same reasons of encouraging growth in Jewish learning rather than for reasons of spirituality.

Table 3.11. Attendance at services (Q27)

Q27	Converts	Progressive Jews	Traditional Jews
Most Sabbaths	29%	16%	29%
About once a month	28%	17%	17%
On a few occasions	31%	46%	42%
Once or twice a year	8%	16%	10%
Not at all	4%	6%	3%

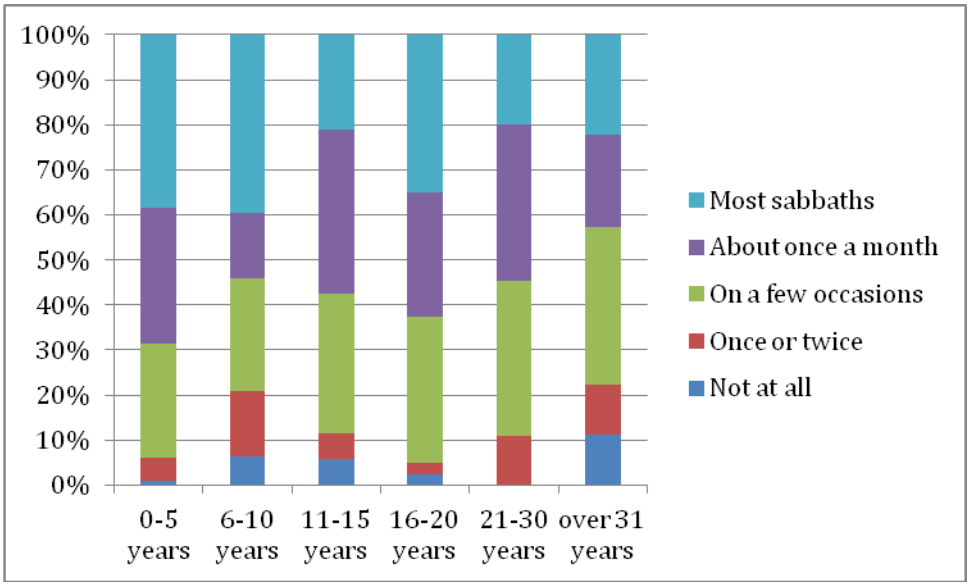
Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

It is notable that the proportions of converts reporting that they attended services on Shabbat are similar with those who defined themselves as traditional Jews, for attending weekly services is a very demanding activity.

To check whether this may have come about through the reported slight bias in our survey

results towards those recently converted, I tested the incidence of the observance of this ritual over the time that has elapsed since the conversion took place. The results of that check can be seen in **Figure 3.1**.

Figure 3.1. Attendance of converts at Shabbat services against time since conversion



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

The differences here were significant (p = 0.028). The higher levels of attendance in the earlier years may indeed reflect the requirement that converts attend synagogue regularly as part of the conversion process and also that this is a very public requirement, easily checked by the teacher or rabbi.

Also, from the qualitative data there is some suggestion that immediately after the conversion, some converts are ridiculed and face hostility from born Jews because of what is seen by the born Jews, and by the converts themselves at a later stage in their Jewish journey, as over-enthusiasm.

Angela reported on the growing hostility she faced from her in-laws because of her attention to ritual:

> *...They were thrilled to bits when I came out with my piece of paper and all of a sudden his aunties and everybody saw me and I got cards saying Congratulations,* Mazel tov*, the whole bit, which was smashing and then nothing, at all...I mean they were incredibly supportive for the first year and would boast about me to their friends...if they had a theoretical discussion they would say "we'll have to ask Ann, she'll know". It was lovely, great, I was on a real high with all this, and then of course the time progressed, suddenly I was not such good news because I had become a real pain in the proverbial. I went through the "holier than thou" syndrome and they hadn't*

been keeping a kosher house etc. and they all of a sudden had to completely re-vamp their lives... (Angela converted 1981 aged 31 married, p.3)

Her wish to keep the *mitzvot* was a challenge to her in-laws' practice of Judaism; for Angela *kashrut*, the laws of Passover and Shabbat were all important. To her in-laws, that was not Judaism. To them, Judaism meant belonging to an ethnic club.

The higher attendance 16-20 years after the conversion may reflect the time when the famiy is busy celebrating the B'nei mitzvah of their children, when again synagogue attendance is required. But the continued higher attendance 6-10 years after the conversion cannot be explained by either of these hypotheses. Possibly this trend may reflect a lingering educational or development effect from the conversion process.

Sarna suggests that converts are bringing to Judaism the relgious expression that they were accustomed to seeing in their own childhood. He said that converts...

...tend to emphasise the religious and spiritual aspects of Judaism: they attend synagogue more often than born Jews do, they observe the basic home rituals and they look to the synagogue as their spiritual centre....[they] define their Jewishness in terms familiar to them from their Christian upbringing: prayer, ritual observance... (Sarna, 1995, pp.125-6)

And indeed he suggests that *'by their numbers and sincerity, they are reshaping Judaism into a less ethnic, more spiritual community'.* Though this would then not explain why attendance gradually declines after the *B'nei Mitzvah* period of family life.

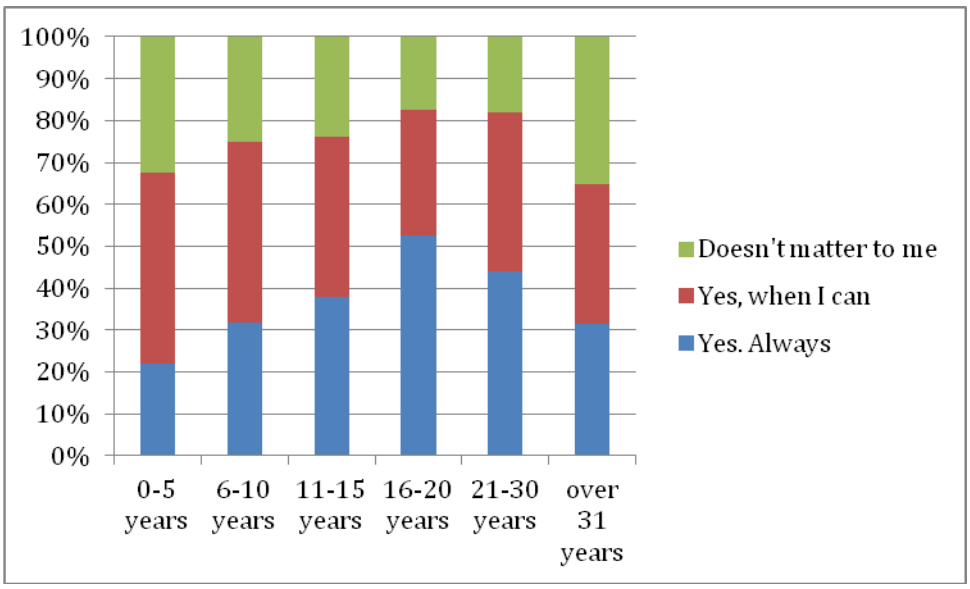
The more normal pattern can be seen in **Figure 3.2** (almost significant with p = 0.054), where staying in Friday nights for religious reasons is set against time since conversion.

Here, the incidence of the observance of the ritual increases gradually till the peak 16-20 years after the conversion when the couple's children are likely to be going through the Bar/Bat mitzvah process and then declines as the children leave home.

As far as intermarriage is concerned, Epstein (1995 p127) quotes one of Mayer's studies (1983) which *inter alia* looked at the attitudes of converts who had become leaders in the Reform Movement in the USA. He found that more than 50% of these leaders would not be bothered a great deal if their children converted to Christianity. Some American scholars are so concerned about this issue that they talk about '*one generation Jews*'.(Sarna 1995 p128)

Partly, the concern about one generation Jews was based on the family outcomes of the children of converted Jews and partly on the attitude of those who themselves had converted from another religious tradition. Due to their own status as proselytes, that is: people open to changing their religion and marrying a Jewish partner who welcomed them, their position and response can be somewhat ambiguous. As a 44 year old male commented on this question:

Figure 3.2. Staying in Friday nights for religious reasons agsinst time since conversion



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

> *...On intermarriage I find myself squirming at my own thoughts, especially as I am the son of a mother who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism – so I'm still not sure about my nagging doubts regarding my children. Perhaps it's a 'natural' parental concern they don't neglect/reject/'forget' their Jewishness. I hope I am welcoming enough to my daughter's non-Jewish boyfriend! I was certainly welcomed by my in-laws, despite any early reservations they had...* (Survey 101 male, converted 2000 aged 40 married 2 children)

Angela was very conscious of the dilemma facing her teenage daughter and the hypocritical response of her husband to her daughter's concerns. She said:

> ...*One of Anna's (*her daughter*) main worries was the fact that she didn't feel she was going to meet this "nice Jewish boy". She didn't instinctively feel Jewish and it was a big problem because she felt Anthony's disapproval because he had always said that they must marry somebody Jewish without seeing the hypocrisy of his statement...* (Angela converted 1981 aged 31 married, p.13)

In this study we can examine the level of concern over intermarriage and compare that with the attitudes of born Jews in the JPR survey, but unfortunately, we do not have the data to be able to look statistically at what has happened to our converts' children as there is only a very small group of these who have already found their own partners and had children of their own. We can, however, report the absolute numbers where they have been provided and will do so a little later in this chapter.

Again, where comparison is possible, these have been made in **Table 3.12** with the JPR survey results (posted in italics).

Table 3.12. Items relating to intermarriage (JPR survey results in italics)

Q22	Agree strongly/agree	Not certain	Disagree/disagree strongly
Nothing can be done to reduce the level of intermarriage	41%	31%	27%
Having a Jewish partner is only important if you intend to have children	11%	10%	79%
JPR survey results	*11%*	*19%*	*70%*
If my son or daughter wished to marry a non-Jew I would do everything possible to prevent it	4%	18%	78%
JPR survey results	*36%*	*19%*	*44%*
I would welcome my child's non-Jewish partner without hesitation	68%	22%	10%

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Q22.2 ('*Having a Jewish partner is only important if you intend to have children*') may have been a little unclear to some respondents. Is it suggesting that if there is no intention to procreate, then they would not be at all concerned if their children chose a non-Jewish partner? Or that even if they did intend to have children, it still did not matter that they had a Jewish partner? However they understood the question, they posted very similar results to the JPR survey respondents.

It is noteworthy that in this instance, the born Jewish Progressive group in the JPR survey recorded a higher percentage than the converts when asked whether they would do anything to prevent the intermarriage of their children (21% to 4%), while the born traditional Jews posted a much higher proportion than either of the progressive groups (61%). At the other end of the scale, disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement about doing anything to prevent intermarriage, again the convert group showed a very strong degree of disagreement with trying to prevent the intermarriage of their children (78%), with born progressive Jews recording a lower proportion in disagreement with this item (51%) and born traditional Jews an even lower proportion (14%).

Presumably, it is hard for those who have come from another faith to argue against their children finding a partner of another faith – after all, they had. This attitude is also clearly reflected in the 41% who felt that there was nothing you could do to reduce the rate of intermarriage and the 68% who would welcome their child's non Jewish partner without hesitation.

As mentioned above, I can only give a simple description of the numbers and status of the children of the converts. Some details on their children and grandchildren are recorded in **Tables 3.13a** and **3.13b** respectively.

Table 3.13a. Children of converts

	#		%
Children of converts	606		-
Jewish at birth	379		63%
Converted if non-Jewish?	137		60% of those born non-Jewish
Total Jewish children	516		-
Did/will the child have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah?	424		82% of those with Jewish status
If old enough, do they have a Jewish partner?	**Yes**	52	27% of those with a partner had Jewish partners.
	No	139	

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 3.13b. Grandchildren of converts

	#		%
Grandchild of converts	208		-
Jewish at birth?	106		51%
Converted if non-Jewish?	15		15% of those who were non-Jewish at birth.
Total Jewish grandchildren	121		58% of the total number of grandchildren were Jewish at birth.
Did/will the child have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah?	58		48% of those with Jewish status
If old enough, do they have a Jewish partner?	**Yes**	1	-
	No	15	

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Of note is that amongst the children, 82% of those with Jewish status did or will celebrate their *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*.

Only 37% of these children were old enough to have a steady relationship with a partner and 73% of that cohort had a non-Jewish partner. This is higher than the percentage of those with non-Jewish partners in the general community, which based on the 2001 census, is now usually calculated to be around 30-50%.

Amongst the grandchildren, 48% of those who had Jewish status did or will celebrate their *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. Obviously this indicates that even though their children may have Jewish status, the lifestyle choices of the parents of these grandchildren are not centred in Jewish rituals.

These figures do raise some concerns that the Judaism of the converts has not been overwhelmingly positively transmitted to their children or, even more worryingly, through them to their grandchildren.

Certainly, the willingness to adopt processes that might stop the intermarriage of one of their children produced the most modest results. As Glazer wrote, concerning the North American community:

> *...the converted may be better Jews than those born within the fold and indeed often are, but it seems undeniable that their children have*

alternatives before them that the children of families in which both parents were born Jewish do not – they have legitimate alternative identities... (Glazer 1987 p 13)

3.4.2. Multiple regression exercise on the growth factor

Using the same predictors as in the previous regression exercises, two predictors were significant. The first, contentment with the process, explained 18% of the variance ($p \leq 0.001$). The second, the intrinsic motivation factor, explained a further 3% of the variance ($p = 0.043$).

3.5. Spirituality and religious commitment

3.5.1. Spirituality factor

The fourth factor of identity, explaining 5% of the variance, is the most diverse in its make-up, and it seems to be concerned with the level of **spiritual/religious commitment,** four variables load onto this factor:-

- **Believes Torah is of Divine origin (0.637),**
- **Wants a Jewish funeral (0.547),**
- **Fasting on Yom Kippur (0.464, also included on the ritual factor),**
- **Importance of participation in Jewish religious life (0.386, also included in the growth factor).**

Different positions on this variable were reflected in the interview data. In terms of the status of Torah, Hetty expressed the most traditional belief. Though it was obviously a hard issue for her to express clearly, her solid belief in the Divine relationship with Torah was clear:

> *...I can accept any of it because as long as the Torah to me is the greatest story ever told, and I am just as happy to believe it totally literally as I am to sort of say well is that, it doesn't matter, because that is that. I do not mind a jot because once you unroll it and read it that is what is real, that's what is written down...If you put that into the context with the miracle of creation that is when it actually all came together enormously and I can remember sitting looking at a sunset and thinking to myself "you can't argue with that. And you can't make that"...* (Hetty, converted 1987 aged 42, Patrilineal Jew, husband converted 1996, p.9)

One female respondent, who converted in 1992, recorded a moving description of her deep

faith. Her response to the survey also records a high level of ritual involvement in both the demanding and the lighter *mitzvot*.

> *...By the time I went to the Beit Din, I felt completely Jewish inside. For me, conversion was a religious experience, between me and God, so I had no concern I would be rejected by the rabbis...* (Survey 287, female, converted 1992)

She also complained about the lack of spirituality there had been during the course:

> *...The conversion process seemed very mechanical and pragmatic, geared to those who were converting for practical reasons, to ease family/marital issues. There was no sense of spiritual involvement, no sense of religious commitment...*

Again, looking at comparative results in the 1995 JPR survey we find the following, shown in **Table 3.14**.

Table 3.14. Range of beliefs in the divine origins of Torah

Belief	Convert survey	JPR survey, Progressive Jews	JPR survey Traditional Jews
Torah is the actual word of God	5%	*3%*	*16%*
Torah inspired by God but written by man	58%	*41%*	*48%*
Torah is an ancient book of history and moral precepts recorded by man	37%	*56%*	*36%*

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Given that that the main belief that separates Reform and traditional Jews is to what degree the torah can be seen as reflecting the Divine will, it is not surprising that these two groups do not share that stance. But it is notable that the proportion of converts who believe that the Torah is an ancient book recorded by man is almost the same as the proportion of traditional Jews who hold that belief, as opposed to the Progressive Jews where a much larger proportion state that the Torah is recorded by man. **Table 3.14** shows quite clearly that the converts in this study weight their attitudes very much towards a belief that God's inspiration, if not God's actual words, can be found in the Torah.

3.5.2. Regression exercise on the spirituality identity factor

Only one variable, the contentment index, is a predictor of this spiritual identity factor, explaining 17% of the variance.

Thus a key finding from all the multiple regression exercises on the identity factors is the contentment index. If the converts are content with the outcome of their endeavours, that are

costly in terms of time and both intellectual and emotional effort, then the strength of this feeling of contentment affects their ritual and ethnic actions, their feelings of Jewishness and spirituality and their desire to promote Jewish continuity both for themselves and their families. Other variables, such as the level of their Jewish partner's family's Jewish activities does help to predict ritual behaviour and the level of the convert's intrinsic motivation helps to predict their levels of ethnicity. But the most potent of predictors is the feeling of contentment with the process and fact of their conversion.

3.6. Findings: Correlations between the factors of Jewish identity in converts and born Jews

3.6.1. Correlations between the factors of Jewish identity

As noted in Chapter 1, understanding of the process of conversion to Reform Judaism is not sufficiently advanced to allow sophisticated hypotheses to be developed. It is possible to argue on intuitive grounds that, since most converts have come from an Anglican background in which theological engagement with religion is the expected norm, then the typical Jewish pattern in which practice is driven by ethnicity rather than belief may not be found. It is also reasonable to assume, perhaps on the basis of cognitive dissonance theory, that individuals who assume a Jewish identity without being raised as Jews would be more likely to link their observance to an acquired belief system than to any sense of ethnic belonging.

On the other hand, given that the majority of proselytes have Jewish partners, it may be that the converts acquire a similar Jewish identity structure to that of their partners and their new Jewish families and hence demonstrate high correlations between their sense of ethnicity and ritual practice.

Rather than develop complex hypotheses along these lines, it seems more profitable to allow this analysis to be empirically driven. Thus, in general, I have sought to develop hypotheses by induction from the findings, rather than as predictions to be tested.

The chart in **Figure 3.3** shows the pattern of correlations between the four most potent Jewish identity factors in the proselyte sample.

As we can see in **Figure 3.3**, there are positive correlations between all of these factors, the two strongest being those between factor 3 (growth and ethnicity r = 0.509) and ritual identity (r = 0.438). Factor 3 does not emerge in research on Jewish identity carried out previously on British Jewry(Schmool Miller 1994) possibly because the entry requirements for converts includes participation in a basic Judaism class lasting at least twelve months and also, most coverts would see that there is an obvious need to learn about being part of a new religion. But the other factors do appear in previous research on the community and it is interesting to compare and contrast the factor results from this study on converts to those of born Jews

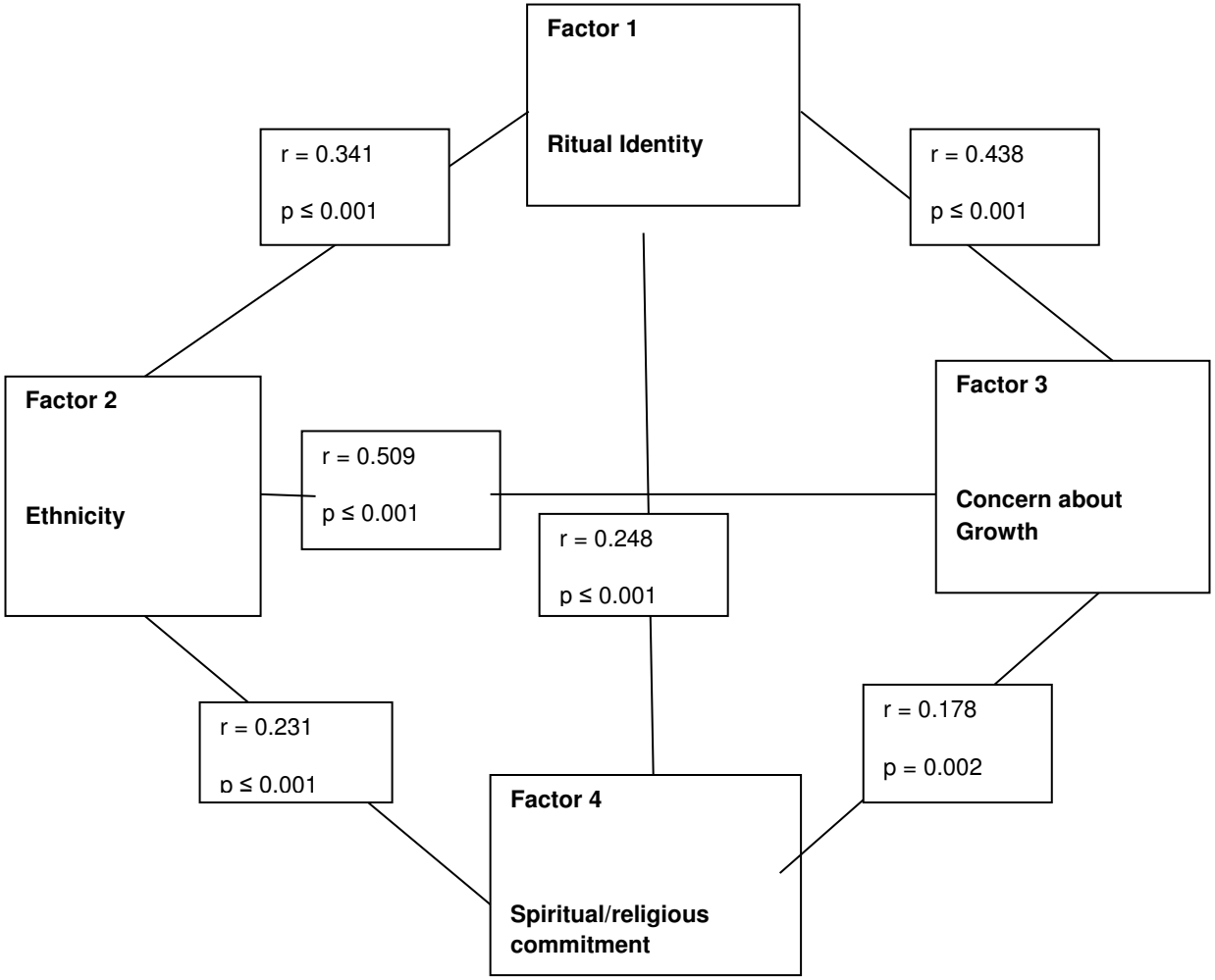


Fig 3.3. Correlations between the four main factors of identity in Proselyte sample

Source: Survey (Tabick 2005)

3.6.2. Comparison between the Jewish identity structure of converts and born Jews

Using the previous work of Miller, Schmool and Lerman (1994) as a proxy measure of Jewish identity structures in the Jewish community as a whole, there are some immediate contrasts with the structure underlying the responses of Reform converts to very similar items on belief, attitudes and Jewish lifestyle. These can be seen in **Table 3.15**.

Table 3.15. Comparison of identity factors between born Jews and converts

Factors found among born Jews (< 50 years)	**Factors found among born Jews (> 50 years)**	**Factors found among converts**
Behavioural Ethnicity (Jewish social belonging + light ritual practice)	Social ethnicity (Jewish friends and feelings of reliance on fellow Jews)	Ethnicity (ethnic belonging both behavioural and feelings of belonging)
Mental Ethnicity (Feelings of Jewishness and belonging)	Mental Ethnicity (Feelings of Jewishness and belonging)	
Religiosity (Belief + demanding ritual practice)	Religiosity (Belief + demanding ritual practices)	Spiritual/Religious Commitment (Level of belief and involvement in Jewish religious life)
	Ritual Practice (Involvement in light rituals and synagogue life, often devoid of religious commitment)	Ritual Practice (Includes level of practice of all rituals)
		Jewish Growth (Level of involvement in Jewish education, synagogue services and prevention of intermarriage)

Sources: Miller (1994), Miller (1998), Miller (2003), Survey (Tabick, 2005)

The major difference between the three samples relates to the complexity of the various factors. In younger Born Jews, ethnicity takes two forms: (i) a factor which reflects the strength of the respondent's practical involvement in Jewish social activity (behavioural ethnicity). The behavioural form incorporates not only the degree of mixing with fellow Jews but also level of involvement in the 'light' rituals which, according to Miller (2003), function as ethnic identifying events rather than expressing a purely religious motivation. And (ii) a factor which represents a person's strength of 'feeling Jewish' which is relatively independent of practical action (mental ethnicity).

In older born Jews, ethnicity again takes two forms: (i) a social ethnicity, incorporating the degree of mixing with fellow Jews; and (ii) the mental ethnicity which again represent's a person's feelings of Jewishness but is relatively independent of practical action.

However, among the proselyte sample, perhaps unsurprisingly, ethnicity is a less variegated and potent element of identity; there is a single ethnicity factor which incorporates group identifying behavior AND feelings of belonging to the group and behavioural actions attached to

ethnic feelings.

Again, in born Jews, demanding ritual performance combines with religious belief variables to create a single dimension of religiosity. In contrast, among proselytes, the level of performance of the light rituals does not correlate with ethnicity as it does in born Jews, but rather with the more demanding rituals to create a single ritual practice dimension, while the more spiritual elements of Judaism are separated off into its own spirituality factor.

In addition, there is the separate growth factor as part of a convert's understanding of their identity. Put crudely, born Jews require relatively complex structures to describe variations in ethnicity and ritual, whereas converts separate out the identity factors into unidimensional structures of ritual, ethnicity, spirituality and growth.

To further explore our findings, an additional factor analysis was carried out using only variables reflecting light and more demanding rituals, As noted above, among younger born Jews light rituals load on the behavioural ethnicity factor, whereas the more demanding ones load on religiosity or belief. In this proselyte sample, the 'spiritual/religious commitment' factor (loosely similar to 'belief') does not emerge very strongly and so it is difficult to make an exact comparison. However, by factor analysing the ritual practice items alone, it is possible to see whether the observance of light (in *italics*) and demanding rituals can be 'forced' to load on different factors. The resulting Principle Component Analysis (see **Table 3.16** below) explained 40% of the variance but only one factor of ritual behaviour was extracted.

Table 3.16. Pattern Matrix based on some items in Q24-26

	FACTOR LOADINGS Component 1
Home Friday nights	0.720
Light candles Friday night	0.708
Doesn't work on Rosh Hashanah	0.666
Eating kosher food	0.596
Mezuzah *on some doors*	0.595
Fasts on Yom Kippur	0.578
Attending Passover Seder	0.563

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This lack of evidence of any divisions between light and demanding ritual practice supports the conclusion that for proselytes all rituals have similar status – whereas for born Jews some have become expressions of group membership rather than religiosity.

We then looked, where it is possible to make direct comparisons, at the differing relationship between the various factors as expressed by born Jews and converts. These were plotted in **Table 3.17**.

The lack of a strong linkage between ritual and Spirituality is in direct contradiction of the experience of Christians and Muslims where religious commitment and faith leads them to other activities. However, born Jews are more likely to have a much stronger link between feelings of

ethnicity and Ritual identity than that of the converts, for them, belonging to the Jewish club seems to be their primary link with Judaism, while converts have a slightly stronger linkage between ritual and spirituality than born Jews, possibly as a learned response from their previous faith.

Table 3.17. Comparison of factor correlations between born Jews and converts

	Born Jews (1995 survey)	**Converts**
Ritual Identity/Spiritual and, or religious commitment	r = 0.1	r = 0.25
Ritual Identity/Ethnicity	r = 0.8	r = 0.34
Ritual Identity/Growth	n/a	r = 0.44

Source: Miller, Schmool and Lerman (1996) and Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This finding confirms the hypothesis that converts, who look to their learning experience to inform at least some of their ritual behaviour rather than to ethnic childhood memories which they, of course, lack, express the relationship between the various factors of Jewish identity in a different manner than that of born Jews.

We should however recognise that the failure to replicate the 'born Jewish' model may be due to a methodological limitation, namely that there were too few demanding ritual items (and belief items) for an independent factor to emerge that combined these items. Alternatively it may be that the teaching and induction process experienced by proselytes reinforces the overall coherence of all ritual practice so that the development of differential behaviour with respect to simple and demanding rituals is less likely to occur. A lack of cases was also considered as a potential explanation and this remains a theoretical possibility although 315 cases were probably adequate to detect the trends if they were to exist. We must also remember that the majority of these items have proved reliable in other surveys and has produced the results as outlined above when discussing Miller's work, which support the accuracy of our results here.

I found reference to an awareness of not expressing one's Jewish identity in quite the same way as born Jews in both the survey and the interviews. For example, one respondent wrote:

> *.One of the more challenging aspects of developing a Jewish identity is developing Jewish assumptions and attitudes – ways of thinking and looking at things...* (Survey 250, female, converted 1984 aged 37)

Denise talks about the creative maladjustment she has experienced as a convert, never feeling quite part of the group, of the 'normal' patterns of identity, but then realising that this can be a good thing.

> *...And so then I realised that the marginality of the convert is only one of a whole range of marginalities and of course a convert may share more than one marginality. But that, in a sense the best place to be...* (Denise, converted 1993 aged 44 two children p 31)

For all these reasons, it would appear that converts have their own understanding of Jewish identity, slightly different from born Jews.

3.7. Relationships between identity outcomes and personal characteristics

3.7.1. Background and hypotheses

3.7.1.1. Gender

Many scholars of religion have pointed to the greater participation of women than men in religious life in the modern world (Wuthnow, 1999). In American research into the Jewish community, the same pattern has been demonstrated to be present.

Cohen, Eisen and Fishman have all commented on the greater participation of women. Cohen and Eisen wrote: '*The "action" in Jewish activity now rests with women, who undertake such activity either with or without the assistance of male partners*' (Gohen and Eisen, 2000, p.206). Fishman discusses the '*female orientated'* aspects of modern Jewish life, especially in the Reform movement (Fishman, 2000, p.99).

Research by Greenwood (2002) takes this further, suggesting that the prominent role played by women, especially in the Reform movement (where the majority of converts in America are located) affects both the decision by males to convert, and their actions and feelings as converts.[7]

It is recognised that the same pattern of female oriented communal life is replicated amongst British Reform Jews.[8] The Survey, directed at converts, cannot answer Greenwood's first question relating to male decisions to convert, though it is noted that the gender imbalance is significant (79% female to 21% male in the Ledgers and 77% to, 23% in the survey). Nevertheless, the second question can be examined, namely: do male converts express their new Jewish identity in a measurably different way from female converts? It could be hypothesised that male converts will have the benefit of female Jewish partners who feel more at home in synagogue life and with spirituality and that will help them into that religious life.

Alternatively, it is also possible, that male converts will express their Jewish identity in a more concrete fashion than females, with concern for family more important than the spiritual side of Judaism, as found in the writings of such researchers as Wuthnow (1999).

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[7] (Greenwood, 2002, p.12) writes: "*given the significantly higher rates of conversion among non-Jewish women, it can be hypothesized that they too can find a comfortable milieu in the synagogue and that their Jewish husbands are relatively successful, for whatever reason, in encouraging their conversion. Conversion can in this way be seen as a concrete outcome produced by Jewish men...*"

[8] In more traditional synagogues the pattern is different. There men take major roles in synagogue ritual life while women's spirituality is very much confined to the private sphere of the home. Though in many Orthodox synagogues, women will take leading roles in organisations devoted to the care of the vulnerable.

Thus male candidates present such reasons for conversion as:

> *…I had a son working towards Bar Mitzvah and wanted a meaningful role in his spiritual growth…* (Survey 11, male, converted 2005 after 16 years of marriage)

and:

> *...To be able to take part in our future children's education and life- I didn't want them to question why I was different from them if I hadn't converted...* (Survey 101, male, converted 2000 after 14 years of marriage).

Given these findings in American literature, it was deemed important to explore whether there were significant differences between the approach of male and female converts in Britain.

3.7.1.2. Jewish roots

There are other characteristics that may affect the new identities that converts espouse. For example, I would expect those with Jewish roots to more closely follow the patterns seen in born Jews – that is, that they would express their identity more through ethnicity then through religious ritual or spiritual commitment, though these converts come with very different prior experiences of Judaism.

For Liz, the possibility of Jewish antecedents was an open secret in her family, but it was seen as a 'dark' secret, a malign presence that in no way influenced public family behaviour.

> *...My father used to say to my mother who was quite dark and has quite a pronounced nose, "Of course if Hitler ever gets here you won't have a chance" and things like that. So it* [Jewish antecedents] *was always in the background but it was always "sssh don't talk about it"…* (Liz, converted 1986, aged 46 after being widowed from second marriage which had been to a Jew)

In contrast, a 21 year old patrilineal Jew, engaged to a Jew, explained:

> *...I have been brought up as a Jew and a practising Jew. I have attended religious classes and have been Bar Mitzvah. This is the only religion I know and in fact, was only aware of the difficulties in the last few weeks...* (Application Form 1962, aged 21, Jewish fiancée)

Whilst (from these two examples) it is clear that patrilineal Jews grow up with highly varied prior experiences of Judaism, their common awareness of Jewish 'roots' may create a predisposition to experience their Jewishness as an ethnic, rather than ritual or spiritual, characteristic. This

will be examined by comparing patrilineal and non-patrilineal Jews on the core dimensions of proselyte Jewish identity.

3.7.1.3. Marital status

Marital status at the beginning of the conversion process may also affect the understanding and expression of Jewish identity. It seems plausible that those married or engaged to Jews would follow their partner's family's religious pattern. In most cases, as we shall see, that would tend to imply an ethnic rather than spiritual or strongly ritual expression of Jewishness. In contrast, those who come to Judaism as singles might be expected to be more interested in the ritual and spiritual aspects and in furthering their Jewish growth.

3.7.1.4. Time elapsed since conversion

A key issue in evaluating and understanding the conversion process, is the sustainability of the convert's religious practices and sense of identity through time. Clearly if these dissipate or disappear then the religious purpose of the exercise is lost and many would question the fundamental validity of the process.

Sarna (1995), following some research in the USA, has questioned the long term success of conversions. Quoting research by Egon Mayer into the children of intermarried couples, he wrote that this study...

> *...showed that many converts would not even discourage their children from marrying someone who was not Jewish. In the reform leadership study, more than 50% of the converts responding – leaders I remind you – would not even be bothered a great deal if their children converted to Christianity! There is here a world of difference between converts and born Jews and one that augurs badly for our future...Let us make no mistake; the data we now have at hand should serve as a dire warning. Unless we act decisively, many of today's converts will be one generation Jews – Jews with non-Jewish parents and non-Jewish children...* (Sarna, 1995, pp.127-8 quoting Mayer, 1983, his emphasis)

There is a difficulty with the present data in making statistically reliable statements about the next generation due to lack of information. However, it is possible to see what the behaviours and attitudes of the respondents are as a function of time since conversion – after allowing, of course, for the normal patterns of Anglo-Jewry, i.e. increased participation when children are approaching the age of Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Earlier in this chapter, we already examined their attitudes towards the out-marriage of their children and compared this to born Jews, and found

that converts felt that they could do little to oppose such marriages.

3.7.1.5. Age at conversion

There is also the question as to whether age at conversion affects identity outcomes. Are the concerns of young engaged couples the same as those who come to Judaism at a more mature stage in their lives? Again, there is no clear evidence on this issue, but it would seem plausible to suggest that those who convert at a later stage in their lives are more likely to be expressing intrinsic religious motives (and therefore stronger on ritual and growth dimensions of Jewish identity) than younger converts who are converting for pragmatic reasons of marriage.

3.7.2. Measures used: Jewish identity and personal characteristics

3.7.2.1. Independent variables

The independent variables were measured through direct questions in the Survey. They are:-

- Gender: Q68.2.
- Jewish roots: Q1.6 (though this question does not discriminate between immediate Jewish descent e.g. having a Jewish father, and more remote ancestors).
- Marital status: Q58.
- Time elapsed since conversion: Q15 subtracted from year survey was completed. This period was then divided into convenient sections for analysis.
- Age at conversion: Q68.1 minus years elapsed since conversion. This too was divided into groups for ease of analysis.

3.7.2.2. Dependent variables

The four Jewish Identity Factors of identity described above: ritual, ethnicity, growth and spiritual commitment. They were each measured by SPSS-generated factor scores. An arbitrary constant of 5 was added to the factor score so that data entries were all positive.

Table 3.18. Identity factors by gender

Median scores of factors (+5)	**Males**	**Females**
Ritual identity	5.303	5.187
Ethnic identity	5.221	5.040
Growth identity	5.122	4.918
Spiritual/religious commitment	4.960	5.012

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

3.7.3. Results and discussion

3.7.3.1. Gender

When an analysis of median factor scores was carried out, there were no significant results when gender was correlated with identity factors. This is shown in **Table 3.18**.

3.7.3.2. Jewish roots

(i) An analysis of median factor scores on respondents who had scored very important or important on item Q1.6 (whether they wished to convert to affirm Jewish family roots, 52 cases) was carried out. This analysis demonstrated that converts with Jewish roots have low levels of spiritual/religious commitment and higher levels of ethnicity. This echoes the finding that this group express a strong correlation with intrinsic motivation for conversion, which is itself a measure largely concerned with feelings about being part of the Jewish people. This is explored further in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.2.2.1, p.221) and can be seen in **Table 3.19**.

Table 3.19. Identity by those with Jewish roots

Factor	Median score (+5)
Ritual identity	5.027
Ethnic identity	5.311
Growth identity	5.183
Spiritual/religious commitment	4.986

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

3.7.3.3. Marital status

There were no significant differences in ritual practice or spirituality between the groups differing in marital status at the time of conversion.

Table 3.20. Comparison of means of identity (+5) against marital status at conversion (Q58)

	Married to a Jew	Engaged or in long term relationship with a Jew	Married or in a long relationship non-Jew	Single	Significance level
Ethnic identity	4.923	4.787	5.675	5.535	$p \leq 0.001$
Growth identity	4.825	4.89	5.446	5.439	$p = 0.001$

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

There were however significant differences when marital status was correlated with ethnic and growth identity. These results indicate that those who convert when married to or in a long-term relationship with a non-Jew or when single express their identity more powerfully with Jewish Ethnicity and Jewish growth than those in relationships with Jewish partners. This can be seen in **Table 3.20** above.

As was suggested above, converting as they do, not for instrumental reasons, it would seem

that these categories of converts are more concerned with the active expression of their new identity and exploring ways to grow their new faith than those married to or engaged to a Jewish partner.

We can begin to understand why having a Jewish partner may tend, paradoxically, to lower the ethnic and Jewish growth commitment by considering some statements found in the qualitative data**.**

Some of the respondents expressed their difficulties in keeping their secular Jewish partners involved in Judaism after the conversion:

> *...It's difficult to keep one's Jewish partner involved...* (Survey 239 female, converted 1990 aged 29, married)

and:

> *...It's hard to form part of something with someone who is effectively a secular Jew because the lines of teaching and expectance as to what I needed to be (and do) on conversion were unclear – and are so today. It can be very hypocritical to be told to do something that the person dictating to you does not do themselves...* (Survey 143 female converted 2001 aged 26, married)

Whereas one woman who converted *lishma* felt that being in a relationship with a non-Jew had in fact enhanced her determination to explore and take part in Jewish life:

> *...I am engaged to a non-Jew and oddly enough, this has intensified my own internal sense of being Jewish and of seeking to maintain a Jewish way of living...* (Survey 166, female, converted 2001, aged 37).

3.7.3.4. Time elapsed since conversion

From the data presented earlier in this chapter it was demonstrated that the Jewish life style of the Jewish partner's family and the original bundle of reasons presented for seeking conversion does have an effect on the future make-up of the Jewish life adopted by a convert. It was shown that those whose Jewish partners come from more observant families and those whose motivation is not so instrumentally driven by the wish to create a Jewish family united by religion tend to adopt a more ritually observant Jewish life (Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3.2, p.67).

However, from the qualitative evidence, there are indications that levels of ritual observance diminish over time. For example, one widower wrote:

...On the death of my wife I became less involved in synagogue attendance...
(Survey 4 Male, retired chartered engineer, engaged to a Jew when converted, aged 38)

While an older divorcee explained:

...When my children were at home I tried to keep a Jewish house and give them a Jewish upbringing despite being divorced. When my children left home I became less observant in the home as I was living on my own in a non-Jewish environment and in closer touch with my own non-Jewish family in the North, although I always kept up membership of a synagogue...
(Survey 19, female, now aged 65)

For both of these respondents, a change in their lifestyle and the loss of partner or children growing up has resulted in a diminution of their active expression of especially Jewish rituals.

There are statistically significant changes in both ritual practice ($p = 0.045$) and Jewish growth ($p \leq 0.001$) when set against the years that have elapsed since conversion, shown in **Table 3.21.**

Table 3.21. Comparison of means of identity (+5) as a function of time since conversion

	Years since conversion			Significance level
	0-10	11-20	Over 21	
Ritual identity	4.835	5.271	4.982	$p = 0.045$
Growth identity	5.139	5.082	4.743	$p \geq 0.001$
Spirituality	5.154	4.950	4.821	$p = 0.054$

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

As seen in **Table 3.21**, converts begin with a low score of participation in rituals (4.84), which increases markedly in the period 11 to twenty years after conversion (5.27) and then falls away again at a later stage in their lives (to 4.98). This accords with the theory that converts gradually become involved with rituals as their children attend *cheder*, peaking during the years when *B'nei Mitzvah* are celebrated, and then falling away again as the children leave home.

The association between parental ritual observance and the key life-cycle event of *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* was proposed as an explanation for the inverse U-shaped trend of ritual practice in **Table 3.21** above. This is evidenced in the comment below where it is clear that the ethnic concerns of the family are their dominant form of engagement with Judaism, not spirituality, and that the imminent arrival of *B'nei Mitzvah* was the catalyst for more ritual involvement. Note that the increased synagogue attendance is because it is required for the celebration of the twins' *B'nei Mitzvah*; it is not because of any spiritual need in the convert who actually prefers spending that time on other activities.

...My husband and I are divorced and the children spend alternate Shabbat mornings with me – I prefer to spend that time doing something else – next

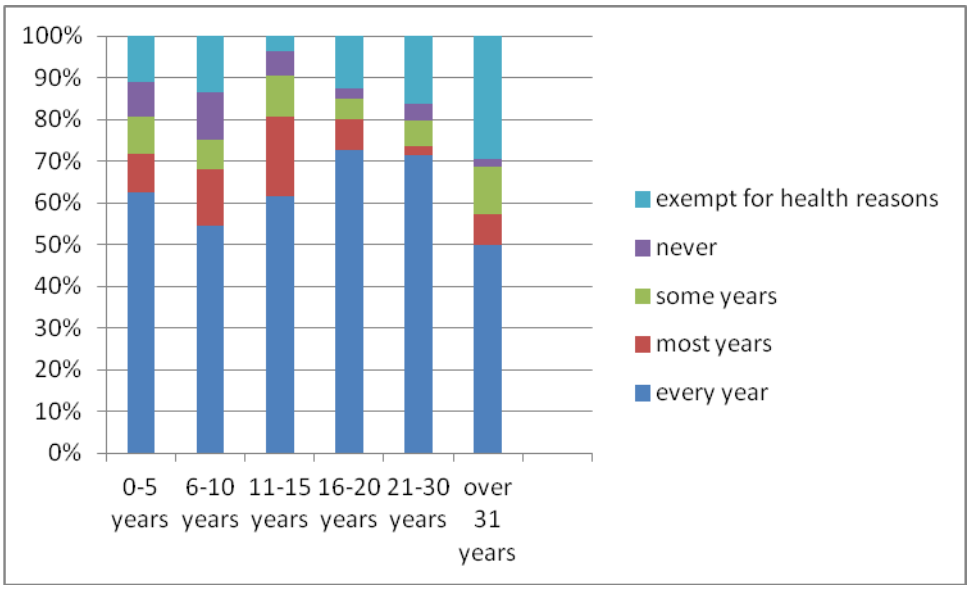
year will be different as it is their Bar/Bat Mitzvah *year (they are twins) and we will be attending shul every week...* (Survey 298, female, engaged to a Jew when converted, now aged 41)

The gradual decline of involvement with ritual as the family grows and moves away can be seen in the following comment. This was written by a retired woman who had four children, none of whom are married to a Jew and with no grandchildren being brought up as Jewish. She noted that she and her husband both attended synagogue occasionally, she fasted on Yom Kippur, she sometimes lights candles and went to a Seder most years. She wrote:

…All my children attended cheder *for years only one married Jewish but is now divorced. My Jewish mother-in-law lived with me for 26 years and belonged to clubs and served on the B'nei Brit committee. Jewish people I met were all kind and friendly to me, knowing I was a convert. I had friends at the Finchley Road orthodox synagogue too. I even taught Jewish history at the Reform* cheder*. All over now....* (Survey 329, female, widow now aged 78)

One important exception to this trend in fasting on Yom Kippur. As can be seen in **Figure 3.4** below, there is a consistently high level of such fasting over the entire period after the date of the conversion (p = 0.032).

Figure 3.4. Fasting on Yom Kippur against time since conversion



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: The increase in those stating exemption from this ritual naturally increases as old age brings physical ailments, but it is interesting that the period 0-10 years also have a higher proportion of those claiming exemption, probably, given the population of converts, reflecting the higher incidence of pregnancy and breast-feeding in this age group.

Jewish Growth shows a different pattern. There the converts begin with strong involvement (5.139), stronger than their relationship to ritual, probably the result of the fact that many respondents to the survey did so soon after completing their conversion courses which all require regular attendance at classes and services.

However, by the time over 21 years have elapsed since the conversion, converts show a lower level of involvement with Growth than with Ritual, i.e. there has been a steeper decline between the first and the final results of Growth than with ritual. It is possible this has occurred because ritual is concerned largely with feelings of Jewishness and rituals in the home or annual events that bring families together, while growth involves the more demanding and/or intrinsic commitment, such as attendance at adult education classes or synagogue services.

Spirituality shows a steadily decreasing level of involvement. Whatever factor of spirituality was present at the time of the conversion had slowly declined. This is in marked contrast to ritual practice, showing again that the practice of rituals in much of the Jewish community is an ethnic not a spiritual concern.

3.7.3.5. Age at conversion

Both ethnicity and growth (as measured at the time of the Survey) showed significant variations as a function of the convert's age at the time of conversion, as seen in **Table 3.22**.

Table 3.22. Comparison of means of identity (+5) as a function of age at conversion

	Age at conversion			Significance level
	Under 30	31-40	Over 41	
Ethnic identity	4.895	4.896	5.394	p = 0.020
Growth identity	4.879	4.931	5.478	p = 0.003

Source: Survey

As predicted, those who converted at an older age, and who were therefore less likely to be influenced by instrumental reasons for conversion, showed higher current levels of ethnicity and growth than those who converted at 20-40 years of age, when marriage and children are very much at the forefront of the majority of the converts' considerations.

3.8. Conclusion

Many of the American studies (e.g. Lerer and Mayer, 1989 and Fishman, 2006) were able to use data that covered both those that had chosen to convert and those that did not choose that path. Forster and Tabachnik (1991) found in their study of people who had attended basic Judaism classes in Chicago between 1987-88, 79% of the students converted to Judaism, (though they noted that the attendees were already very motivated to learn about Judaism, those Jews who are not seeking to keep their commitment to Judaism are unlikely to attend

such classes with their partners). Lerer and Mayer (1989) noted that in a series of studies by Mayer et al (1979, 1983, 1987, 1989) it was shown that marriage between Jews and Gentiles resulted in the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse to Judaism in about 25-30% of cases while in that period, 95% of conversions took place in the context of an intermarriage. It should also be noted that Hoge et al (1981) have also found conversions into and out of Catholicism occurred overwhelmingly within the context of intermarriage.

Unfortunately, this study was not able to include such a mixed population and therefore I can only speculate as to why conversion did not take place in all cases where intermarriage had occurred. It may be that there was not sufficient commitment to Judaism present in the life of the Jewish partner, or the non-Jew felt highly committed to their own faith, or felt that conversion to Judaism would be hypocritical in cases where they held no religious beliefs. Or they may have worried about seeming to reject their birth family's way of life or their belief system. Knowing from research in the United States that children born in a mixed marriage are less likely to identify as Jews when they become adults (according to Mayer 1984, over 70% do not) than those brought up in a conversionary family or by two born Jews, more research would be needed to determine how more conversions of the non-Jewish partners of born Jews can be encouraged.

Such research is especially important when it is seen to be evident from this research that in the main, the process of conversion was successful, if you define 'success' as an outcome in which the majority of converts:

- Feel very Jewish (in fact even more so than born Jews);
- Identify themselves with Reform Judaism;
- Feel content with the process they had undertaken to become Jewish; and
- In their everyday life, while they are generally practicing a lower level of ritual observances than born traditional Jews, they are performing a higher level of ritual observances than born progressive Jews.

Egon Mayer (1984) noted that:

> *…The notion that assimilation follows on the heels of intermarriage is not an ironclad rule of human nature. Certainly where intermarriage also involves the conversion of the non-Jewish mate to Judaism quite the opposite seems to occur. Both the convert and his or her spouse tend to become more committed to a Jewish way of life than is characteristic of American Jews in general...* (Mayer 1984 p 41)

In many practical ways, it would be difficult on the basis of how converts conduct their lives to identify them as different from born Jews. Paradoxically, this similarity is also demonstrated by

the fact that many converts, like their born Jewish partners, have strong feelings about being Jewish that do not translate into the carrying out of specific Jewish ritual or ethnic behaviour.

On the surface, the most important areas of difference were found in the converts' attitudes to the intermarriage of their children and in the composition of their friendship circles. Born Jews feel far more able to take action to try and prevent their children from going out with non-Jews than do the converts, the majority of whom, after all, have been involved in such a relationship. Indeed, looking at the simple percentage data for their children it would seem that the children of converts are marrying out in greater proportions than those of born Jews, and that there seems to be a lower proportion expressing their Judaism though the ritual of Bar or Bat mitzvah for their children.

The other area where a large difference was measured was in the establishment of a network of Jewish friends. For converts, this was perhaps naturally a much more difficult exercise than for born Jews who had childhood networks of such friends on which they could build their adult friendship networks.

Ideographically, their differing personal characteristics – age, gender etc. – have a relatively minor effect on how individuals express their identity, with many of these characteristics not producing significant results in our study. Their marital status, however, did make a difference in that people converting *lishma* (i.e. those who were single or with no Jewish partner) and not for the instrumental reason of marriage, are more concerned with the active expression of their new identity and exploring ways to grow their new faith than those married to, or engaged to, a Jewish partner. Traditionally, and still in many Orthodox groups today, only people converting *lishma* are accepted as converts. This area of how those Jews who converted *lishma* express their new identity will be explored much more thoroughly in later chapters as it is one of immense importance.

I was not able to support the hypothesis that converts' ritual observances steadily declined as the years elapsed since their conversion. Instead, it was found that, except for the anomalies around synagogue attendance, the observance of rituals increases 10-20 years from conversion and then decreases as time continues beyond that date, forming an inverted U-shaped curve. This is a similar pattern to that of born Jews, giving weight to the hypothesis that the increase coincides with B'nei Mitzvah of their children.

It is very important to note that, despite outward similarities in expression of Jewish identity, proselytes do not entirely conform to the behavioural dimensions as described by Miller et al (1994, 1998 and 2003). Instead, their identity is shaped primarily through the tensions set up by the education they receive during the conversion process and, for those in partnership with a born Jew, through the influences of their partner's Jewish family. This results in their ritual practice and spiritual beliefs being closely correlated to their educational and growth experiences, unlike their Jewish partners who express a greater correlation between these

activities and their ethnic memories of family life. However, the converts to Judaism still see their identity primarily in ethnic rather than in 'religious' terms, unlike converts to other religious groups. This is confirmed by the growth over the *Bar Mitzvah* years in ritual practice while the expression of their spirituality gradually declines.

The mental ethnicity factor, i.e. the separation between ritual or ethnic behaviours and feelings of Jewishness, was not found as a separate factor in the Jewish identity factors of the converts. However, some evidence of this stance was found in the qualitative literature, especially in the interview with Elie.

And, most importantly, while born Jews tend to express their Jewish identity through complex structures to describe variations in ethnicity and ritual behaviour, converts tend towards four unidimensional factors, separating out the various facets of their Jewish identity:-

(i) A ritual factor containing both light and demanding rituals,

(ii) A specific spirituality structure,

(iii) A simpler ethnic structure, and

(iv) One peculiar to proselytes, a factor that measures their involvement in activities that lead to growth in their religious understanding of Judaism.

The next chapters will further explore the differing experiences that they bring to the conversion process, specifically of their birth religion and the nature of their partner's Jewish family life to help in this idiographic exploration of their new identity and how these then correlate with motivation and life outcomes.

These results are supported by Egon Mayer's research in the US, in which he drew our attention to the finding that:

> *…Jews by Choice all too often find themselves married to Jews by Birth whose subjective sense of their Jewishness is far more strongly developed than their objective Jewishness. Yet the conversion process by which non-Jews become Jews tend to be much more orientated to the development of the objective dimension of Judaism. Consequently, Jews by Choice often find themselves in tension with their born-Jewish family over their understanding of what it means to be Jewish…* (Mayer, 1989, p.121)

What is certain is that when it is taken seriously, conversion is an enormously powerful step to take which can, and does, and perhaps we can argue, should transform lives. As Borts reminded us:

> *…Conversion can be a wrenching experience, during which a person metaphorically both dies and is reborn as a new person. Jewish tradition*

recognises this through the practise of tevilah*, immersion in the* mikveh *or ritual bath, and the assumption of a new name and symbolic assumption of new parents...*[9] (Borts, 2010, p.10)

[9] The convert's Hebrew name will become the chosen name, followed by the Hebrew words *bat* or *ben*, meaning son or daughter, and then the names of our patriarch and matriarch *Avraham avinu*, Abraham our father, and *Sara imeinu*, Sarah, our mother.

4. THE RELIGIOUS AND FAMILY BACKGROUND OF THE CONVERTS AND SOME EFFECTS ON MOTIVATION AND JEWISH LIFE OUTCOMES

4.1. Introduction

The previous religious affiliation of the converts and their birth families has traditionally received little attention in Jewish circles. As Diamant reminds us, Jewish tradition sees converts as 'new borns'.

> *...Jewish tradition compares converts to newborns. The metaphor is not meant to repudiate a proselyte's family of origin or their past in any way, yet there is something about the image of the newborn that speaks to the experience and vulnerability of a new Jew by Choice...* (Diamant, 1998, p.208; Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 48b, 1936)

In this research, I considered it unhelpful, even rude, to quiz the interviewees in too much detail on previous religious experiences,[10] yet some of the survey responses suggest that the interaction between previous experiences and present dimensions of Jewish identity may be a very interesting area for further qualitative analysis.

An analogy might be made between this highly charged description of a convert as a newborn with the issues arising out of adoption, where again there is a debate as to how much of previous life experience should be acknowledged in the light of new family circumstances. Nyden refers to this discussion using the imagery of the adoptee carrying around a suitcase:

> *...The precious treasures and heavy stones are all realities that accompany relinquishment and become some of the components in a sense of loss in either a positive or negative way. Sometimes they become the missing pieces of an adoptee's personal story missing because the suitcase often stays shut, is opened in secret, or is peeked into occasionally and then closed either because it feels painful or because a child is told not to bother opening it in light of adoptive development*... (Nyden, 1999, p.12)

Just like Nyden's adoptee, the converts carry suitcases containing differing measures of stones and treasures that some feel to be unhelpfully ignored both during and after the process of conversion. For example, one survey respondent commented:

> *...I am interested and encouraged by this research. Jewish life post-conversion is not straightforward. The restrictions on references to pre-Jewish life make open discussion of issues difficult, if not impossible…It becomes an unmentionable past; almost like a guilty secret....* (Survey 343, female, converted 1990, aged 26)

[10] Jewish tradition forbids such queries.

It is also clear that converting caused massive dislocation in some of the convert's families. For example, one woman wrote, '*This refers to my father who disowned me because of my conversion*' (Survey 366, female, converted 2006, female aged 25). Rambo, whose research was largely into those who converted to fundamentalist or evangelical Christian groups, observed:

> *…Converts are passionate. They are, in many cases, arrogant. They have the truth. They know exactly what should be done, or should not be done. Therefore, the issue of conversion is a very controversial topic, because quite often it does in fact disrupt peoples' lives. It does disrupt families…* (Rambo, 1998, lecture)

It is all too easy to underestimate the pain and conflict that conversion can bring. Such parental reactions as described above must have ongoing psychological and social repercussions on the candidate's future life as a Jew, where there is so much emphasis on family life.

As a background to the discussion of the possible effects of these issues on the converts' future Jewish life and identity, there will be a brief exploration into first the religious background of the converts and then into their family's reactions to their conversion to Judaism.

4.2. Classification of religious backgrounds

In the Ledgers the candidates' self-selected previous religious affiliation taken from their application forms was recorded. However, from the interviews, it is evident that their self-definition on a form does not necessarily accurately describe their religious upbringing. As Fay said, describing her religious background:

> ...*Church of England, I went to Sunday school and things like that, but not very strong. Although my father would have said he was quite Christian but he never went to church*... (Fay, converted 1987, aged 28, p.1)

The Beit Din used to behave as if all those who claimed a Christian self-definition on had been practising Christians, but that was not always true. Liz commented on this:

> ...*That was one of the questions the Beth Din asked..."What do you think is the most obvious difference between Christianity and Judaism" and I gulped and I said "I have had so little Christianity in my life I don't know that I am really able to say"...* (Liz, converted 1986 aged 45, widow of a Jew, p.4)

Yet Liz had described her religious upbringing on her application form as 'Church of England'.

In addition, the religion of the birth family may not necessarily be the same as the self-definition of the candidate at the Beit Din. 11% of the respondents to the Survey reported that they were

not involved in the same religion as the rest of their family. This might be seen as evidence of someone who is involved in a religious search. As one respondent noted:

> ...*You ask about childhood religion but you have not asked anywhere about religious commitment at the time immediately [prior] to considering conversion. For me, conversion was the natural progression in a religious journey which started in my childhood, but led through different paths including agnosticism and Quakers and possibly universalism before arriving at Judaism. To group people only by where they initially start from is simplistic and ignores the 'journey' aspect of life...* (Survey 68 female, converted 1975 aged 24, engaged to a Jew)

I have used the convert's declared previous religion, recorded in the Ledgers, to develop **Table 4.1** and subsequent analysis. In the majority of cases this was probably the religion of their birth family but, if the same trend exists as was reported in the Survey, then there is a possibility that a small proportion celebrated a different religion from that of their birth family.

One obvious source of confusion in the Ledgers was the question whether there was any difference between those who claimed 'Anglican', 'Church of England' or even a plain 'Christian' self-definition. In all these cases, the candidates were entered as 'Church of England.' Where other Christian denominations were concerned, on the advice of an Anglican vicar (Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrook) the different churches were grouped under headings that represent distinct forms of Christianity such as: the Anglican Communion, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Churches, general Free Churches and the non-Trinitarian sects such as Unitarians.

The distribution of these religious groups is shown in **Table 4.1.** The figures show quite naturally, given the religious makeup of the United Kingdom, a preponderance of people from a Christian background (79%). Within that group, again to be expected, the majority described themselves as belonging to the Anglican Communion (51%).

Generally, few differences emerged between these Christian groups on further analysis; for ease in managing the data, the religious affiliations declared on the Application Forms were collapsed into five categories: Christian, Non-Believers, Jewish/mixed, Muslim and Eastern groups. (In some cases. where it has seemed appropriate, the Roman Catholic group has been left as a separate entity).

The changes in the distribution of previous religions through time can be seen in **Table 4.2**.

As British society has become more diverse, candidates from other world religions have appeared. One of the clearest trends is the appearance of Muslims or Eastern religions from 1973. They form only a tiny percentage of the whole, just 1% if taken together. Because of these small proportions, it was not possible to use statistical tests to examine this trend.

Table 4.1. Previous religious affiliation declared by converts

Religious affiliation		**%**	
Christians	Anglican	51	
	Roman Catholic	15	
	Free Churches/Protestant	12	
	Orthodox	0.4	
	Non-Trinitarian and minor sects	0.6	
Total Christians			**79**
Jewish	Jewish	6	
	Mixed	2	
Total Jewish			**8**
Other	Eastern	0.5	
	Muslim	0.3	
Total other			**1**
Non-believers			**10**
Not stated			**1**
All			**100**

Source: Ledgers (1953-2002)

Table 4.2. Previous religious affiliation declared by converts through time

Religious affiliation	**1953-1962**		**1963-1972**		**1973-1982**		**1983-1992**		**1993-2002**		**All years**	
	#	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Christians	604	83	879	86	872	82	841	78	764	74	3960	81
Non-believers	16	2	44	4	90	8	170	16	197	19	517	10
Jewish/mixed	105	14	98	10	92	9	63	6	47	5	405	8
Muslims	0	0	0	0	5	0	3	0	6	1	14	0.4
Eastern/other	0	0	0	0	3	0	8	1	12	1	23	0.6
All	**725**	**100**	**1021**	**100**	**1062**	**100**	**1085**	**100**	**1026**	**100**	**4919**	**100**

Source: Ledgers (1953-2002)

4.3. Non-believers

Another obvious change is the growing proportion of those who define themselves as non-believers, from 2% (1953-1962) to 19% (1993-2002). This may reflect the growing perceived legitimacy of that label as a recognised stance in modern society. People began to feel that they no longer had to declare a commitment to a particular religious philosophy. It is also possible that Reform Judaism is considered attractive to non-believers as within Reform Judaism there are few demands to make a statement of faith. Certainly, it is a rare Reform Beit Din that quizzes a candidate on their belief in God, though they may question them on their present approach to the figure of Jesus, just to be sure that no links remain. There is no catechism which a convert is expected to recite, except maybe the first line of the *Shema*: '*Hear O Israel, the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One*' (Deuteronomy 12:4), and within Reform synagogues an open and full discussion is encouraged about theological issues.

In a recent book, attacking Dawkin's (2006) ideas of religion and theology, Romain wrote:

> *...whereas other faiths had internal wars and sectarian heresies over the right/wrong concepts of God, Judaism never sought to tie down God in the same way and that's why it is possible to have very different images of God...For those who want to believe, but can't, who have doubts and questions that get in the way, but would actually like to discover a means of overcoming them and be able to find God, then you are in good company! The Hebrew word 'Israel' means 'he who struggles with God' and refers to the centuries long wrestling match between Jews and God; doubting, arguing, questioning, but not letting that stop them being Jewish*... (Romain, 2008, p.75-6)

One of the Survey respondents noted a different, though related, theological difficulty facing candidates, namely the use of the phrase 'convert to Judaism' when she had previously not experienced any degree of faith in another religion. He wrote:

> *...I had no previous faith, brought up as Christian but not baptised or christened. I did not convert from Christianity therefore and find the word 'convert' not applicable...* (Survey 111, male, converted 1995, aged 26, engaged to a Jew)

The non-believer label includes both those who were brought up in a nominally Christian home but without much religious content, such as Fay, and those such as Denise whose father actively pursued a non-religious life style:

> *...my father was rather hostile to children receiving any kind of religious education so that even at school I was permitted not to attend the assemblies when I was younger...* (Fay, converted 1987, aged 26 p 2)

One of the survey respondents, who had a similar family background, noted the benefits such an upbringing might confer upon the recipient:

> *My own family background is anti-religious, it held me back a bit, later it influenced me to rethink.* (Survey 75 female, converted 1992 aged 43, patrilineal Jew)

4.4. Jewish upbringing and/or patrilineal Jews

4.4.1. The confusion over the use of the 'Jewish' or 'mixed' label

Another source of confusion in the Ledgers concerns those who declared a Jewish upbringing and those with what is described as a 'mixed' religious background. In a small minority of cases,

this category arose through the adoption of minors where no conversion procedure was followed, such as in the following case:

> ...*just found out not Jewish, adopted at three days, I am applying for registration because I have always believed myself to be Jewish and have been brought up throughout my whole life in a Jewish household and have followed Jewish traditions and customs...* (Application form 1982 female, aged 20, engaged, brother, also adopted, celebrated his *Bar Mitzvah* at St. John's Wood United Synagogue)

One can only imagine the shock that this small minority must have experienced in such circumstances.

However, it would appear that the majority of the cases where the declared religious affiliation was 'Jewish' or 'mixed' involved the conversion of a patrilineal Jew. Evidence from the Ledgers supports this proposition. Of the 98 cases out of a possible 116 where the upbringing was described as 'mixed', 76 (78%) of the candidates were patrilineals. Also logically, the court would not be concerned with any other type of religious 'mixing'.

4.4.2. The complex feelings and experiences of patrilineal Jews

The situation of a patrilineal Jew can be emotionally complex and this may have an effect on the results of the conversion process.

Although in the Orthodox and the British Reform world, they are not considered as Jews, research in the States has indicated that patrilineal Jews often feel very Jewish. Phillips (2005, quoting American National Jewish Population survey 2000-1) has reported that when responding to the statement *'I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people*', 87% of Jewish parentage agreed with this statement while 71% of mixed parentage also agreed. That is, when asked about feelings, not about practice, children of mixed parentage, even if of no religion or practicing another religion, still strongly identified with the Jewish people. Similarly, both groups were closely identified when responding to the statement: *'When faced with an important life decision, I turn to Judaism for guidance*', with 53% of those with Jewish parentage and 46% of those with mixed parentage agreeing. In addition, when asked if it was important that their grandchildren should be Jews, 71% of Jewish parentage and 38% of those with mixed parentage declared that it was.

Complex problems surround patrilineals when seeking to disentangle their identity. A particularly tragic case where Jewish status was assumed was recorded in 1992. From this application emerges the case of a 45 year-old divorcee who had just discovered that she was not actually Jewish. She tells the story of her confusion and emotional trauma:

> ...*I have always considered myself Jewish so it came as a great shock to find out that I may not be. My father is German and was a victim of the Holocaust. He married my mother in a Civil ceremony because she was Church of England. When I was nine my mother converted to Judaism. Unfortunately, not much thought was given to teaching my brother and I all the things a Jewish child should learn. My maternal grandmother lived with us and as she was a very devout Christian, religion was a very fraught subject in our house. We celebrated all the Jewish festivals but she insisted on celebrating hers as well. I left home when I was 17 and went into the WRAF. During my service I had a number of meetings with Rev. Wiseman…we returned to England when my father became unable to look after my mother…As she was an invalid I could not get to synagogue. When she died, I had a talk with Rabbi…and discovered the anomaly of my position…After my mother's death, my father and I began attending synagogue together…I felt I had at last come home. The rabbi arranged some lessons for me…two months ago it was a shock to discover that like my mother I had cancer...As yet they are unable to operate…I still do not know if I will survive, that to my mind is in God's hands. I have had to stop my lessons and attending synagogue…I feel very lost at the moment not knowing if I can be considered Jewish and if I do die not being able to be buried alongside of my mother…* (Application Form, 52, female, aged 45 , separated from her non-Jewish husband)

In addition there were those who became aware of their general Jewish ancestry and wished to respond, though it should be noted that in some cases, as demonstrated here, it was the meeting of a Jewish partner that sparked the desire to convert. A single woman, brought up as Christian, wrote:

> ...*Throughout my childhood I have always been aware that both of my great-grandfathers were Jewish, my father, although not Jewish, talked about the religion and when my parents learnt that I was going out with a Jewish boy they were delighted...* (Application Form, 1991, female, engaged aged 24)

When interviewed, some converts raised the possibility, though not yet proven, of the probability that they had Jewish ancestors. It seemed immensely important to them that such a possibility existed. Betty, who came from Spain, the land of the Marranos declared:

> ...*now we found out that she* [her mother] *probably was Jewish and her mother before her and maybe I didn't even have to convert. Bob* [partner] *started looking at the pictures and he said that the grandmother definitely looked Jewish, that's my grandmother and my great grandmother and then we found…*[where they lived in Spain] *is a place where people are buried*

and the names are Jewish… (Betty, Jewish partner age at conversion 27 in 1989)

These patrilineal Jews have such different family backgrounds and emotional experiences, but it is hoped that some trends will be elucidated through Survey responses.

4.4.3. Patterns that emerge around marital status of patrilineal Jews in the Ledgers

When the age of patrilineal Jewish candidates, or those with a Jewish background, is correlated with marital status at the time of conversion, a different pattern emerges than for other entries in the Ledgers. This can be seen in **Table 4.3.** Only those up to 40 years of age have been included in these tables, as above 40 the numbers are too small to support the comparison between marital groupings.

Overall, the majority of converts had a 'Christian' family background – over 90% Christian against under 10% Jewish. But within the marital status/age sub-groups, a different pattern emerges.

In the youngest age group, up to 20, the majority of converts had a Jewish family upbringing (53% Jewish, 47% Christian). For converts who were single at the time of conversion, almost half had a Jewish upbringing (45% Jewish, 55% Christian). Taking the two factors together, the large majority of young, single converts had a Jewish background (81% Jewish, 19% Christian).

The first column of **Table 4.3** seems to suggest that those converts whose fathers were Jewish tended to convert at a younger age than those in the main Christian groups. It seems that they wanted to sort out their status even before becoming engaged and that this was one of the motivations behind their conversion. Being in this situation was obviously difficult for some, as one respondent explains: '*being "half and half" is horrible. I wanted to be "whole" and accepted by my chosen faith*' (Survey 240, female, retired teacher, converted 1956 aged 28)

The variations in the age distributions with marital status were highly significant ($p \leq 0.001$ for both those with a Christian and a Jewish background).

It would seem by observation that for both groups that the trend to seek conversion was often triggered by the possibility of marriage to a Jewish partner. However, those with Jewish backgrounds are seeking to regularise their situation at an earlier stage in the relationship than those without that Jewish background. Perhaps those who do not have a Jewish background are more inclined to wait until they have a greater experience of Judaism before they make a commitment to convert. Those who are already 'half' Jewish see conversion as an obvious and relatively straightforward step, whereas for the others it is a major life-choice. So this phenomenon is hardly surprising (similarly for the singles).

Table 4.3. Religious background of converts, by marital status and age (for ages up to 40)

	Single		Engaged		Married		Widow/Divorced		All	
Age	**Jewish**	**Christian**	**Jewish**	**Christian**	**Jewish**	**Christian**	**Jewish**	**Christian**	**Jewish**	**Christian**
Under 20	88	20	22	53	1	25	0	0	111	98
	81%	19%	29%	71%	4%	96%	-	-	53%	47%
21-30	67	126	123	1173	33	821	1	10	224	2130
	35%	65%	9%	91%	4%	96%	9%	91%	4%	96%
31-40	12	61	5	261	23	735	2	20	42	1077
	16%	84%	2%	98%	3%	97%	9%	91%	4%	96%
All to 40	167	207	150	1487	57	1581	3	30	377	3305
	45%	55%	9%	91%	3%	97%	9%	91%	10%	90%

Source: Ledgers (1953-2002)

Note: 'Jewish' background includes cases of patrilineal or mixed birth family.

Again, literature on adoption and the tensions over the disclosure of either the fact of the adoption or the details of the natural parents holds many analogies to the psychological consequences of parents not being sufficiently open as to their child's true religious status (Wieder, 1978). Potential converts who come from mixed parentage often bring with them complex, sometimes painful, feelings of confused identity which many hope the conversion process will resolve.

4.4.4. Differences in proportions between the Ledgers and the Survey

As stated in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.6, pp.50-1) the distribution of previous religions in the Survey shows some differences from the population distribution based on the Ledgers. Specifically, there is an under-representation of patrilineal Jews who declare they had a Jewish upbringing.

It seems likely that whilst patrilineal Jews need to go through the conversion process (and hence appear in the Ledgers), they do not think of themselves as converts and hence are less likely to respond to a survey of converts.

This does not mean, however, that there was a substantial lack of respondents who had Jewish roots. In answer to one of the sub-questions in Q1, 13% of the respondents to the survey give as one of their motivations to convert the wish to 'affirm their Jewish roots'. From comments on the survey forms, it is clear that while many of these respondents were not patrilineal Jews their roots did include Jewish grandparents or other members of the family who may have been Jewish or who had converted to Judaism at some time, and it was these more distant Jewish roots that they wished to affirm through their conversion.

4.5. Intensity of religious upbringing

Other than the category of patrilineal Jews, whose situation was explored above, the data from the survey regarding the ratio of different religious backgrounds is very similar to that already explored in the Ledgers. Issues concerning previous religious upbringing were addressed in Q54, Q55 and Q56.

The Survey makes it possible to look at issues arising from the converts' previous religious behavior and affiliation in a deeper fashion. For example, from Q55 it was possible to ascertain the respondents' self reported degree of prior religious intensity (**Table 4.4**).

As **Table 4.4** shows, the bulk of the respondents to the survey (66%) saw themselves as having been brought up in a moderate or slight religious atmosphere. Only 5% felt that they had been brought up in an anti-religious home. As this percentage was so small, for analytical purposes,

this group was amalgamated with those who felt that they had experienced a totally secular, non-religious upbringing.

Table 4.4. Reported levels of the intensity of the converts' religious upbringing

Category	#	%
Intense	40	11
Moderate	132	36
slight	109	30
Entirely non-religious	66	18
Anti-religious	18	5
Total	365	100

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 4.5. Self-reported intensity of religious upbringing, by religion of birth

	Intensity of religious upbringing				All	Number in sample
	% Intense	% Moderate	% Slight	% Secular or anti-religious		
Roman Catholic	36	44	13	7	100	56
Anglican	7	38	37	18	100	197
Other Christian groups	11	51	19	18	100	53
Non-believers	0	0	18	82	100	33
Jews/mixed	0	22	50	28	100	18
All	11	37	105	82	100	357

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

4.6. Relationship between religious Intensity and religious denomination

This section examines the variation in the perceived intensity of religious upbringing as a function of religious denomination. Here we have split up the Christian groups as differences, especially between those of Roman Catholic and other Christians, do emerge from the data.

Using a Chi-square test, the distribution of intensity of religious upbringing is found to differ between the different birth religions ($p \leq 0.001$). By observation, it can be seen that the Roman Catholics tended to report a more intense religious upbringing than the other faith traditions, which accords with stereotypical views of Catholicism (36% of Roman Catholics as opposed to 7% of the Anglicans and 11% of the other Christian groups gave a rating of 'intense').

Those brought up in Jewish/mixed homes experienced a predominantly low level of religious intensity (78%). The Anglicans too can be seen as having been brought up in homes that generally showed little intensity of religious upbringing.

4.7. The impact of the intensity of religious upbringing and prior religious affiliation on conversion outcomes

4.7.1. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Mayer in his 1987 research pointed out that the motivation to convert may stem from...

> *...a series of other relational factors, such as the relative religiosity of the families of origin of husband and wife...* (Mayer and Avgar, 1987)

In their study, Forster and Tabachnik (1991) developed a conceptual model that consisted of 'push' and 'pull' factors.

Among the 'pull' factors, the authors note that since the Second Vatican Council in 1962 reappraised its attitudes to Judaism, there has been a far more positive attitude amongst Catholics towards Jews (though this first step may be classified more as a 'push' factor) and where there has been a liberal upbringing, then an attitude is developed of being capable of appreciating the other. It is this appreciation of Judaism that then becomes the 'pull' factor. The authors also note that 'push' factors include the fact that the converts' parents tend to be religiously active and converts had fairly strong religious attachments in their youth, though 57% are now dissatisfied with Christianity.

In terms of the intensity of their religious upbringing, as **Table 4.4** indicates, only 11% of the respondents to the Survey reported that either their own or their family's religious engagement had been intense. This small proportion found in the Survey would seem to be in disagreement with the findings reported by Forster and Tabachnik as described above (1991, p.64). This may be because religious commitment and identity tends to be more overt and intense in the United States than in the UK. As Kosmin and Lachman state, '*the vast majority of the Americans consider themselves to be religious and are not afraid to admit it*' (1993, p.2).

However, in the interview sample there were some cases in which intensity of religious attachment, though not upbringing was mentioned. For example, Angela commented on the intensity of her relationship to religion when she was young:

> ...*I had been brought up as Church of England; I was the religious one within my family. My parents weren't too interested. I would be the one who would go off with little white gloves and little hat on to Sunday school and get my stamps and book prizes*... (Angela, female, married converted 1981 aged 31, p.1)

And Jack noted:

> *...I was baptised, both my parents were agnostic and intellectual, but I had a Christian upbringing. Now oddly enough I was, am, quite religious and at*

school I was quite involved in the Christian Union... (Jack, male, married converted 1984 aged 33, p.1)

There is some evidence from studies of twins that the level of religious intensity that they demonstrate, whether it be intense or moderate, may have a genetic component.[i] On that basis, it may be that individuals like Angela who described a strong, possibly innate, tendency to engage in religious expression in her youth may be better able to engage in an alternative religion after conversion than someone who was not so disposed (and irrespective of the particular religious domain in which her religious propensity was first expressed). However, other research carried out by Eaves, Hatemi, Prom-Womley and Lenn Murrelle[ii] would seem to suggest that this genetic influence is quite small, accounting for only 10% of the variance in the tendency towards religious belief and practice, while the social environment had a far greater influence, accounting for 50% of the variance. There are thus divergent findings in relation to the relevant contribution of genetic and social factors in the explanation of complex social and spiritual behavior.

There is also evidence from empirical studies carried out by Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2004), that psychological factors related to parental/child relationships may play a part in the development of religious intensity. They demonstrated that where there were individuals with a perceived low level of parental attachment, especially to their fathers, these individuals were statistically overrepresented amongst those who experienced a sudden and intense religious conversionary experience. This could be understood in terms of a compensation hypothesis, where the new and intense relationship with God functions as a surrogate attachment assisting individuals in the regulation of the distress of not having experienced a high level of parental attachment. However, in this study, such sudden and intense conversionary experiences were extremely rare.

Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2004), also demonstrated that where there was a perceived high level of parental attachment, then the children of parents who themselves demonstrated a high level of religiousity were statistically overrepresented amongst those who in their own lives demonstrated a similar high level of religiousity. This, they explained, was related to 'socialization – based acquisition of parental religiousness (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2004, p.230). This too then could be related to why there was some evidence of religious intensity in our study, but parental relationships were not examined in our Survey and it is therefore not able to support or to challenge these theories.

In contrast to the expectations derived from a genetic view of religiosity, it might be expected that an early intense religious affiliation would lead to tensions felt within the individual when considering conversion. Thus one respondent, Louise, reported that a difficulty for her when facing the decision to convert to Judaism had been '*the fact that I had been baptised and confirmed as a Christian in the Church of England, a matter of conscience and concerns about*

loyalty' (Survey 31 female, freelance research consultant, partnered, converted 1969 aged 38). This factor may have more influence on the decision to convert – preventing some from making the choice – than on the outcome of conversion for those who do decide to go ahead.

A third consideration is that once such psychological reservations have been overcome, the operation of cognitive dissonance may generate an even stronger level of commitment to the new religion than would be the case for those who did not have to overcome such dissonance (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999) .

The relationships and possible influence of all these factors can be seen in **Table 4.6** below.

Table 4.6. The relationship between previous religious identity and conversion outcomes

Factors supporting positive outcomes	**Factors undermining positive outcomes**
Religiously active parents encourage religious behaviour	
Converts religiously active in their youth maintain same pattern	Converts religiously active in their youth could now feel disloyal
Genetic tendencies towards religion remains the same	
Cognitive dissonance to overcome previous beliefs leads to greater involvement	Parents who provide an intense religious background are more likely to oppose/undermine commitment to the new religion.

It is difficult to predict how the tradeoff between these competing factors will manifest itself, but on balance the processes linking intense religious background to positive outcomes seem to be more salient. In any event, the Survey data provide a good opportunity to examine the empirical relationship between the intensity of a respondent's prior religious experience and their subsequent feelings about the conversion process and their ritual commitment and ethnic identification as Jews.

It was decided to examine the impact of prior religious intensity and religious affiliations on:-

a) Motives for seeking conversion,

b) Attitudes to the conversion,

c) Responses to the conversion process,

d) Behavioural measures of Jewish observance, and

e) Strength of identification with the Jewish community.

4.7.2. Measures used: Religious intensity

As reported above, **religious intensity** was measured using Q55 and, for ease, the results are repeated below.

Table 4.7. Reported levels of intensity of the converts' religious upbringing

Category	#	%
Intense	40	11
Moderate	132	36
Slight	109	30
Entirely non-religious/anti-religious	84	23
Total	365	100

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

4.7.3. The dependent variables – Outcome measures

4.7.3.1. Measures used: Motivation

Using the Oblimin Rotated Pattern Matrix based on Q1 of the survey, three factors of motivation were found:-

- **Degree of intrinsic motivation to become Jewish,**
- **Level of family pressure,**
- **Strength of the desire for family unity.**

This analysis explains 65% of the variance. It is fully explained in Chapter 6 (Sections 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-3 and 6.3.2.4, pp.235-9)

4.7.3.2. Measures used: Contentment Index (Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3.1, p.66)

Positive feelings towards the Beit Din. This factor will be fully explored in Chapter 7 (Section 7.1.2, pp.244-7).

4.7.3.3. Measures used: Conversion process

Again, using the Oblimin Rotated Pattern Matrix, a more extensive factor analysis was carried out on all the variables concerned with the process of conversion and its immediate aftermath (fully explored in Chapter 7, Section 7.1.2 pp.244-7). Four dimensions were revealed, accounting together for 42% of the variance:-

- **Positive feelings towards the results of the process** (in further analysis this was replaced by the contentment index, cf. Section 3.2.3.1, p.66),

- **A wish for ongoing help and support after the conversion,**
- **Support received during the process,**
- **Positive feelings towards the Beit Din.**

4.7.3.4. Measure used: Ritual practice and ethnicity

Both of these factors were described in more detail in Chapter 3 (Sections 3.2 and 3.3, pp.60-74). Here, we will explore the relationship between the these two and their relationship to the converts' prior denomination and previous religious experiences, as these two factors produced far more statistically significant results than identity factors Growth or Spiritual Commitment.

4.7.4. Results

a) Relationship between intensity of religious background and levels of motivation

Table 4.8 examines the relationship between intensity of religious background and the strength of the converts' motivation to convert. A separate ANOVA has been conducted for each of the three dimensions of motivation: intrinsic desire to become Jewish, family pressure for conversion and a desire to create a Jewish family environment.[11]

Table 4.8. Intensity of religious upbringing by motivation

Motivational outcome	Intensity of religious upbringing			
	Intense	Moderate	Slight	ANOVA result p
Intrinsic	5.14	4.96	4.89	0.263
Family pressure	4.88	4.94	5.06	0.558
United Jewish family	4.96	5.06	4.97	0.838

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: For ease of analysis the slight/secular/anti-religious categories were collapsed into one variable.

None of these findings approach statistical significance.

b) Relationship between intensity of religious background and the contentment index

Looking at the index of contentment with the conversion as a function of the intensity of religious upbringing, the following results were found, shown in **Table 4.9.**

[11] NB again we have added 5 to factor scores to avoid negative results.

Table 4.9. Contentment index by intensity of religious upbringing

Religious upbringing	Mean Contentment
Intense	22.38
Moderate	21.75

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This was not found to be a statistically significant result (ANOVA p = 0.264).

c) Relationship between intensity of religious background and responses to the process of conversion

These were investigated in a similar way. Looking at the process of conversion factors as a function of the intensity of religious upbringing, the following results were found as shown in **Table 4.10**.

Table 4.10. Responses to the process of conversion by intensity of religious upbringing

Factors: process of conversion	Intense	Moderate	Slight/secular /anti-religious	ANOVA result p
Desire for ongoing help and support	4.77	5.07	4.98	0.329
Feelings of support during the process	5.42	4.97	4.92	0.277
Positive feelings towards the Beit Din	5.27	4.99	4.96	0.614

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

These too were not found to be statistically significant.

d) Relationship between intensity of religious background and Ritual observance

Using the ritual observance factor as a function of the intensity of their religious upbringing, the following results were found, shown in **Table 4.11.**

Table 4.11. Ritual observance by intensity of religious upbringing

Religious upbringing	Mean ritual behaviour
Intense	5.18
Moderate	5.04
Slight/secular/anti-religious	5.00

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This result was not found to be statistically significant (ANOVA p = 0.419), though from observation it can be seen that those with an intense religious upbringing have a higher

mean score than the other categories.

e) Relationship between the intensity of the converts' religious backgrounds and their current feelings of ethnicity

Turning to more ethnic outcomes, the following results were recorded by using the ethnicity factor as a function of religious intensity, shown in **Table 4.12.**

Table 4.12 Ethnicity by intensity of religious upbringing

Religious upbringing	Mean ethnic behaviour
Intense	5.23
Moderate	4.96
Slight/secular/anti-religious	4.83

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

These results were not statistically significant (ANOVA p = 0.105). Again, by observation, it can be seen that there is a tendency for those with an intense religious upbringing or a secular one to have a higher mean score than the other categories.

f) Relationship between the converts' previous religious denomination and levels of motivation

Table 4.13 examines the relationship between prior religion and each of the three measures of motivation (intrinsic, family pressure and desire to create a Jewish family). In this case, the previous religion of the converts has a significant relationship with all three dimensions of motivation.

Table 4.13. Factors of motivation by prior religious denomination

	Previous religious denomination					
	Roman Catholic	**Other Christian groups**	**Anglican**	**Unbelievers**	**Jewish/ mixed**	**ANOVA p**
Intrinsic	5.07	5.03	4.82	5.36	5.88	≤ 0.001
Family pressure	4.72	5.13	4.95	5.36	5.27	0.024
United Jewish family	5.26	5.19	5.03	4.41	4.37	≤ 0.001

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

It would seem that intrinsic motivation is strongest in converts with mixed Jewish backgrounds. This makes intuitive sense given that the intrinsic features of Judaism might appeal more to those already familiar with Judaism than it would to those with a non-Jewish religious background. Those whose background was very secular also rated highly. This again makes intuitive sense in that there was no prior religious background that had to be

adapted for the acceptance of intrinsic factors.

The same two groups feel more strongly pressured by the desire to satisfy family pressure, but are least motivated by a desire to create a Jewish family. Perhaps surprisingly, those from Catholic and other Christian backgrounds are most strongly motivated by concerns to create a coherent Jewish family.

g) Relationship between prior religious denomination and the contentment index

Examining the index of contentment with the conversion as a function of religious denomination, the following results were found, shown in **Table 4.14.**

This also was not found to be statistically significant (ANOVA p = 0.063) though it is approaching significance with a tendency for those brought up in a Jewish environment or in Roman Catholic homes to have a higher mean level of satisfaction with the conversion.

Table 4.14. Contentment index by previous religious upbringing

Religion of birth	Mean contentment
Roman Catholic	22.45
Other Christian groups	22.10
Anglican	21.32
Unbelievers	21.38
Jewish/mixed	22.88

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

h) Relationship between the converts' prior religious denominations and responses to the process

Exploring the relationship between the teaching process, the appearance at the Beit Din and the aftermath of the process of conversion and prior religious denomination, the following results were obtained, shown in **Table 4.15**.

Again, here it can be seen that the Catholics are out of step with the other Christian groups. The greater lack of desire on the part of those brought up with Jewish backgrounds for post-conversion help from the community can be understood as reflecting this group's well established feeling of already being part of a community. Those brought up in secular homes might feel that they have invested enough of their time and effort during the process of conversion. But it is difficult to understand why the Catholics, in contrast to the Anglicans or other Christian groups, should feel less need for further support.

Table 4.15. Process of conversion by prior religious denomination

Religion of birth	Desire for extra help post conversion	Support received during the process	Positive feelings towards the Beit Din
Roman Catholic	**4.76**	5.17	5.20
Other Christian groups	**5.11**	5.12	5.02
Anglican	**5.11**	4.92	4.87
Unbelievers	**4.73**	4.94	5,31
Jewish/mixed	**4.41**	5.12	5.00
ANOVA	**p = 0.022**	p = 0.516	p = 0.114

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

i) Relationship between prior religious denominations and current ritual observance

Examining ritual observance as a function of religious denominations, the following results were found, shown in **Table 4.16.**

Table 4.16. Ritual observance by previous religious upbringing

Religion of birth	Mean ritual behaviour
Roman Catholic	4.98
Other Christian groups	4.83
Anglican	5.08
Unbelievers	4.96
Jewish/mixed	4.99

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: The factor scores here do not sum to zero because typically, around 15% of the respondents are not married and their factor scores are excluded from these tests. The omitted cases have atypical motivational and identity factor scores, and therefore their exclusion has a significant impact on the distribution and the mean of the remaining scores.

This was also found to be statistically non-significant (ANOVA p = 0.672).

j) Relationship between previous religious denominations and current feelings of ethnicity

Lastly as a function of the different religious denominations by feelings of ethnicity, the following results were obtained, shown in **Table 4.17.**

These results were found to be significant (ANOVA p = 0.040). Not surprisingly, the strength of their Jewish ethnic identity was strongest in those brought up with Jewish backgrounds. However, it is surprising that the strength of Jewish ethnic feelings was so strong amongst the Catholics, again in contrast to the other Christian groups.

Table 4.17. Ethnicity by prior religious upbringing

Religion of birth	Mean ethnicity
Roman Catholic	5.24
Other Christian groups	5.01
Anglican	4.85
Unbelievers	5.17
Jewish/mixed	5.45

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

4.7.5. Discussion

The main trigger for examining the relationships described above was the suggestion of Mayer (1997) and Foster and Tabachnik (1991) that the intensity of religious upbringing may influence the conversion process and that Roman Catholics may have a special part in this. It is, however, clear that these researchers had in mind the influence of prior religious experience on the *decision to convert* rather than the strength of the bond with the new religion after conversion which leads to some difficulties in relating their findings to this research.

a) The effects of the intensity of the converts' religious upbringing

Unfortunately it was not possible to test the hypothesis about the decision process because the data relate only to those who have already chosen to convert. However, it is reasonable to assume that, if a religiously intense background increases the likelihood of conversion in a mixed marriage, it is also likely to have a positive effect on (i) the intensity of the motivation to convert of those who do convert and (ii) on how the convert feels about their conversion once the process has been completed. There are also the arguments from genetics and from cognitive dissonance theory put forward earlier that support the hypothesis of a link between religious background and positive outcomes.

However, the results show that the association is not significant when examining the relationship between the prior intensity of religious upbringing and motivational factors, attitudes to the conversion, the conversion process, feelings of ethnicity or ritual observance, thus challenging the research carried out in the USA which saw this as an important contributory factor in conversion.

There is a hint that the relationship between intensity of religious background and motivation may be a U-shaped function – i.e. high and low levels of intensity promote motivation whilst intermediate levels do not. This is plausible on the basis that those coming from an intermediate religious background may not have sufficiently articulated belief systems to support the new religious world view, but neither are they so distanced from religion that they can easily disengage from a (partially assimilated) faith and transfer to a

new one. In the Jewish community, there is good evidence that those who have intermediate levels of engagement are driven more by social and ethnic factors than spiritual ones (Miller 2001). If that is the case more generally, then it may explain why such individuals find it more difficult to consider adopting life style changes in an alternative religion than those driven by intense spirituality or none at all.

b) The effects of the converts' prior religious denomination

(i) Relationship between prior religious denominations and intrinsic motivation

In terms of the relationship between prior religious affiliation and these motivational factors, it was demonstrated that prior religious denominations do seem to play a significant role.

It is hard to understand the different measures attached to the various Christian denominations when looking at the strength of their intrinsic reasons for conversion. Perhaps it is because the Anglicans, as is often reported in the press, seem to be members of that communion by default rather than by personal choice. For example, Moll, citing the work carried out by Wells, talks in an internet article about the problems of Anglicanism today. He wrote:

> *...The 20th century marked a significant decline in British Christianity. In 1900, there were 5.4 million practicing Protestants, but by 1990, there were only 3.4 million. At the same time, the Church of England dropped from 2.8 million to 1.5 million. Today, 86 percent of adults in Britain do not attend any church...* (Moll, 2005)

He mentions problems with the social standing of the church in society as part of the difficulties, also the loss of the Empire, the difficulties of being a state religion and the association of the church with the middle and upper classes, but then he tellingly adds:

> *...Another problem might be Protestantism itself, Wells suggests that the Protestant shift of religion to a personal, experiential faith may have doomed that brand of Christianity. "A religion that has lost its social meaning and exists only in a private, 'religious' sphere may not be Christianity at all, but its echo and memory"...*

It was a surprise to me that the Catholics scored so lowly on intrinsic motivation. I had not been able to explore the issue at the interview stage as only one interviewee, Olive, had been brought up as a Catholic, but rabbinic 'lore' and experience had seemed to suggest that Catholics, often brought up in homes where religion had a place around the life of the family, would have found the intrinsic factor to be more potent than the

analysis showed.

Those converts who came from backgrounds where there was no belief system practiced in the home, or even where, in some cases, an anti-religious stance was present, had a slightly higher score on the measures related to intrinsic reasons for conversion. This group was making a real change in their personal religious stance, moving from a totally neutral or negative stance to one that affirms religious commitment. That is a big step and it is no wonder that intrinsic motives play such a strong role.

From the Application Forms, the interviews and the comments in the Survey it is clear that many converts had already begun to question their earlier birth family's religious affiliation long before they had considered conversion to Judaism. As Harry said:

> *...I was never religious at school. I don't think I was ever baptised. As I grew older I started to have a problem with this trilogy thing, I couldn't sort out who was this Holy Ghost for a start, not that I researched much on them to find out, and then there was this God and Jesus, but I must admit I tended to be a little bit sort of sceptical...* (Harry, married to a Hetty who converted in 1987, conversion 1996 aged 61, p.1)

While in 1959 a thirty year old woman who had been married to a Jew but was now divorced from him, wrote:

> *...I am convinced that the Jewish religion is the true religion. As a girl of thirteen I stopped going to Sunday School because I did not believe in Jesus, I felt that there should not be anyone between man and God. At sixteen I wanted to change my religion to the Jewish faith but felt I was too young to make such a decision, but I have never wavered from my belief...* (Application Form, 1959)

It is however also possible that these statements were simply post-hoc rationalisations to explain the decision to convert to Judaism.

On the other hand, it is not surprising that the strongest relationship was found between those with Jewish origins and the factor measuring intrinsic motivation.

As a group, they are positively motivated towards seeking conversion for the very variables included in that factor, such as already feeling Jewish to some extent, a feeling of closeness to the Land and people of Israel, the warmth of Jewish homes that they must have experienced amongst their wider family as they grew up and the Jewish circles in which they already felt at home. This factor included to a lesser extent the attraction for religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism, but, as will be shown later, the more religious/ritual aspects of Judaism are not that potent a driver for those

with a Jewish upbringing. Hence 'intrinsic' is being used here to distinguish between on the one hand drivers arising from the attributes of Jewishness (whether spiritual or ethnic) and non-intrinsic factors such as family pressure.

It might be predicted that the different components of intrinsic motivation might be influenced in different ways by the convert's prior religious denomination. More specifically, converts from Christian denominations might be more motivated with respect to religious intrinsic factors while those from Jewish or non-believing backgrounds might be driven by ethnic and social intrinsic factors.

To test this hypothesis I examined the impact of background religion on three of the key elements of intrinsic motivation, analysed separately, as part of Q1.4, Q1.7 and Q1.9 of the Survey. Q1.4 reflects religious and spiritual drivers *('I was attracted to the religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism'*), Q1.7 *('I already felt Jewish to some extent and wanted to develop this')* and Q1.9 (*'I felt close to the Land and the people of Israel'*) altogether reflect different aspects of ethnicity.

The results of this post-hoc analysis are shown in **Table 4.18**.

Table 4.18. Q1.4, Q1.7 and Q1.9 by prior religious denomination

Religion of birth	I was attracted to The religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism	I already felt Jewish To some extent and wanted to develop this	I felt close to the Land and the people of Israel
Roman Catholic	1.81	3.00	3.00
Other Christian groups	2.11	3.13	2.92
Anglican	2.19	3.08	3.22
Unbelievers	1.85	3.87	2.8
Jewish/mixed	1.78	4.5	3.06
p	0.031	≤ 0.001	0.005

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This further examination does indeed indicate that those from Jewish or secular backgrounds were motivated less by 'religious/spiritual' concerns than those from Anglican or other Christian groups, with the exception of the Catholics who, it seems, were also not strongly motivated by religious/spiritual motives.

Unsurprisingly, those from Jewish backgrounds expressed the strongest relationship with the variable which talked about a prior feeling of Jewishness as a motive for conversion but a general feeling of already belonging to the Jewish people was felt to be a strong motive for conversion by all the Christian groups. Perhaps this latter correlation was influenced by the generally long period between meeting a Jewish partner, thinking about converting and actually going through the process.

When considering the variable measuring the motive to convert, because the convert

felt close to the Land of Israel and its people seen as an ethnic concern of Jewish peoplehood, the Anglicans and the Jewish groups demonstrated the strongest propensity to see this as a motive for conversion, whereas those brought up in secular homes see this as a weak motive. The Catholics are seen to regard this as almost as strong a motive as the Jewish group.

So the hypothesis that converts from Christian denominations might be more motivated with respect to religious intrinsic factors can be partially supported in that this can be said to be true of the Anglicans and other Christian groups, but not of the Catholics. The second part of the hypothesis, that those from Jewish or non-believing backgrounds might be driven by ethnic and social intrinsic factors is supported by these results. Those brought up in Jewish backgrounds did demonstrate a strong propensity to be motivated by their love of Israel and Jewish peoplehood.

Of course, in any individual case, it is possible to see both the ethnic and the spiritual dimensions at play. For example, they are most clearly interwoven in the case of Hetty when she discusses her Jewish roots and how these motivated her to seek conversion.

Hetty was well aware of her Jewish ancestry but was not moved to regularise her situation until she was in her 40s in 1987. She had lived with knowledge that she had a deep connection with Judaism until the pain of her confused identity became just too much for her. Later in the interview she attributed her lack of having borne children to her feelings of personal insecurity regarding her religious status. In answer to my question about her religious background, she said:

> *...Jewish on my father's side, but lapsed. I can remember my great grandmother in the East End being quite a Yiddishe type of lady…I was brought up… in a block of flats. We were the only people who didn't speak Yiddish…I remember being very surrounded by Judaism. I didn't, I never took upon myself a Christian faith...I can actually say that when I eventually approached the rabbi…when I was forty, it had got to the point where I was living with an actual physical pain inside. I was completely in the wrong place with the wrong thing, leading the wrong form of life, totally believing in God,* [but] *couldn't do with all the other layers. Couldn't do with the personification and all the other things that came in between. And so really I grew up in a orthodox kind of thing when I was very small. I knew about Shabbat, I knew chickens came home alive on a Friday in the yard and the old man…did something to them and they arrived on the table. And I remember...klezmer, you know playing the clarinet and playing klezmer. And you heard it when you went to the outside loo...* (Hetty female patrilineal Jew, converted 1987 aged 42, p.1)

Her non-Jewish husband became involved in Judaism with her and he himself converted about ten years later.

(ii) Pressure for conversion from their Jewish partner or his family by prior religious denomination

The strongest relationship that emerged between the response to the pressure for conversion from their Jewish partner or his family and prior religious denomination was shown to be with those who professed no previous religious belief. Maybe, as people with no faith to give up, they felt that they had the least to loose and so they could respond graciously to that pressure.

The second group here were those with prior Jewish connections, again, maybe that group could better understand the familial ties and the family desire that they become fully part of the Jewish people. They must often have enjoyed family events centered round life-cycle rituals that they wished to bring more formally into their personal ambit.

It is interesting to note that those with prior connections to Roman Catholicism gave strong expression to their lack of relationship with family pressure as a motivating factor.

(iii) Strength of desire for a united Jewish family by prior religious denomination

When looking at the relationship between the desire to convert in order to create a family united by Judaism and prior religious affiliation, a different pattern can be seen. Those who were brought up as agnostic or with a Jewish background were found to be less motivated by a desire for a united Jewish family than were other respondents.

Perhaps those brought up in a mixed home felt that if they converted out of a desire to create a united religious home then that would be an implicit denial of their own family experience. Those from an atheist or agnostic background felt that they did not need family religious unity to create a good home. Also, they had, as was shown above, displayed the greater potency of intrinsic motivation in their desire to convert and this factor could be seen as in some ways diluting a genuine commitment to Judaism by emphasizing the more instrumental motive of creating family unity.

Here, it was those who came from a prior Roman Catholic background who were most prone to expressing this motive. Perhaps they had seen such unity in their own homes and the benefits that could accrue from it and therefore saw this as an important reason to seek conversion.

(iv) Current feelings of ethnicity by prior religious denominations

When exploring the relationship between prior religious denominations and current feelings of ethnicity, again it was perhaps not surprising that those from a Jewish background reported the highest mean figure, as they would have experienced this ethnicity in their youth. It is, however, more interesting to note that the Catholics had the second highest mean figure.

For Catholics, the factor expressing intrinsic motivation was relatively weak, but once having made the decision to convert, then a stronger level of ethnic affiliation was expressed in their adopted religion.

(v) Discussion on correlation between religious intensity of upbringing and prior Roman Catholic affiliation

There is however a further complication in interpreting these results. This arises from the correlation between intensity of religious background and religious denomination – specifically the association between Catholicism and intensity. As was shown above in **Table 4.4**, 36% of Roman Catholics declared that their upbringing was religiously intense as opposed to 11% of the other non-Anglican Christian groups, 7% of the Anglicans and 5% of the other groups.

It is important to determine whether the linkage between intensity of religious upbringing and conversion outcomes is explained partially or entirely by the impact of Catholicism per se, or whether it is due to the generalised impact of religious intensity irrespective of denomination. This conundrum has been approached by including denomination (Catholic vs other) as a dummy variable in a multiple regression analysis. The results are shown in **Table 4.19** below.

Table 4.19. Levels of significance for a) Roman Catholicism and b) intensity of religion when entered into a multiple regression analysis

	Family pressure motivation p	**United Jewish family motivation p**	**Ethnicity now p**
Roman Catholics only	0.046	0.066	0.050
Intensity of Religious upbringing	0.528	0.622	0.482

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

These results show that whether or not someone is Catholic has more impact than religious intensity on the way they respond to Jewish family pressure to convert and on

the strength of their current ethnic behaviour.

4.7.6. General conclusions of discussion over intensity of religious upbringing and prior religious denomination

The array of non-significant results in the previous tables may, of course, arise from the lack of statistical reliability of the intensity measure. But it may equally reflect the fact that *either* the intensity of the religious upbringing is irrelevant to conversion outcomes, *or* that it interacts in very complex ways with other variables that have not been measured and controlled (e.g. the level of independence/compliance of the convert) so as to obscure any clear relationships emerging.

A further study that examined the extent to which converts experienced a sense of disloyalty at the time of conversion might be useful to further explore these issues and may give rise to more statistically significant results. On the hypothesis that the intensity-outcome link is mediated by the need for cognitive dissonance reduction, we would expect the link to be strongest in those with the strongest feelings of disloyalty. It is of course also possible that strong feelings of disloyalty might arise not only from an intense religious upbringing, but also for the opposite end of that spectrum, from a strong secular or even an anti-religious atmosphere in the parental home.

The overall conclusion therefore is that the intensity of a convert's previous religious experience has no impact on the outcome measures explored, while their previous religious denomination has some impact on:-

(i) Their memory of what motivated them to convert, and

(ii) The factor measuring their current feelings of ethnicity. The qualitative evidence would suggest that there are stronger links, but the statistical evidence shows otherwise.

The real mystery that still remains is to what extent prior Roman Catholic converts differ in their motivations and outcomes from other prior Christians. The question must arise as to whether there is something in the nature of Catholicism that gives rise to the results documented here, where the results seemed to indicate a parallel between those brought up in Jewish/mixed religious backgrounds and those brought up as Roman Catholics. Is it to do with the notion that Protestantism is concerned more with the individual salvation of each person while Catholicism can be seen as having deeper concerns with rituals that rely on community and family? Or are these results false in some way? This matter too requires more elucidation.

4.8. The feelings of the converts' families and their impact on motivation and conversion outcomes

4.8.1. Theoretical background and hypotheses

When someone converts to Judaism, their decision not only affects them, it also affects their partner, their partner's family and, especially under consideration here, their own family. The reaction of their birth families can range from one of joy that their child has found a spiritual home to one of hurt feelings of rejection, or even of fear as to how the future of their family relationships might develop. Certainly, it would be unwise to assume that this change of identity is not going to lead to some major challenges and that these may in turn affect the future feelings of the convert towards their new religion and its practice.

Angela and Fay both mentioned that they had had positive support from their families when they had told them that they were going to convert to Judaism.

> ...*My parents were terribly open-minded because, not being religious, they didn't see it as problem at all. And because my father was involved business wise with a lot of Jewish people he found it quite natural*... (Angela, married converted 1981 aged 31, p.2)

> ...*Not bothered at all. They didn't mind...* (Fay married, converted 1987 aged 28, p.4)

Harry, when he told his grown-up children of his decision, spoke of their reaction as having been somewhat questioning, though tending now towards becoming supportive.

> ...*So they are getting the hang of it by now. They were not quite sure as to why I should keep to just having the one God. Where I had trouble was with three of them. They have the same sort of "Well what's the matter with it" "Well this is the way I feel, the way I am". Give me one God that's absolutely perfect, the other 1, 2, 3 am just unhappy with it... (*Harry, married to a Hetty who converted in 1987, conversion 1996 aged 61, p.14)

Whereas Jack, whose father had been a Jewish refugee from Europe, spoke in no uncertain terms as to his mother's unhappiness at his decision:

> ...*My mother was quite angry, I got four page letter from her saying how, just before my circumcision, saying how my father had had himself baptised in the British Embassy in Paris just before he'd come to Britain, which I can quite understand, I think I would probably do the same thing to save my own life, and how she felt it was rejecting her, which was quite difficult…it's not something I can practise when she's around and I suppose I feel I don't want to upset or hurt her...* (Jack, married converted

1984 aged 33, p.4)

In some cases, the decision to convert awakened very negative views in their own families: '*My mother told me, "Jews are dirty and killed Jesus." My father told me Judaism didn't need me*' (Survey 341, female care assistant married to non-Jew, converted 2002 aged 45).

Again, Forster and Tabachnik (1991) among their 'pull' factors included the influence exerted by the convert's relationship with their own parents. They wrote that whether the converts want to adhere to a family pattern or whether their background has enabled them to feel free or perhaps even compelled them to reject that pattern and choose another, was an important factor to be considered when conversion was in the offing.

These comments led to a question as to how the level of support from the birth family may affect the motivational factors leading to conversion and post-conversion feelings of contentment with their new status and their ritual and ethnic behaviour.

Other research on the development of a positive identity amongst Israeli homosexuals has indicated the importance of family support for the positive adoption of an identity that may be different from their parents. As Elizur and Ziv (2004) found that both general family support and family acceptance of same-gender orientation play a significant role in the psychological adjustment of gay men.

And also in the case of adolescents forming their identity, a good relationship, particularly with the mother as well as with friends, was seen to be helpful for the development of a stable growing sense of self. Reis (2004) argued that a decremental change in identity was related to persistent problems with mothers and friends. He showed that for mothers, a lack of communication and for friends, persistent conflicts were related to decremental identity changes.

Thus, from the comments made in the interviews, the results of work with homosexuals and adolescents and an intuitive consideration of the conversion process, it can be suggested that the level of support from the birth family is likely to have an effect on the attitudes of the convert towards their conversion, on their feelings of Jewish ethnicity and on their ritual and religious behaviour. These possibilities were then explored, results given in the following subsections.

4.8.2. Measures used: Support from the birth families

The items from Q35 were explored using a five-point Likert scale. For ease of data management, this was reduced to a three-point scale. Q35.5 ('*They weren't bothered in any way*') was not included, as the question proved to be ambiguous: was the fact they were or were not bothered a positive or a negative act? It was decided to keep the items in Q35 as separate variables rather than to create a combined index so that the different nuances of

emotion could be explored in a deeper fashion. (The emotional difference between '*they ostracised me*' and '*they supported me fully*' seems to indicate more diverse emotions than just the opposing positions on a scale). The simple percentage results can be seen in **Table 4.20.**

From this analysis, it was clear that the converts felt that their own families were generally highly supportive of their decision to convert to Judaism.

The one area where it seems that the converts felt that their families had some concern was over possible anti-Semitism being directed at the convert or her children. Liz recalls:

> *...My mother was a bit taken aback…she was angry about it for a while and I remember her saying "Well of course you might have something like the Holocaust happening again"...* (Liz, widow of a Jew when converted in 1986 aged 45, now married to a Jew, p.12)

Table 4.20. An analysis of level of support from the converts' families

	Agree strongly/ agree	**Not certain**	**Disagree/ disagree strongly**	**Total**
They just wanted me to be happy	79%	8%	13%	327
They were worried they'd be excluded	24%	15%	61%	323
They were worried about anti-Semitism	25%	26%	49%	326
They ostracised me	3%	2%	95%	324
They weren't bothered	28%	19%	53%	325
They were angry	8%	11%	82%	302
They felt I was being disloyal	18%	12%	70%	325
They supported me fully	77%	12%	11%	329

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

4.8.3. Measures used: Outcome variables

The following outcome measures were applied, as described earlier.

a) Motivational factors (Chapter 6, Sections 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-3 and Section 6.3.2.4, pp.235-9))

- Conversion for Intrinsic reasons
- Pressure from the Jewish family
- Desire to create a united Jewish family

b) Contentment Index (Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3.1, p.66)

c) Ritual factor (Chapter 3, Section 3.2, pp.60-7)

d) Ethnic factor (Chapter 3, Section 3.3, pp.67-74)

4.8.4. Results

a) Family support and the three motivational factors

Tables 4.21-4.23 explore the respondents' mean levels of intrinsic motivation, the strength of the Jewish family's pressure on them to convert, and their desire for religious family unity as motives for conversion as a function of the level and type of support they felt that they had received from their families.

Table 4.21. Mean intrinsic motivational scores as a function of birth family's reactions

Family reactions	Mean Intrinsic Motivation Score			ANOVA p
	Agree strongly/agree	Not certain	Disagree/disagree strongly	
They just wanted me to be happy	4.92	5..22	4.90	0.323
They were worried they'd be excluded	4.82	5.12	4.95	0.278
They were worried about anti-Semitism	4.93	4.93	4.97	0.922
They ostracised me	5.28	5.45	4.92	0.207
They were angry	4.61	4.70	4.74	0.103
They felt I was being disloyal	4.75	4.93	4.97	0.258
They supported me fully	4.93	4.79	4.98	0.560

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 4.22. Mean family pressure motivational scores as a function of birth family's reactions

Family reactions	Mean Family Pressure Score			ANOVA p
	Agree strongly/agree	Not certain	Disagree/disagree strongly	
They just wanted me to be happy.	5.01	4.98	4.73	0.243
They were worried they'd be excluded	5.04	4.89	4.95	0.774
They were worried about anti-Semitism	4.98	4.51	4.97	0.987
They ostracised me	5.09	4.36	4.98	0.376
They were angry	5.31	5.15	4.91	0.130
They felt I was being disloyal	4.88	4.87	5.01	0.573
They supported me fully	4.96	4.89	4.99	0.839

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 4.23. Mean family unity motivational scores as a function of birth family's reactions

Family reactions	Mean Family Unity Score			ANOVA
	Agree strongly/agree	Not certain	Disagree/disagree strongly	p
They just wanted me to be happy.	5.05	4.85	5.25	0.229
They were worried they'd be excluded	**5.02**	**4.85**	**4.62**	**0.003**
They were worried about anti-Semitism	5.01	5.07	5.06	0.924
They ostracised me	4.85	5.08	5.06	0.718
They were angry	**5.08**	**5.30**	**5.50**	**0.035**
They felt I was being disloyal	5.19	4.91	5.04	0.381
They supported me fully	5.07	5.07	5.05	0.984

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

No significant association between birth family support (or lack of it) and motives to convert was found (most cases $p \geq 0.05$), except for two instances involving motivation to create Jewish family unity:-

i) The birth families were worried that they would be excluded from the new family's life ($p = 0.003$), and

ii) The birth families were angry that the convert had to convert to satisfy the wishes of their Jewish partner or his family ($p = 0.035$).

b) Family support and the index measuring the converts' level of contentment with the conversion now.

Table 4.24 posts the contentment index as a function of the level of support converts received from their families.

This shows no statistically significant results here for any of the support family variables – for all cases, ANOVA $p \geq 0.05$.

Table 4.24. Mean contentment scores as a function of birth family's reactions

Family reactions	Mean content index score			
	Agree strongly /agree	Not certain	Disagree/ disagree strongly	ANOVA p
They just wanted me to be happy	21.17	21.78	21.74	0.557
They were worried they'd be excluded	21.53	22.16	21.74	0.459
They were worried about anti-Semitism	21.75	21.79	21.38	0.644
They ostracised me	21.74	20.20	20.88	0.330
They were angry	21.74	20.38	22.17	0.211
They felt I was disloyal	21.60	21.85	21.65	0.905
They supported me fully	21.82	20.77	21.76	0.153

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

c) Family support by ritual behaviour

Table 4.25 shows the results when the ritual factor is shown as a function of the converts' families' reactions to the conversion.

This indicates that when the converts felt that their families were worried that they would be excluded from their new life as a Jew, the converts performed a higher level of ritual acts (ANOVA p = 0.001).

Table 4.25. Mean ritual behaviour scores as a function of birth family's reactions

Family reactions	Mean ritual behaviour score			
	Agree strongly/agree	Not certain	Disagree/disagree strongly	ANOVA p
They just wanted me to be happy	5.02	5.06	4.81	0.493
They were worried they'd be excluded	**5.30**	**5.31**	**4.83**	**0.001**
They were worried about anti-Semitism	5.05	5.00	4.65	0.773
They ostracised me	5.12	6.01	4.98	0.162
They were angry	5.26	5.34	4.91	0.118
They felt I was being disloyal	5.88	5.09	4.91	0.221
They supported me fully	5.33	4.95	4.97	0.139

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

d) Family support by with ethnicity

Table 4.26 shows the relationship between the ethnicity factor and the converts' families' reactions to the conversion.

Table 4.26. Mean ethnicity scores as a function of birth family's reactions

	Mean ethnic behaviour Score			
Family reactions	**Agree strongly/agree**	**Not certain**	**Disagree/disagree strongly**	**ANOVA p**
They just wanted me to be happy	4.95	5.36	4.87	0.158
They were worried they'd be excluded	4.98	4.84	4.92	0.327
They were worried anti-Semitism	4.98	4.94	4.99	0.625
They ostracised me	**5.56**	**6.31**	**4.93**	**0.004**
They were angry	4.97	4.84	4.95	0.452
They felt I was being disloyal	5.13	5.20	4.90	0.140
They supported me fully	5.35	4.92	4.92	0.063

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This shows one significant result (ANOVA p = 0.004) which indicates that when their families ostracised them, they demonstrated a higher mean value of ethnicity.

e) Tests on specific items from Q35 by gender and previous religious identity

I then carried out a correlation between the items in Q35 (omitting Q35.5) factoring in the gender of the converts. Significant trends were found when gender was correlated with:-

i) The wish for the personal happiness of the convert, and

ii) The risk of future anti-Semitism was considered.

These trends can be seen in **Table 4.27.**

Table 4.27. Some family reactions by gender

	Agree strongly/agree		**Not certain**		**Disagree/ disagree strongly**		
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
They just wanted me to be happy	73%	80%	13%	7%	14%	13%	325
They were worried about anti-Semitism	13%	29%	21%	27%	66%	44%	324

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

As can be seen in the table, it seems that there was a slight tendency for female converts to feel that their families were more concerned with their future happiness than the male converts (73% to 80%). However, there was a more marked tendency for female converts to feel that their families were concerned about the possibilities of anti-Semitism (29% to 13%, ANOVA p = 0.019 and p = 0.018).

Table 4.28. An analysis of item, '*Despite some concerns, they just wanted me to be happy*', by declared religious status of the convert

	Agree strongly/ agree	Not certain	Disagree/ disagree strongly	Total
Anglicans	83%	8%	9%	180
Roman Catholics	68%	6%	26%	52
Other Christian groups	80%	4%	16%	49
Unbelievers	80%	8%	12%	25
Jewish upbringing	46%	40%	14%	15

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 4.29. An analysis of item, '*They felt I was being disloyal to their religion or way of life*', by declared religious status of the convert

	Agree strongly/ agree	Not certain	Disagree/ disagree strongly	Total
Anglicans	16%	11%	73%	180
Roman Catholics	24%	18%	58%	51
Other Christian groups	24%	14%	62%	49
Unbelievers	8%	8%	84%	24
Jewish upbringing	13%	7%	80%	15

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Tables 4.28 and **4.29** show the relationship between the self-declared religious orientation of the convert prior to conversion and the item concerning how the convert rated their own families' wish for the convert only to be happy, and how much the birth family felt that the conversion expressed disloyalty to them.

In **Table 4.28** (ANOVA $p \leq 0.001$), the greatest disagreement with the idea of wishing the convert happiness in their new religion was felt most strongly by those converts from a Roman Catholic background.

In **Table 4.29** (ANOVA $p = 0.014$), again we can see those brought up as Catholics, along with those from other Christian groups (though not Anglicans) expressed most strongly the belief that their families felt that the converts had been disloyal to their birth families, though those that disagreed with the statement formed a far larger proportion (Catholics 24% to 58%; other Christian groups 24% to 62%).

Two previously Roman Catholic respondents referred to the adverse effect their conversion had on their family:

> *...I am from a very strong, large and devout 2nd generation Irish Catholic family. I knew it would upset them...* (Survey 268 female solicitor married converted 1990 aged 34)

...My grandmother was a devout Catholic and was very hurt at the time...
(Survey 297 female married converted 1983 aged 27)

This suggests that there might be a greater degree of home and family religious involvement in active Roman Catholic homes than in Anglican homes.

In both cases explored in **Tables 4.28** and **4.29**, those who came from Anglican backgrounds seemed to feel that their families were less perturbed by their child's conversion.

f) Tests on specific items of Q35 against time since conversion

I tested this general level of support against age or length of time since conversion but there were no significant results.

In general, these percentages suggest that a generally supportive family background was felt to be present by most converts. It is possible that this might be influenced by the practice of most rabbis to question candidates about their families' levels of concern and support and where this is lacking some, or even many of those candidates, never reach the Beit Din.

4.8.5. Discussion

Evidence from research on identity formation seems to indicate that, where there was strong support from the birth families, especially the mother, this would result in a stronger sense of self, which would allow expression of a new identity to flourish in a safe and supported way. The research from Forster and Tabachnik (1991) also seemed to support this thesis, but the survey results indicate little significant evidence to support this hypothesis.

It is interesting that the three variables that were formulated in an almost aggressively negative form did affect the Jewish life that the convert adopted, though usually in a positive fashion. In particular:-

- '*They were worried they'd be excluded from my life'*
- '*They ostracised me'*
- '*They were angry at the idea that I needed to convert to satisfy the wishes of my partner or his/her family'*

attracted the statistically significant results.

This may be a reflection of the theory of negativity bias which maintains that humans pay more attention to negative vibes or details than to positive ones (Rozin and Royzman, 2001). It may also be an example of the theory of cognitive dissonance: having been forced into a positive appreciation of Judaism through the negative reactions of their own families, the converts now value Judaism all the more.

It is, however, possible that having accepted higher levels of ritual practice or ethnicity into their new lives, the converts then felt the unhappiness of their families grow. Certainly, qualitative evidence does exist of converts being worried that in some way, they had hurt their families. As one respondent wrote:

> *...My only regret is that I possibly caused my parents some hurt although they never said so. I find it very difficult to discuss my conversion and Jewish life with them...* (Survey 167, female engaged, converted 2000 aged 25)

Other qualitative evidence does exist for the real appreciation of the support some converts reported having enjoyed from their birth families. It may be that there were insufficient measures in this survey to really address this issue.

4.9. Conclusion

It is clear from the data that previous religious experiences were salient to many of the candidates for conversion, just as their birth families and their early experiences were important to those who had changed their identity through adoption. In particular, it emerges from the qualitative data that previous religious experience predisposed many applicants to apply for conversion or influenced their present Jewish identity. It is also clear that when the birth families reactions are very negative, this also affects the converts.

For this reason, extensive use has been made of this material in this and in other sections of the thesis, but unfortunately, the significant results posted do not provide much, if any, guidance as to how to improve the conversion process for the candidates who come forward for conversion.

It has to be recognised though that the sensitivities of the measures used in the Survey to classify religious background may be too limited to reveal possible determining factors; when examined, few statistically significant results were discovered, and no coherent pattern of effects emerges, though there seems to be some limited effect on motivation and current Jewish practice of those who had previously been Roman Catholics.

The important subject of motivation will be examined more thoroughly in Chapter 6 (pp.184 - 241).

5. THE PARTNERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

5.1. Introduction

There are a total of 4,970 converts recorded in the ledgers 1953-2002. 4,270 of the converts were engaged or married when they came to the Beit Din. In 3,322 of the cases, the ledgers record the synagogal affiliation of the partner's family. **Table 5.1** shows the distribution of that affiliation across the various synagogue groupings. **Table 5.2** shows how this has changed over the years.

While this demonstrates that the majority of converts had Jewish partners – i.e. 3317 of the 4270 who were married or engaged at the time of application – the percentage cannot be stated precisely as the Beit Din did not record other possible religious affiliations of the in-laws:14% of the answers concerning status were missing while 19% of the total sample stated 'not applicable'[12].

Table 5.1. Synagogue affiliation of the parents of the Jewish partner

Synagogue Movement	**#**	**%**
Orthodox	2,326	70
Reform	719	22
Abroad	246	7
Liberal	22	0.7
Masorti	5	0.2
Other	4	0.1
Total	**3,322**	**100**

Source: Ledgers 1953-2002

Note: Missing values have been omitted.

Table 5.2. Synagogue affiliation of parents of Jewish partners by year of conversion

	1953-62		**1963-72**		**1973-82**		**1983-92**		**1993-2002**		**All years**	
	#	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Orthodox	63	89%	702	81%	622	71%	533	65%	405	59%	2325	70%
Reform, Liberal & Masorti	7	10%	150	17%	215	25%	210	26%	164	24%	746	22%
Abroad	1	1%	13	2%	35	4%	78	10%	119	17%	246	7%
All	**7**	**100%**	**865**	**100%**	**872**	**100%**	**821**	**100%**	**688**	**100%**	**3317**	**100%**

Source: Ledgers 1953-2002

Note: Missing values and those classified as 'other' have been omitted. From 1953-1962, synagogue affiliation of parents of Jewish partners was rarely recorded.

[12] From the interviews and notes on the Application Forms, it can be seen that some candidates felt this question was irrelevant to them because their in-laws were dead, or they lived abroad, or that they played no part in their lives. In some cases, the converts were married to each other, or were married to non-Jews, so had no Jewish partners.

The question of how many converts had a Jewish partner at the time of conversion is directly addressed in the survey, in Q58, the results of which are shown in **Table 5.3.**

Table 5.3. Religious affiliation of the converts' partners by when conversion first considered

Status	#	%
Married to Jew	96	27
Engaged or serious relationship with Jew	186	52
Married or serious relationship with non-Jew	22	6
Single, without partner	55	15
Total	**359**	**100**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: Missing values have been omitted.

Thus, at the point of starting the conversion process, 79% of the respondents had Jewish partners, 6% had non-Jewish partners and 15% were single. These data are broken down slightly differently in **Table 5.3a**.

Table 5.3a. Religious affiliation of all partners to date

Status	#	%
Only Jewish partners	206	60
Only non-Jewish partners	34	10
At least one Jewish and one non-Jewish partner	94	28
Always single	8	2
Total	342	100

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: Missing values have been omitted.

This reveals that 88% (300 people) of those whose partners' religious affiliation is known have, at some time, had a Jewish partner.

Thus one can see that the overwhelming majority of those seeking conversion did so with Jewish partners and Jewish in-laws. The high proportion of such relationships makes it very important that we explore what Jewish characteristics the Jewish partners brought to the conversion process and what possible influences they may have brought to bear on the converts themselves.

5.2. The Jewish families

5.2.1. Synagogue affiliation

The proportion of the Jewish partner's families with an affiliation to an Orthodox background has decreased steadily over the years while the proportion of those with an affiliation to a Reform

synagogue has increased. (As there were so few who recorded that their in-laws belonged to a Masorati synagogue (5 cases) or to a Liberal synagogue (22 cases), these have been subsumed under the Reform category as they share a similar philosophy). Part of this increase is explained by the underlying growth in the Reform Movement relative to the centrist Orthodox movement in the same period.[13] However this effect alone is not sufficient to explain the entire shift. It is also possibly influenced by those who grew up in a Reform synagogue seeking the conversion of their non-Jewish partner through their own community. Or there may be theological reasons at work.

Rabbi Curtis, who was clerk to the Reform Beit Din for over 25 years, took the latter view:

> *...The Jewish partner, when confronted with the problem of a mixed marriage, is forced to examine his own attitude to religion. He then discovers that his views are not in accordance with orthodox Judaism and quite rightfully he applies to us...* (Annual Report of the Reform Beit Din, 1962, p.4)

It must also be noted, however, that, just because the parents of the partner are members of a Reform synagogue when the application comes before the Beit Din this does not mean that that was their long term affiliation. From the application forms, it can be deduced that some switched membership to support their child in the process of their partner's conversion.

It could also be argued that, as more converts enter the Reform Synagogue movement in each successive decade, and if we assume that children of converts are more likely to choose non-Jewish partners than children of born Jews, then the increasing proportion of applicants with Reform Synagogue (rather than Orthodox synagogue) parents-in-law (or potential parents-in-law) follows automatically. This could be the basis of a later specific study. The respondents to this study were not asked about their partner's parents' Jewish history so this hypothesis cannot be tested here.

The other marked increase is in the proportion of those who recorded their in-laws as belonging to synagogues abroad. Included in this category are those who just answered 'Israel' but who might not actually be members of a synagogue there. This increase has come about because of the growth of Progressive Judaism in Israel and Europe, especially since the demise of Communism. As new Batei Din have been established on the continent, this percentage will now probably fall.

These trends in the changing proportions of synagogue affiliation are statistically reliable ($p \leq 0.001$) but it must also be stated that the information given in the Ledgers is limited, especially in the earlier period, which may influence its accuracy.

[13] I tried to ascertain figures from the Board of Deputies to quantify this suggested trend, but comparative figures were not available.

5.2.2. Why synagogue affiliation is not a useful measure

It must be recognised that belonging to an orthodox congregation does not mean experiencing an orthodox upbringing. The complexities and the different shades of orthodoxy can be seen quite clearly in the accounts given by Andrew, Fybush and Gabby. Andrew describes the nominal orthodoxy in his family home:

> *...Chanukah didn't exist. Christmas did...You know, you were dragged along to synagogue for High Holidays...They thought, oh blimey, we'd better get him Bar Mitzvahed. Orthodox. I just learnt it parrot fashion...Seder night we always went to a particular relative, it seems he was the one who could read Hebrew. My father could but he couldn't hold a service and my mother couldn't cook the meal so it was always at the same relative until he died and then it stopped...as there was no input at home, I barely learnt to read... after granddad died, that was the end of it...Yes candles, maybe she did do candles...Other than that, nothing. But I was always brought up on the basis that because you're orthodox they can't kick you out the club and you can do what you like...* (Andrew, married to Angela who converted 1981, p.1)

Do note the almost tribal feeling the family exhibited in their feeling that belonging to an Orthodox synagogue was their right, no matter that they observed Christmas, no matter that they had not provided their son with even a rudimentary Jewish education. A really good example of a family that had Jewish institutional links but whose real connection to Judaism was based on ethnicity.

Andrew continued, '*it really didn't become an issue until I eventually, quite late really, began making plans to get married.*' Then, he noted, Orthodox values concerning intermarriage surfaced. Orthodox obligations towards *mitzvot* were not his family's concern, but marrying someone who was not of the 'tribe' was definitely an issue for his parents.

Angela, Andrew's wife, made a very perceptive comment regarding her husband's upbringing:

> ...*In lots of cases the husbands are not that involved obviously, that is why they have married somebody who isn't Jewish. The fact that they have married you in the first place means that they weren't looking for a – whatever....* (Angela, converted 1981 aged 31, married to Andrew, p.14)

Angela had realised that her husband was not actually looking for someone who would be an observant Jewess, otherwise he would have married someone who was Jewish and who was practising. She understood that for Andrew, marrying her was a possible way out of being actively Jewish.

Fybush describes his upbringing as secular, almost anti-religious. His parents did not belong to a synagogue, and yet was his actual upbringing that different to Andrew's? He talked in positive,

even glowing terms, of the family memories of the olden Orthodox days and family ritual heirlooms which he later rescued and brought to his home after his parents' death. They went to synagogue at the High Holy Days, as did Andrew. The main difference seems to be that Fybush felt comfortable with that upbringing and there was no sudden swing to 'Orthodox' values when intermarriage was in the offing. Secular? Yes. But with a touch of Jewish ritual and memories always present, an identity based on ethnic values.

> *...I suppose the major thing in my life has always been tension between religious and secular. Both my parents were from ultra-orthodox backgrounds, Chassidic. But they both turned their backs on it, utterly, a long time before I was born. And I think they were both of the Zionist faith probably...So I grew up in a totally secular environment. But with very strong echoes of the orthodox. Really totally secular, no candles, no* Kiddush *on* Erev Shabbat*, nothing at all. Synagogue, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur maybe, and of course with not having grown into it at all, not having a clue as to what was going on. So it wasn't a part of day to day life at all. But, the echoes were there…* (Fybush, married to Fay who converted 1987 aged 28 p1)

There were also those who described unhappy memories of what seemed to them, a strictly Orthodox upbringing, but turned out to be, in their eyes, a deception, and even gross hypocrisy. Gabby describes her resentment at having been brought up in a strictly Orthodox home in the north of England, especially when the cracks and inconsistencies of belief and rituals later appeared:

> *...I was very resentful as a child, I remember all the duff parts of Judaism and never the nice bits. I was never allowed out on* Shabbas*, as we called it, I was...not allowed out on my bike, or draw or colour, or do anything that my friends were doing. It was perfectly alright for my mother to get in the car and go out on a Saturday afternoon or go to the library in the car or to the country for tea. It wasn't until I got older that I got very, very resentful. There was obviously one rule for one and one rule for the other, and then I saw my mother was doing a crossword puzzle as well and then she would smoke. When you are a child you just take this as rules of the house but then obviously as I got older I began to think "hang on a moment" and so I began to withdraw more and more. I was almost ashamed of being Jewish. I didn't want to tell my friends. We took every festival, we had everything that was there, there was two days for this and two days for that – I mean the winter term was just a write-off for me...* (Gabby, married to Guy who converted in 1993 aged 36, p.13)

Gabby knows about Orthodoxy; she knows how to conduct a strictly Orthodox home. She had

been brought up to believe that this was the religious outlook of her parents and she describes the enormous shock it was to her to find out that they had, as she saw it, been 'cheating' behind her back. Her memories of her childhood were full of constraints, hemmed in by *mitzvot*. Her parents, she recalls, had even used the prayers as a means of punishment, and then suddenly, in her mid-teens she realised that maybe things could have been different. Her parents were Orthodox, in her estimation, extremely so, part of the Gateshead Orthodox conglomeration, known throughout the Anglo-Jewish world for its adherence to strict observance, but, as it turned out, only at home. They would have described their synagogue affiliation as strictly orthodox, but what does that really mean when they ate lobster on holiday?

These three very different examples demonstrate the inadequacy of formal denominational membership as a proxy measure of the reality of the Jewish partner's religious experience and background.

5.3. The impact of the Jewish family's level of observance on conversion outcomes

5.3.1. Background and hypotheses

In many different fields of study, such as smoking (Flay et al, 1994) or drinking or anti-social behaviour (Barnow, Ulrich Ines, Grave, Freyberger, & Spitzer, 2007), or indeed general emotional, social and moral development (Sharpe, 2003), there has been widespread acknowledgement that the most important relationship is between parental behaviour and the behaviour of their offspring. This transmission of behaviour can, of course, also be mediated by genetic predispositions and by environmental factors.

Obviously, in relation to converts, here we are talking about an influence from one set of parents to the child of another set of parents mediated through the expectations, experiences and behaviour of the Jewish partner, or perhaps directly from the partner's parents to the convert. But, it is reasonable to suppose that the Jewish family's level of religiosity may also have a significant effect on the decisions and attitudes of the convert.

Indeed, Mayer postulated that the religiosity of the Jewish family and Jewish spouse was an added factor in the convert's decision to convert. He concluded:

> *...Converts tend to have very or moderately religiously orientated in-laws (66% father-in-laws, 60% mother-in-laws) and spouses (67%)...* (Mayer, 1987, p.76)

While again it must be stressed that the present research cannot bear on the factors that lead a person to make the decision to convert, for our study only concerns those who have already made that decision, still, this study can go some way towards confirming Mayer's findings in a more indirect way – that is by testing whether among converts the strength of religious

commitment of the partner and his/her family affects the motivation and the behaviour of the convert. Hence it can be argued that there is an influence on the decision to convert (not measured here) and on the features of the conversion and later Jewish life (which is assessed in this study).

It seems from the respondents' point of view, that they perceived that 76-79% of their partners' families kept some rituals (e.g. Seder), and that the larger proportion were fairly observant and traditional (e.g. kept *Kashrut*), but did not keep all the Sabbath laws. They had also observed that 2-7% were, in their eyes, strictly Orthodox.

However, it must also be remembered that Schmool and Miller indicate that, even though family religiosity is the largest and most potent factor in predicting the future involvement in Jewish life of the children when adults, it still only accounts for around 20% of the variance in that behaviour.

> *...To evaluate the impact of background factors on adult involvement in a more precise way, an index of involvement was constructed based on twelve different measures. How the background factors impact on involvement can then be assessed. The analysis shows that only about 20 per cent of the variation in Jewish behaviour can be predicted from background factors* [including Jewish education and involvement in Youth Groups] *and that by far the most important factor is parental religiosity...* (Schmool and Miller, 1994)

These findings can be seen in **Figure 5.1.** below, taken from their research.

The differing reactions voiced in the interviews also made me wonder whether there was an optimal level of observance in the Jewish family for the purposes of welcoming and supporting the convert. It seemed to me that very secular families would not be supportive of the process because institutionalised Judaism did not mean very much to them, while very observant families might withhold support in order to try to break the relationship.

This lack of support from very traditional families was identified as a major problem by Natalie, a widow of 54 with two children, who had married someone from a very traditional home. Indeed, she recalled that when the engagement was announced...

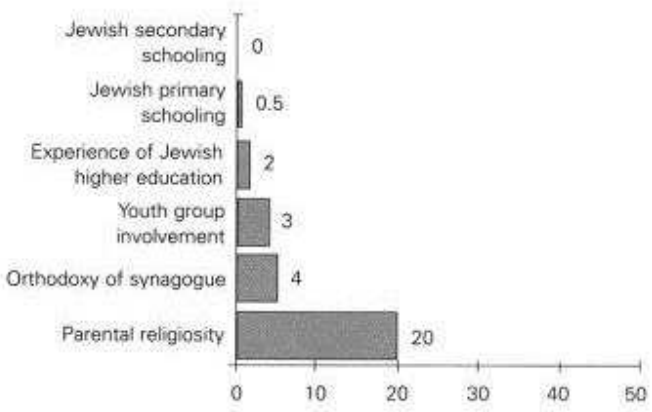
> *...My boyfriend's father...decided that he would go through this ritual ceremony like a funeral and disown his son and it got pretty heavy...* (Natalie, widow, converted 1966 aged 20 p2)

She suggested that while she had been seeking a way into Judaism, her husband (as Angela had also noted) had been seeking a way out and that as they lived in a non-Jewish area and had no backing at all from her husband's family, she felt as if she lived '*in a no-man's land*'.

After her children were born, she contacted her father-in-law, by this time a widower, and managed to make a tenuous connection between him and the grandchildren, but...

> *...he kept us at arms' length from the rest of my husband's family, so we were never invited to any social gathering; we were never invited to any weddings or anything that went on in the home...* (Natalie, widow, converted 1966 aged 20 p3)

Figure 5.1. The extent to which Schmool and Miller found that various social factors can predict later involvement in Jewish life



Source: Schmool and Miller (1994)

While it seemed important to examine the relationship between the level of family religiosity as perceived by the converts and the outcomes of the process, it had to be remembered that these relationships may be quite weak. Given the fairly small proportion that this factor accounts for in the variation in involvement in Jewish life, as reported by Schmool and Miller, and by extension, religious background, second hand, as it were (from the partner's family) may have even more limited effects on the outcomes of the conversion process.

5.3.2. Measures used: Family religiosity and outcome variables

a) The independent variables: Family religiosity

As has been demonstrated elsewhere, (Schmool and Miller, 1994, p.16)[14] Orthodox synagogual affiliation covers an enormous range of behaviours from the near secular to the strictly observant – and from the religiously consistent to the inconsistent mixture of Orthodox and secular practices. Hence synagogue denomination was NOT used in the Survey to capture the level of observance of the Jewish partner's family. Instead, the

[14] '*Formal synagogue affiliation gives only an approximate guide to a person's level of religious observance. Some members of the Orthodox synagogues, particularly those whose attachment is mainly emotional or historical rather than religious, may observe very few rituals, while some who belong to Masorti or Reform synagogues observe many of the key practices.*'

Survey sought to capture the differing levels of observance displayed by the Jewish families with a five-point scale.

These special measures have not been used in previous surveys of the Jewish community: they were devised for this purpose, as it is possible that some of the families involved in this research may not have regarded themselves as Jewish, whereas in previous surveys (JPR, 1996 and Schmool and Miller, 1994) a degree of Jewish identification was required as an entry criterion for the respondents. In addition, it was felt that this measure, which describes in greater detail the possible levels of observance, was more appropriate for an observer (in this case: the proselyte) to access rather than asking them to use labels that could be misleading.

It does mean that this measure's reliability cannot be derived from earlier surveys, nor is it eligible for split-half verification, but its reliability can be inferred from the observations below which show that this measure is significantly correlated with other measures (e.g. the results shown in **Figure 5.2** on the relationship between this variable and measures of early and late family support).

It must also be stressed that the data defining Jewish partner's family's religiosity when conversion was first mooted are based on the personal perceptions that respondents remembered of their partner's family in what now may be some years later. In addition, it is not measured against any independent criteria. Each respondent may have judged how observant the family was against very different expectations and experiences of Judaism.

The converts' perceptions were recorded at two different points in the conversion process, allowing for an examination of the background of new partnerships that may have emerged since the conversion. This is shown in **Table 5.4**.

Table 5.4. Perceived level of Jewish family's religious observance at two points of capture

Level of observance as categorised by convert	When the convert first met their partner (Q 44)		Current partner's Jewish background (Q 53)	
	#	%	#	%
Highly assimilated	8	3	2	2
Non-observant	42	14	23	17
Kept some rituals	107	36	51	37
Fairly observant	115	40	58	42
Strictly Orthodox	20	7	3	2
Total	**292**	**100**	**137**	**100**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: Those marked as missing or non-relevant have been excluded.

These data present a fairly consistent picture of the religious life of the Jewish in-laws encountered by the majority of converts. It is what might be called a centrist approach, leaning towards a lifestyle that is fairly non-observant of the more demanding rituals of Shabbat but with a weak majority of this centrist group observing at least some elements of *kashrut*. This seems to be of similar proportions to the general community as described in

the report on Women in the Jewish Community, where Schmool and Miller report that:

> *...40% of the respondents assigned themselves to the category "traditional, not strictly Orthodox", indicating a leaning towards Orthodoxy but without full observance...Women who see themselves as "Progressive" or "Just Jewish" form the largest sub-group of the sample (43%) and are probably the largest grouping in the community as a whole...* (Schmool and Miller, 1994, pp.18-20)

In order to examine the influence of the Jewish partner's family on attitudes and conduct, I have used the data from Q44, since this was the first, and arguably the more salient, influence on the proselyte, when the process of conversion was undertaken and the new pattern of life as a Jew was being established.

b) The dependent variables

There were five dependent variables in this analysis: motivation, the contentment index, ritual behaviour, ethnicity factor analysis, and specially constructed variables measuring early and late family support. These are described in more detail below.

1. Motivation

Three factors contributed to motivation:

i) Intrinsic,

ii) Pressure exerted by the Jewish family, and

iii) The desire to create a united Jewish family.

These three measures were derived by factor analysis described more fully in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-3)

2. Contentment index

The Contentment Index measures the converts' current feelings towards the conversion, described more fully in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3.1, p.66).

3. Ritual behaviour

There were two items under this heading:

i) Ritual observance factor, described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2 pp.60-7), and

ii) Specific items allowing a more detailed exploration of ritual behaviour. This

allowed the capture of certain specific ritual behaviours that, on the basis of years of congregational experience, seemed to me to be most important.

These were measured on a Likert scale that varied according to the ritual behaviour being measured. For those rituals connected with everyday life, a three-point Likert scale was employed marked 'Always', 'Sometimes' or 'Never'. For those rituals connected to the annual cycle of festivals a four-point scale was used from 'Every Year' to 'Never'. These items correspond to Q24 to Q28 in the Survey. The reliability of these measures has been demonstrated in previous studies (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996).

Q25 was not used in this series of tests as it measures a theological response rather than a ritual action.

Table 5.5. Early family support

Measure: Strength of family support		**%**	**#**
0	Horror (plus rejection)	10.7	39
1	Horror	0.5	2
2	Disappointment (plus rejection)	4.4	16
3	Disappointment	1.9	7
3.5	Disappointment/reluctant acceptance	9.0	33
4	Reluctant acceptance (plus rejection)	4.9	18
5	Reluctant acceptance	7.9	29
6	Fairly positive	13.4	49
7	Welcoming, supportive	28.1	103
-	Missing	19.1	70
Total		**100**	**366**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 5.6. Late family support

Measure: Strength of family support		**%**	**#**
0	Horror (plus rejection)	0.5	2
1	Horror	0	0
2	Disappointment (plus rejection)	0.5	2
3	Disappointment	0.3	1
3.5	Disappointment/reluctant acceptance	8.2	30
4	Reluctant acceptance (plus rejection)	2.2	8
5	Reluctant acceptance	4.1	15
6	Fairly positive	13.1	48
7	Welcoming, supportive	52.2	191
-	Missing	18.9	69
Total		**100**	**366**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

4. Ethnicity

This variable used the ethnicity factor analysis described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3, pp.75-81)

5. Early and late family support

These were specially constructed variables measuring early and late family support, that can be both an independent and a dependent variable, depending on circumstances. In the following it is employed as a dependent variable to see the relationship between family religiosity and family support. A full description of how these were constructed can be found in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3.1, p.66).

The absolute results showing the numbers and proportions of each of these variables can be seen in the following **Tables 5.5** and **5.6**. Do note that some respondents added an extra level (3.5) to fully express their experiences.

These results clearly show a shift towards a greater acceptance of the proselyte into the Jewish family as the conversion proceeded.

For ease of analysis, levels 0 and 1 were amalgamated and 3.5 was subsumed into level 3.

5.3.3. Results

5.3.3.1. Comparing religiosity of Jewish family to outcome measures

Table 5.7 below shows the relationship between levels of religiosity of the Jewish families and the eight outcome measures. The statistically significant results are marked in **bold.**

From this it can be seen that the more observant the Jewish in-laws, the stronger the level of ritual observed by the convert. However, converts who assessed their in-laws as highly assimilated are exceptions to this general trend. This suggests that the underlying relationship between perceived religiosity and ritual practice may be described by a U-shaped curve.

Examining ritual behavior in a more forensic way, the U-shaped curve seen in **Table 5.7** would normally militate against a linear relationship, but I felt that, given the importance of these variables, it was still valuable to carry out the correlation to test whether this was significant.

Table 5.8 shows the correlation between perceived parental religiosity and ritual performance on nine specific ritual behaviours.

These results demonstrate a strong relationship both in 'demanding' observances (such as maintaining *kashrut*) and 'light' observances (such as placing a *mezuzah* on their doors), but also demonstrates the lack of statistical relationship with Shabbat home observances.

Table 5.7. Means of motivation, outcome and parental support/pressure measures by levels of religiosity of Jewish family

Dependent variables	LEVEL OF RELIGIOSITY					
	Highly assimilated	**Non-observant**	**Kept some rituals**	**Fairly observant**	**Strictly Orthodox**	**Significance level p**
MOTIVATION						
Conversion out of Intrinsic motivation	4.89	5.07	4.69	4.81	4.77	0.303
Conversion because of Jewish family pressure	4.63	4.72	4.28	5.04	5.19	0.378
Conversion because seeking family unity	4.51	5.17	5.24	5.28	5.58	0.092
CONTENTMENT (contentment index)	22.5	21.58	21.07	21.98	21.56	0.304
RITUAL PRACTICE	**5.23**	**4.63**	**4.73**	**5.23**	**5.47**	**0.002**
ETHNIC BELONGING (ethnic behaviour)	5.51	4.11	4.77	4.85	4.72	0.435
PERCEIVED JEWISH FAMILY SUPPORT						
Early family support	**4.57**	**5.33**	**5.31**	**4.42**	**2.36**	**≤ 0.001**
Late family support	**5.69**	**6.18**	**6.40**	**6.31**	**5.31**	**≤ 0.001**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 5.8. Correlation between Jewish family religiosity and current ritual practice

Ritual practice	Correlation coefficient r	Significance level p
Maintain *kashrut*	**0.295**	**< 0.001**
Have a *mezuzah* on some doors	**0.279**	**< 0.001**
Fasting on Yom Kippur	**0.191**	**0.001**
Attending a Seder	**0.183**	**0.002**
Refraining from work on Rosh Hashanah	**0.171**	**0.004**
Partners attending Shabbat services	**0.170**	**0.006**
Proselyte attending Shabbat services	**0.125**	**0.035**
Home Friday night for religious purposes	0.075	0.208
Lighting candles Friday night	0.039	0.511

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: Only those with Jewish partners were included in this analysis.

5.3.3.2. Comparing religiosity of Jewish family to family support

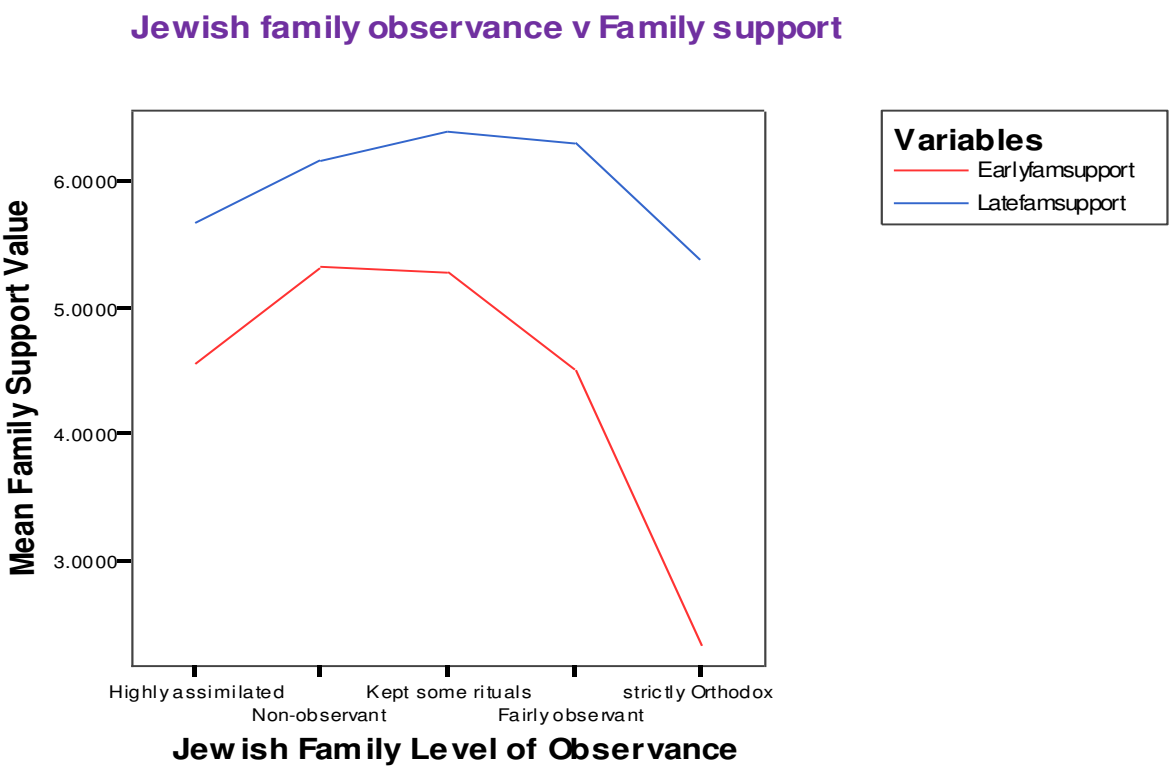
Figure 5.2 gives a graphic representation of the early and late family support data in **Table 5.7**, relating the religiosity of the Jewish family to the level of early and late family support.

5.3.4. Discussion

5.3.4.1. Influence of family religiosity on motivation, ethnicity and contentment

From these results, it is clear that the religiosity of the Jewish family has no influence on motivation of prospective converts, at least when both attributes are assessed retrospectively. It seems that this religiosity also has no discernible relationship to their contentment with the general outcomes of the conversion, nor the attitudes of the convert to their adopted ethnicity. This is perhaps not surprising since the proselytes' reasons for conversion and subsequent satisfaction and feelings about their own identity seem more likely to be driven by their personal characteristics and/or the character of the Jewish environment generally. Any impact of the in-laws' religious style might be expected to be swamped by these more general and often more recent influences.

Figure 5.2. Relationship between religiosity of the Jewish family by family support



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

5.3.4.2. Influence of family religiosity on ritual observance

There does appear to be a statistically reliable relationship between the religiosity of the family and the current ritual behaviour of the converts, which seems to be consistent with other research on the influences of parental behaviour on the future actions of children (Schmool and Miller, 1994, p.117).

The rituals that are most sensitive to the partner's family religiosity are the placing of *mezzuzot* on doorposts and the observance of *kashrut*, presumably because these rituals would be the most important/obvious to a visiting, moderately observant, Jewish family; they would enable the Jewish family to eat freely in the household and appreciate the visible signs of Jewishness on entry to the proselyte's home.

It was also noted above that, according to the perceptions of the converts, between 44% and 47% of the partners' families kept some level of *kashrut*. Miller and Schmool (1994, p.108) talk about a '*desire to maintain ethnic identification by means of home-based practices.*' Fasting on Yom Kippur, attending a Seder and refraining from work on Rosh Hashanah are typical of the observances found amongst moderately observant Jewish families, and are consistent with previous findings of patterns of religious behaviour. (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996) However, the weak but significant correlation between the level of ritual observance in the partner's family and the synagogue attendance of the convert and her partner are not totally consistent with the patterns observed by Miller and Schmool.

More generally, the rank order of the strength of the correlations (with the exception of levels of *kashrut* observed in the home) corresponds to the level of inconvenience attached to the performance of the rituals concerned. This mimics the ordering with which religious rituals survive assimilation in the born Jewish community. The proselytes are probably copying those *mitzvot* they have observed in their Jewish partner's family and their Jewish partner is probably supporting the observance of those *mitzvot* remembered from his childhood. (C.f. Miller, 1994, who noted, '*Practices that interfere least with daily life and participation in general community are most resistant to erosion, those that do affect daily life are more frequently sacrificed*').

A possible explanation for the weak level of most of the relationships may be that observant families are best able to set the standards, but as was shown above, were most likely to be discouraging in the early stages of the conversion. The correlation therefore represents the combined effect of these two contradictory influences. (I.e. Family impact may be muted by the lack of effort and/or resentment on the part of the convert, but enhanced by the more observant norms to which the proselyte is exposed. The Survey data is not rich enough to test this hypothesis).

However, the general pattern of correlations that emerge is generally consistent with the hypothesis that the partner's family background influences the level of observance of rituals in the convert's subsequent family life, though it is interesting to note that the group that come from highly assimilated backgrounds buck this trend. This could reflect that the Jewish partner

can more easily recover their Jewish practice from a background which is consistently not observant than from one that pays lip service to tradition but is fundamentally inconsistent in its practice. We have seen above from Gabby's testimonial how such inconsistent behaviour can actually set up a degree of hostility towards Judaism in the children of such families. It is also possible that a Jew coming from such an assimilated background is demonstrating an independent wish to become more traditional in encouraging their partner to seek conversion, and it is this wish of the assimilated Jewish partner to learn and practice more that is captured in this data.

5.3.4.3. Relationship between Jewish family religiosity and the perceived level of family support

In terms of the support given by the Jewish family to the conversion process, the more Orthodox families had initially strong negative reactions and provided very little support, maybe because they hoped to stop the relationship. However, their level of support increases markedly later in the process. Presumably this reflects a change of tactic in these families once it is clear that the relationship is unlikely to be terminated.

The middle of the road families were felt to offer more consistent support than either of the extremes.

The more assimilated Jewish families were perceived as giving more support at the beginning of the process than the highly observant as, presumably, they felt less threatened by the thought of a non-Jew joining the family. At the same time, they did not give as much support as the moderately involved, presumably because, for many, conversion was seen as an unnecessary step to take. For many assimilated families a non-Jewish spouse for their child would probably be as welcome, and in some cases possibly even more welcome, than someone who wished to convert to Judaism. However, such enthusiasm for Judaism could also be seen as a threat to their assimilated way of life.

Thus it can be seen that the general level of the Jewish family's religiosity can have a profound influence on the amount of support they will give to the conversion and, to a lesser extent, on the level of ritual observance adopted by the new Jew.

The U-shaped function represents the combined effects of two underlying trends:-

1) The more religious the parents, the greater the desire and capacity to help to create Jewish family life for their child and his/her partner; but

2) The more religious the greater the resistance to accepting the relationship.

The conjunction of these two opposing trends creates the U-shaped curve, with the optimal position being in the middle of the religiosity scale where there is enough observance to enable

and fuel support but insufficient observance to be implacably opposed to the relationship.

Superimposed on the above trends it is unsurprising that perceived support increases at later stages of the conversion process for all categories of parental religiosity. This simply reflects the waning (in all groups) of some of the resistance to accepting the relationship.

5.4. The impact of Jewish family's perceived level of support on outcomes of the conversion process

5.4.1. Background and hypotheses

5.4.1.1. Effect of the Jewish family's attitude on the decision to convert

Fishman's research noted that:

> *...[While] far greater numbers study Judaism than ultimately convert to Judaism. In looking at the differences between those who do and do not decide to convert, one finds three factors to be of greatest importance: (1) the Jewish spouse, (2) the mentoring rabbi and (3) the supportive Jewish family, each advocating on behalf of conversion...* (Fishman, 2006, p.14)

It is, of course, impossible within this study to support this hypothesis as the Survey can only draw on evidence after conversion has taken place. Nevertheless, noting the emphasis she placed on the presence of a supportive family, it is logical to suppose, and therefore to check, whether such support has a longer term effect.

In the qualitative material, perhaps following the theory of the dominant nature of a negative bias,[15] positive comments on the family's continuous active support are somewhat infrequent, but we can see some support for Fishman's theory.

Olive, who converted in 1948, was one of the few who reported such positive support. She remembered that her husband's family were...

> *...very, very pleased indeed. I went every Friday night there for dinner even beforehand. I always went to see my mum-in-law, though she wasn't my mother then. No, we went every Friday night for dinner...* (Olive, widow, converted 1948 aged 24 p3)

But, within the limitations of this survey, it is important to explore some aspects of Fishman's hypothesis.

[15] (Marano, 2003) wrote: '*Your brain is simply built with a greater sensitivity to unpleasant news*'.

5.4.1.2. Attitude of the Jewish family to the Reform Movement

At the present time, Reform Jews constitute about 17% or 18% of the total British Jewish community. Current 'street' knowledge suggests that there is a degree of either actual hostility towards the Reform Movement by Orthodox Jews or, at the very least a feeling that Reform Judaism is not authentic. In Q49 we enquired as to the attitude of the Jewish partner to Reform Judaism, the mediator of the conversion process. Although a large proportion of the Jewish partners were brought up in homes affiliated with Orthodox synagogues, 92% approached the conversion with a positive attitude towards Reform Judaism.

This positive attitude may have been influenced by the 'street knowledge' that conversions are very difficult, if not impossible, through Orthodox synagogues.

5.4.1.3. Effect of family support during or post-conversion

The level of support from the Jewish family, both before and after conversion, was mentioned as a very important issue in many of the interviews, and it was acknowledged that these relationships are extremely complex and constantly changing. Such changes made a deep impression on Angela who commented on both the positive and negative reactions that she received. She noted that while her in-laws had been thrilled at the beginning of the process, eventually they had felt threatened by her knowledge and increased level of practice.

> *...They [the family] were thrilled to bits when I came out with my piece of paper and all of a sudden his aunties and everybody saw me and I got cards saying Congratulations, Mazeltov, the whole bit, which was smashing and then nothing...suddenly I was not such good news because I had become a real pain in the proverbial. I went through the "holier than thou" syndrome and they hadn't been keeping a kosher house etc....* (Angela, married, converted 1981 aged 31, p.3)

The importance of this support can be seen also in Olive's testimony. When immediate family support ceased, through the loss of her husband after almost 30 years of marriage, this had a very negative impact on the family's Jewish life.

> [Interviewer]...And what's happened to your children? Have they retained their Jewish identity?
>
> [Olive]*...They have in a way, but they haven't married in a synagogue. My daughter's married* [not in synagogue]*, but she, everyone knows she's*

Jewish...Both boys were Bar Mitzvahed [when their father was alive]*. But they've gone their own ways now. They still have Jewish roots. I think when my husband died, we just broke up. I was very sad at the time I think and I couldn't bring myself to go to synagogue, it just wasn't the same...* (Olive, widow, converted 1948 aged 24 p4)

In addition to Fishman's work on the importance of family support, there is also evidence from studies by Layder (1993) and Burkitt (1993) that stresses the importance of social interactions when changing or modifying one's sense of self. The presence of a supportive Jewish family could provide the positive social setting that would support such a change to the converts' religious and ethnic behaviour.

Such qualitative evidence demonstrates the importance of examining the level of support the Jewish family provides to see how it may influence the convert's future Jewish life.

5.4.2. Measures used: Family support and outcome measures

5.4.2.1. Independent variables

For this analysis, the independent variables were:-

(i) The constructed variables of 'early' and 'late family support' (as described **Tables 5.5**, **5.6** and **5.7** above pp.152-4).

(ii) Separate items in Q47 exploring the Jewish family's attitudes towards the convert and the conversion.

These items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, but are summarised in **Table 5.9** using a three-point scale. They enable us to look at the support given by the families in a more forensic way.

Table 5.9. Support from the Jewish family towards the process of conversion

Partner's family…	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total #
...had little or no contact	20%	3%	77%	250
...helped me learn more about being Jewish	65%	10%	25%	259
...began to resent my enthusiasm and greater knowledge	6%	7%	87%	256
...respected me for becoming Jewish	75%	20%	5%	263
...treated me just like any other Jewish relative and did not refer to my conversion	66%	15%	19%	239
...did not think the conversion would make me a real Jew	16%	32%	52%	259

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: 'Missing' or 'not-applicable' answers are excluded from these percentages.

This indicates that, in general, the converts felt supported by the Jewish families, with 75% feeling respected by them for becoming Jewish. However, it must be noted that 16% felt that their Jewish in-laws considered the conversion process had not made them a real Jew and a further 32% were unsure about this.

5.4.2.2. Dependent variables

The dependent variables investigated were:-

1. The motivational factors, as described in Chapter 6 (Sections 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-223)

    i) Intrinsic,

    ii) Pressures exerted by the Jewish family,

    iii) Seeking a united Jewish family.

    In purely chronological terms, these motivational varaibles might be thought to preceed the family reactions to the convert, and in some cases that may indeed be true. But from the qualitative narratives it would appear that many converts had prior contact with the Jewish families before the decision to convert. Contact during the 12 to 18 month process would also have been likely to influence the motivations of the converts. In addition, given that these motivations were attributed to the decision to convert many years after the decision itself, it may well be that family relationships had an influence on the converts' descriptions of their 'original' motives to seek conversion.

2. Contentment with process

    i) The contentment index, explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3.1, p.66). This index measured contentment on a scale varying from 5 (low) to 25 (high) representing the sum of the scores on items Q17.1, Q17.4, Q17.6, Q17.7 and Q17.8.

    ii) Specific variables chosen to ennable finer discrimination of the issue. I used a variety of items found in questions 17 and18 of the Survey. These were explored using a 5-point Likert scale that was later converted to a three-point scale for ease of analysis.

3. Ritual factor, as explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2, pp.60-7).

    To achieve finer discrimination, I also used some of the individual variables found in Q24-28 of the Survey.

5. Ethnicity factor, as explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3, pp.67-74).

5.4.3. Results and discussion

5.4.3.1. Correlations between family support and outcome variables

The correlations between early and late support from the Jewish families and the outcome variables are shown in **Table 5.10** and **Figures 5.3** and **5.4**.

The only statistically significant relationship was between 'early family support' and the level of the converts' ritual behaviour ($p = 0.002$). After comparing the means of these, the following statistically significant pattern is revealed ($p = 0.014$), shown in **Figure 5.3**.

Apart from the dip at level 2 (where the family showed disappointment and they ignored the putative convert and tried to end the relationship), it would seem that the greater the negative reaction the family had to the relationship, the greater the attachment of the convert to ritual behaviour. It is possible that feeling the negativity from the Jewish in-laws prompted the convert to find solace in ritual, or adopting rituals to somehow assure the partner's family that she really wanted to become Jewish, or that only those with the strongest intrinsic commitment made it without their partner's Jewish family's support.

There was also a significant relationship between 'late family support' and ritual behaviours.

When a further test of means is correlated with 'Late family support' the following significant pattern is revealed ($p = 0.039$), shown in **Figure 5.4**.

Here, the results are fairly flat, though it is still true that those who have experienced a bad reaction from their partner's Jewish family have a slightly higher mean of ritual behaviour, but the difference between them and those who are welcoming is not as large. Maybe the emergence of later support from the more observant families has helped effect this change.

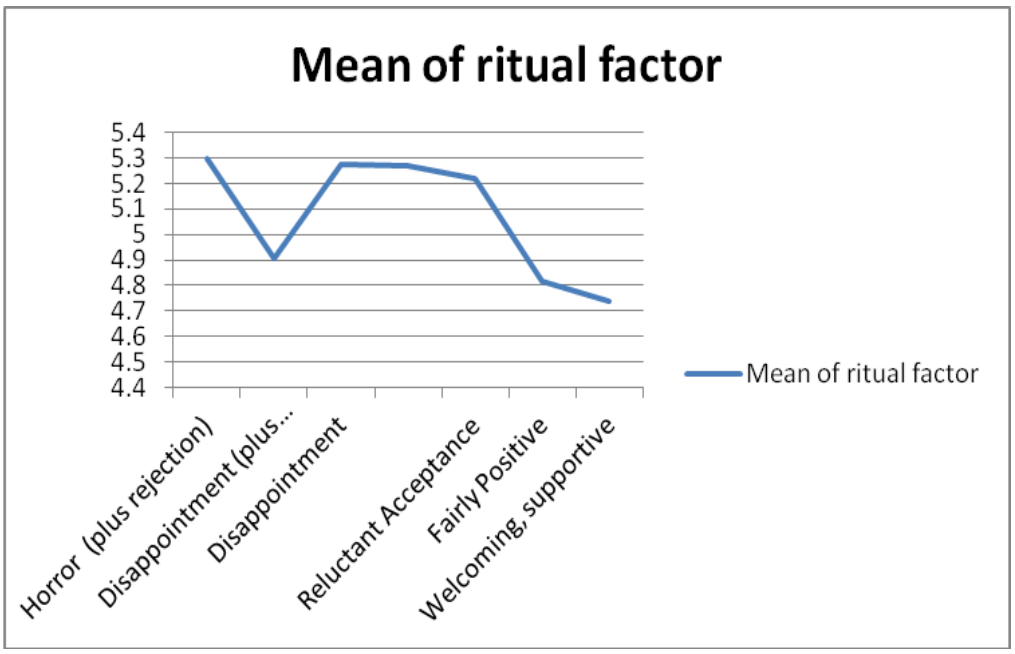
Table 5.10. Correlations between early and late family support and outcome variables

	Early family support		**Late family support**	
	Correlation coefficient r	Significance level p	Correlation coefficient r	Significance level p
Intrinsic motivation	0.092	0.114	0.003	0.963
Motivation influenced by family pressure	-0.053	0.360	-0.011	0.855
A desire for family unity	0.013	0.820	0.078	0.178
Contentment variable	-0.013	0.829	0.019	0.753
Ritual behaviour	0.202	0.002	0.104	0.012
Ethnicity	-0.027	0.677	0.114	0.110

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

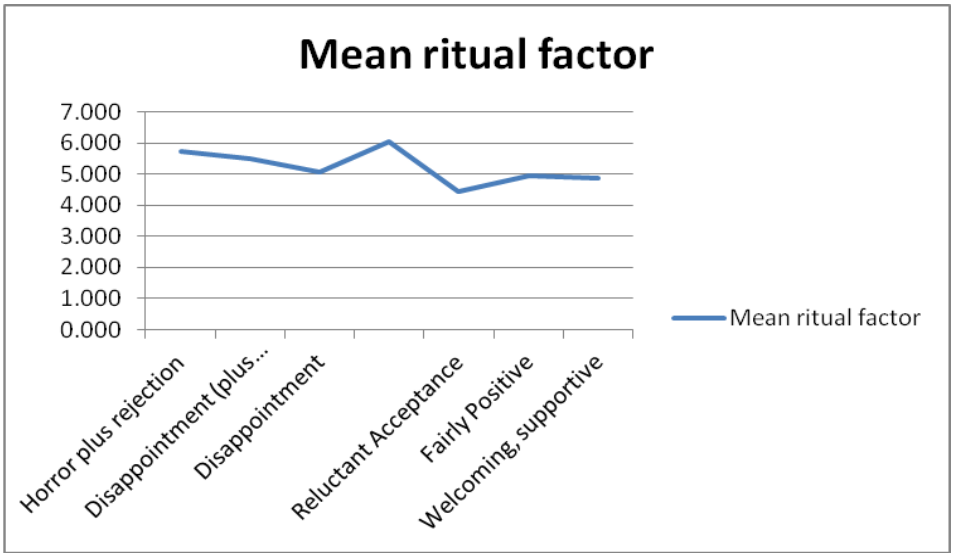
Note: 'Missing' or 'not-applicable' answers are excluded from these data.

Figure 5.3. Mean ritual factor by early family support



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Figure 5.4. Mean ritual factor by late family support



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

5.4.3.2. Correlation between early and later family support and attitudes to conversion

Using specific items in Q17 to explore the convert's attitudes to conversion, the following results were obtained, shown in **Table 5.11.**

However, none of these specific correlations showed statistical significance – not surprising as the overall correlation was also not significant.

5.4.3.3. Correlation between early and late family support and specific items from Q24-28 exemplifying a mixture of 'light' and 'demanding' rituals

As shown in **Table 5.12**, late family support correlates with a greater number of both 'light' and 'demanding' rituals than 'early family support'. These results could be affected by the fact that, those perceived by the converts as having higher levels of Jewish practice tended to add their support later in the process, adding their influence and example in performing ritual behaviour at that more advanced stage of the conversion.

It is also interesting that later support, except for the *kashrut* variable, led to higher correlations with those rituals that Schmool, Miller and Lerman regard as being more demanding, e.g. going to synagogue, stopping work on Rosh Hashanah and staying at home Friday night for religious reasons. This again indicates the importance at this later stage of those Jewish parents perceived as exemplifying a more traditional lifestyle.

Table 5.11. Correlations between early and late family support and specific items from Q17

Feelings about the conversion	**Early family support**		**Late family support**	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Q17.6 My Jewishness has given me a sense of self-fulfilment	-0.013	0.710	0.037	0.525
Q17.7 I cannot imagine not being a Jew	0.028	0.823	0.055	0.353
Q17.4 My conversion has brought strength and unity in the family	-0.088	0.638	-0.037	0.527
Q17.8 Conversion was a big mistake that caused me pain and unhappiness	0.044	0.461	0.007	0.900
Q17.1 Overall, I am pleased that I converted	0.022	0.710	0.037	0.522
Q17.2 I have faced hostility because I'm too *frum*	0.012	0.841	0.016	0.789

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: 'Missing' or 'not-applicable' answers are excluded from these correlations.

Table 5.12. Jewish in-laws' level of support by rituals (for proselytes who had a Jewish partner)

Ritual practice	Early family support		Late family support	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Q26 Maintain *kashrut*	**0.221**	**< 0.001**	**0.160**	**0.002**
Q24.5 Stopping work on Rosh Hashanah	**0.155**	**0.008**	**0.287**	**< 0.001**
Q24.2 Have a *mezuzah* on some doors	**0.154**	**0.010**	**0.196**	**< 0.001**
Q27 Proselyte attending services	0.104	0.076	0.069	0.126
Q28 Partner attending services	0.093	0.128	**0.714**	**< 0.001**
Q24.7 fasting on Yom Kippur	0.087	0.139	**0.204**	**< 0.001**
Q24.3 Attending a Seder	0.080	0.174	**0.235**	**< 0.001**
Q24.6 Lighting candles	0.078	0.184	**0.255**	**< 0.001**
Q24.1 Home Friday night for religious reasons	0.062	0.291	**0.259**	**< 0.001**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: 'Missing' or 'not-applicable' answers are excluded from these correlations

5.4.3.4. Correlation between early and late family support and specific items from Q18 exemplifying ethnicity

Table 5.13. Jewish in-laws' level of support by ethnicity

Ethnicity measures	Early family support		Late family support	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Q18.7 Feeling Jewish inside (i.e. personality, way of thinking, behaving)	0.050	0.398	0.036	0.545
Q18.6 Loyalty to my Jewish heritage	-0.017	0.776	0.112	0.059
Q18.4 A sense of attachment to Israel	0.065	0.227	0.057	0.352
Q18.5 Interest in Jewish culture (art, music, literature)	0.005	0.973	0.022	0.700
Q18.2 Involvement in Jewish home life (food customs etc)	0.059	0.317	0.027	0.649
Q18.1 A feeling of closeness to other Jews	-0.002	0.969	0.011	0.855

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: 'Missing' or 'not-applicable' answers are excluded from these correlations.

There were no significant relationships found.

5.4.3.5. Correlation between specific items in Q47 exploring the various ways by which the Jewish families might support the process and motivation and outcome measures

Table 5.14. Correlations between Q47.1 and Q47.2 and motivation and outcomes

	We had little or no contact		**They helped me learn more about being Jewish**	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Intrinsic motivation	-0.031	0.621	-0.020	0.744
Motivation influenced by family pressure	-0.047	0.455	-0.030	0.628
A desire for family unity	-0.105	0.098	**0.166**	**0.007**
Ritual behaviour	-0.011	0.178	0.090	0.192
Ethnicity	-0.012	0.860	0.001	0.901
Contentment index	**-0.130**	**0.041**	**0.191**	**0.002**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 5.15. Correlations between Q47.3 and Q47.4 and motivation and outcomes

	As time went on, they began to resent my enthusiasm and greater knowledge		**They respected me for becoming Jewish**	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Intrinsic motivation	-0.042	0.501	-0.061	0.322
Motivation influenced by family pressure	0.092	0.142	0.037	0.551
A desire for family unity	-0.113	0.070	**0.193**	**0.002**
Ritual behaviour	0.113	0.070	0.030	0.667
Ethnicity	0.043	0.530	0.070	0.307
Contentment index	-0.027	0.668	**0.226**	**< 0.001**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

In **Tables 5.14-5.16**, it can be seen that the strongest correlations are with the contentment Index. The correlations are naturally negative when the parental attitudes were expressed in the negative. The other significant correlations are between the desire to seek family unity and positive acts of family support and of helping and respecting the proselyte.

From the exploration of absolutes in Q47 tabulated in **Table 5.9**, it was shown that around half of the converts felt that their partner's Jewish family viewed the conversion process positively. The correlations between these items also indicate that the more contact and respect shown to the convert, the greater the feeling of contentment towards the whole process reported by the convert.

Table 5.16. Correlations between Q47.5 and Q47.6 and motivation and outcomes

	They treated me just like any other Jewish relative and did not make an issue of my conversion		**They did not think the conversion would make me a real Jew**	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Intrinsic motivation	-0.111	0.061	-0.008	0.895
Motivation influenced by family pressure	0.081	0.181	0.002	0.969
A desire for family unity	0.079	0.192	-0.108	0.083
Ritual behaviour	0.110	0.101	0.015	0.827
Ethnicity	0.040	0.556	0.045	0.513
Contentment index	**0.142**	**0.021**	**-0.206**	**0.001**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

The only exception is that 16% of the converts felt that their partner's family did not think that the process made them a real Jew and that a further 32% were unsure whether about their partner's families views on this issue. Moreover, 10% of respondents reported that their Jewish in-laws expressed negative views of the converts and the process (from 'reluctant acceptance' through to 'horror') even after the conversion process had begun. This feeling of insecurity was reflected in the negative correlation between this item (Q47.6) and the contentment index. This insecurity over how others viewed their new Jewish identity was referred to in both the interviews and in the comments in the survey. Thus Natalie said:

> *...He has no other grandchildren and he did enjoy seeing them even if they were only to him half-Jewish. Because no conversion in the world was going to make it the pukka item*... (Natalie, widow, converted 1966 aged 20, p.7)

And Harry, whose wife had converted to Judaism a few years before his own conversion, experienced an even deeper level of suspicion from their community. He and his wife have no Jewish family, so for them, community is the only Jewish family they have. Harry talked with sadness about the prejudice he experienced against converts taking office or becoming lay readers because, he felt, the other congregants did not see converts as true Jews.

> *...I had been talking to one of our founder members and I said "You know I had been advised to come back here and become Chairman and sort things out myself"...And he said, "Let me tell you, Harry, I don't think there's a lot of people that would want you to become Chairman." And I thought, oh no, we're not up against this. I mean, I was finding a distance opening up between our own shul and ourselves...*
>
> *...And he said, "We were a bit worried about this service-takers class." And I said "Why was that?" "Well 90% were converts." And I was saying, "Well*

> *think of Ruth, it was a good job she converted." And he said, "Well nobody's bothered." But of course. It's there...* (Harry, married to a Hetty who converted in 1987, conversion 1996 aged 61, pp.10-11)

The generally positive support reflected in the Survey seems to contradict both the commonly held views in the British Jewish community and evidence from the interviewees that would suggest that there is a wide degree of negativity expressed by Jews to those who convert. It may be that the Survey has picked up more behavioural aspects of family support (generally positive) whereas the interview data may reflect more affective and tribal attitudes which seem to be less welcoming and accepting. It is also possible that a distinction needs to be made between (i) appreciating the convert for wishing to become Jewish and (ii) not regarding the results of the process as entirely valid.

However, the demand characteristics of the interview situation and the deliberate choice of a diverse group of candidates with varying experiences, including very negative ones, meant that the interview sample was deliberately unrepresentative. This unrepresentative choice predisposes those interviewed to relate more negative experiences. It could also be that the interviewees and the respondents to the Survey felt that negative experiences were more exciting or interesting to relate.

Also, from these results, it appears that the more rigorous analysis where composite variables were employed were less successful in producing statistically significant correlations than when relationships between individual variables were explored. It seems that the reliable effects are specific to particular outcome measures and that factor scores are too blunt a measure to reflect the fine grain relationships underlying the data.

5.4.3.6. General comments

The qualitative data presents a very mixed picture with both negative and positive support from the Jewish family. However, the Survey data suggest that the family support was generally positive and that this positive response grew as the relationship became established and the conversion process undertaken. However, these expressions of positive support do not seem to have had a great impact on changing behaviour patterns of the converts.

It is important to consider the work of Layder and Birkett in this context. These writers have stressed the role of the group and society in the construction of identity, maintaining that, while the social and historical circumstances in which we live influence the construction of our personal identities, these identities can alter as these circumstances change, as they do, for example, in conversion.

Layder talks about the situated self, the '*individual's sense of identity/personality and perception of the social world as these are influenced by her or his social experience*'. And Ian Burkitt

describes identity in terms of our relationships with social reality, our '*social selves*.'

> *…everything which is unique and personal about our identity does not radiate from within the self as something pre-given or innate. Rather, the basis of human difference and individual identity is to be found within society, in the social relationships that exist between individuals...* (Layder, 1993, p.74; Burkitt, 1993, p.189)

Their work would suggest that mixing with Jewish families who support the conversion enterprise would lead to changes in the construction of the converts' Jewish identity, but our results show that this has happened only to a limited extent, especially with regard to changes in behaviour. On the other hand, it seems that the strength and the type of support the proselyte experiences from the Jewish family can make the convert feel good about themselves and their conversion.

5.5. The Jewish partner

5.5.1. The partner's Jewish educational background

A common misconception heard in communities is that those who marry partners not originally Jewish did not themselves have much formal Jewish education. This area was explored in Q52.

It was reported by the converts that a very large proportion of their partners had experienced some form of Jewish education, shown in **Table 5.17**.

Table 5.17. Jewish educational experience of converts' Jewish partners

Education	# answering "yes" to Q52	Total # of responses to Q52	% answering "yes"
Part-time classes in synagogue (*Cheder*) or private lessons	239	286	80
Part-time lessons after Bar/Bat Mitzvah	69	286	23
Jewish primary school	66	286	22
Jewish secondary school	39	286	13

Source: Survey , (Tabick 2005)

NB Table records results of converts with a Jewish partner

The results indicate that 22% of Jewish partners whose educational experiences are recorded attended Jewish primary schools and 13% Jewish secondary schools. However, it must be noted that these percentages have to be judged cautiously as the respondents were asked to comment on their partner's experiences prior to knowing them and often many years prior to answering the Survey.

Given that the expansion of Jewish full time education took place after most of the partners had left school, the proportion who attended a Jewish primary (22%) is relatively high (the current participation rate, post-expansion, is 45%). In addition, a large proportion (80%) studied in *cheder* or had private lessons in Judaism, and 23% continued to learn post Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

The JPR survey (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996) records that 17% of their respondents defined as 'involved Jews' had received some full-time Jewish education, while 10% of the 'uninvolved' had done so. 90% of the involved Jews had received some kind of Jewish education, including part-time *cheder*, while 77% of the uninvolved went to *cheder*. As the authors of that survey note:

> *...the overlap between the Jewish experiences of involved and non-involved Jews (for example, in having had some kind of Jewish education and belonging to an Orthodox synagogue) emphasizes the unpredictability of Jewish life choices...*

The similarity of the figures from this survey supports that conclusion. The Survey data also support Schmool and Miller's conclusion that Jewish education does not have much impact on marriage choices, once parental background is allowed for.

5.5.2. The partner's Jewish youth group background

Q52 also enquired about their partners' experience in Jewish youth groups. This is shown in **Table 5.18**.

Table 5.18. Length of contact with the Jewish youth groups of converts' Jewish partners

Length of contact	Attended Jewish youth group
3 years or under	8%
4-6 years	9%
7-10 years	4%
10+ years	5%
Don't know	74%
Total %	100% (Sample size: 262)

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

NB Table records results of converts with a Jewish partner

With the same caveat in place about possible lack of correct information, and indeed, the paucity of the information, over half the group (65%) are recorded as having participated in Jewish youth group activities. The JPR survey (1995) records the proportion of involved Jews participation in youth groups as 71%, of uninvolved Jews 34%. Only 26% of the respondents go on to record how many years their partners were involved, with one individual described as having been involved for 25 years. There is no record of what that involvement entailed in terms of activities which could have varied from sport to informal Jewish education.

However, it is clear that the partners of the proselytes had relatively typical levels of contact with Jewish education and Jewish youth activities.

5.6. The importance of the Jewish partner's attitude towards the conversion process

5.6.1. Background and discussion

Just as the family's attitude to the conversion is important, it seems likely, on an intuitive basis, that the partner's influence would be considerably more potent than their families.

We also have to remember that these Jewish partners were predominately male (Ledger data 79% female; Survey data, 77% female). Some of the effects of that gender imbalance were discussed in Chapter 3. Here, some other relationships will be explored.

In particular, in the interviews, some of the candidates reported a mismatch of expectations and desires concerning the conversion when comparing the views of the convert and their Jewish partner. Olive, looking back on her conversion many decades ago after a long and happy marriage, but one in which they had minimal contact with the community and where her adult children have all left the Jewish world, commented:

> *...Matter of fact, I think I was more religious than the man I was going to marry in the end. Which was true I really could have gone to live, to be in Orthodoxy really, I believed a lot in it, but he didn't so unfortunately...When we went to the Chief Rabbi in Ireland he said, "If you're going to make her 99% Orthodox you'll have to find her another husband"...* (Olive, widow, converted 1948 aged 24, p.2)

From the qualitative material and other sociological research it seems important to explore the relationship between the Jewish partner and the convert to see what sort of role, positive or negative, the Jewish partner may play and what influence the role they adopt may have.

5.6.2. Measure used: Partner support and outcome variables

5.6.2.1. Independent variables

The independent variables used to measure the correlation between the Jewish partner's support and the outcome variables were:-

(i) Measurement of individual variables of partner support (Q50). These items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, but are summarised in **Table 5.19** below using a three-point scale. They enable us to look at partner support in a more forensic manner.

Where required, the variables were re-coded so as to associate high values with positive support.

(ii) An index of partner support. This was created by combining all the items in Q50 as shown below, with the exception of Q50.4 '*If it were not for my partner's determination, I would not have lasted the course*', as there is some doubt as to how to interpret the results of this question. This index was subjected to a reliability test (Cronbach Alpha = 0. 701).

5.6.2.2. Dependent variables

These were tested against the following dependent variables:-

(i) The three motivational variables:-

- Intrinsic,
- Family pressure, and
- Desire for family unity.

These were explained in Chapter 6 (Sections 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-3).

(ii) The contentment index, described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3.1, p.66).

(iii) Ritual observance, described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2, pp. 60-7).

(iv) Ethnicity, described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3, pp.67-74).

(v) Individual items from Q17 **(**how the converts felt about their conversion, were they content with the results?), Q18 (how they describe their personal feelings of Jewishness), and Q24-Q28 (their current ritual behaviour). These individual items were correlated with the five items from Q50 (omitting Q50.4). Only significant results, or unexpected non-significant results, have been posted here to save space.

5.6.3. Results and discussion

5.6.3.1. Frequency distributions for Q50

Frequency distributions for Q50 have been tabulated below in **Table 5.19**.

The converts felt they enjoyed the same high level of support from their partners as they did from their Jewish in-laws. When looking at these results, the only possible negative is that only

13% felt that their partners *helped them last the course*. However, this need not imply a lack of support – indeed the other items suggest that it does not – but rather it could be viewed as a positive assertion that the converts themselves were eager to finish the course and did not rely on their partner's enthusiasm to ensure that they persevered. This indeed may be seen as evidence that the proselytes had developed their own intrinsic motivation as the course proceeded.

Table 5.19. Q50 '*How did your partner react to the process of your conversion when your were going through it?*'

Partner...	**% Agree**	**% Unsure**	**% Disagree**	**#**
…not interested in religious aspects	21	4	75	282
...became more involved in Judaism	65	9	26	282
...resented my enthusiasm	5	5	90	279
If it were not for my partner's determination, I would not have lasted the course	12	8	80	279
...eased me into the Jewish world	80	6	14	283
...doesn't recognise me as a real Jew	3	7	90	275

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: Converts with Jewish partners only; 'missing' answers are excluded from these percentages.

Within the material from the interviews and application forms there were many comments which support this interpretation, as Eli said:

> *...My motivation? Probably increased, yes I think I was more and more intrigued and involved and interested and anything like that, my motivation in the first place was really quite good but by the end of the course I was thinking in terms of following it up with some other studies and so yes, I think it changed in a positive way...* (Eli, separated from Israeli, converted 1994 aged 33, p.4)

Or as a respondent to the Survey noted:

> *...I began the conversion process in order to further my relationship with my then partner. During the conversion course I realised that Judaism had something to offer me personally and my journey of learning about Judaism began there, and will continue for the rest of my life...* (Survey 29, female, engaged, converted 2002 when 24)

It is apparent from some later correlations using this item that the phrase '*my partner's determination*' may have been viewed by some of the respondents as being some form of coercive pressure rather than positive support. Because of this ambiguity, this item has not been used in further analysis.

On the other hand, worryingly, 11% feel that there is some measure of doubt as to whether or not their partner feels that they are 'real Jews'. A 62 year-old woman who converted in 1969

commented:

> ...*The sole reason for my conversion was to enable me to be buried with my husband. My husband has no religious Jewish beliefs but is proud of his Jewish identity. To him, to be born a Jew is to be Jewish and thus, even in his eyes, I will never be a true Jew and I feel that within the Jewish community, I will only ever be accepted as a convert...* (Survey 138, female, married, converted 1973 when 26)

While Jack said in his interview:

> *...My wife, who had an Orthodox upbringing and who has rejected the whole thing. She used to come with me to West London where the music is beautiful, but won't go anywhere else. She finds religion very hard, she finds Judaism difficult, she finds Judaism inward looking and excluding and she doesn't like that. There's also the view that I'm, in quotes, "not really Jewish"...* (Jack, married converted 1984 aged 33, p.3)

To have committed oneself to the process and participated in services and classes for at least 12 months and then to feel that your new status has not been legitimised by your partner must be very hard to bear. This lack of emotional acceptance may well be disruptive and raises questions as to what effect such an attitude might have on later outcomes of the process.

5.6.3.2. Correlation between partner support index and dependent outcomes

Table 5.20. Partner support index by dependent outcomes

Dependent outcomes	**Partner support index**	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Intrinsic motivation	0.104	0.087
Motivation influenced by Family pressure	-0.094	0.123
A desire for family unity	**0.231**	**< 0.001**
Ritual behaviour	**0.218**	**0.001**
Ethnicity	0.129	0.052
Contentment index	**0.328**	**< 0.001**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Table 5.20 shows that there are positive correlations between the partner support index and:-

- Desire for family unity,
- Ritual behaviour, and
- Contentment index.

In relation to the correlations between partner support and motivation, the initial motivation of the converts in the survey is hard to determine. Even when we look at the reasons given by the converts in their own words in the application forms for the Beit Din, often the converts have

already been involved in Jewish learning and Jewish family life for some time. An even greater interval would have elapsed by the time the answers to the survey were recorded.

Even recognising this difficulty, the results here indicate that the greater the support the convert feels from her Jewish partner, the more likely she is to express a desire for family unity as a motive to seek conversion (r = 0.231), and the greater is her espousal of Jewish rituals in the household (r = 0.218). In this way, she is responding to that support from her partner by taking on board his Jewish family/home concerns. In particular, the greater the support, the more likely is the convert going to feel content at the outcome of the process (r = 0.328).

The variable *'He/she saw the conversion as something we had to get through but was not really interested in the religious aspects***'** had a slight positive correlation with 'family pressure' (r = 0.146, p = 0.014). Once the convert acknowledges that her partner was not interested in the conversion for religious reasons, then the acknowledgement of bowing to a degree of family pressure more easily arises in their mind.

The variable '*He/she became more involved in Judaism when I converted and this interest has continued ever since*' had positive correlations with 'intrinsic motivation' (r = 0.157, p = 0.008) and 'desire for family unity' (r = 0.170, p = 0.004). Here, the Jewish partner's increased interest in Judaism correlates well with the variables in the Intrinsic motivation factor and also accords with the wish to provide a Jewish home in which the family could celebrate religious events together.

The variable, *'Once I started to practice Judaism, he/she resented my enthusiasm and knowledge of Jewish life*' had a negative correlation with 'desire for family unity' (r = -0.190, p = 0.001). Again, enthusiasm from the convert for a Jewish lifestyle accords well with the desire to form a Jewish family united by religion.

The variable '*He/she helped ease me into the Jewish world*' had a positive correlation with 'desire for family unity' (r = 0.250, p ≤ 0.001). Becoming part of the wider community is an important context for a home united by Judaism.

The variable '*He/she still doesn't recognise me as a real Jew*' had a negative correlation with 'intrinsic motivation' (r = -0.149, p = 0.024). Feeling your Jewish partner's acknowledgement that you have become a true Jew accords well with the variables that make up the intrinsic motivation factor.

Indeed, all these results support the common sense view that where the convert feels that her commitment to the conversion has been religiously supported by her Jewish partner, then she too espouses the more intrinsic motivational path and supports the desire to find religious unity for the family. Where she does not receive this support, either through lack of acceptance of the validity of the conversion or there are jibes about her enthusiastic response to her Jewish learning, then the convert reacts negatively to both these variables. The strongest correlation

between how partner helped ease the convert into the Jewish world and the desire for family unity reflects the importance that the Jewish world places on family life and the acceptance of her partner's espousal of this value by the convert.

5.6.3.3. Correlation between individual items of partner support (Q50) and ritual practice, ethnic behaviour and contentment

The variable measuring the partner's view that conversion was something to get through but not something to show interest in the religious aspects of had negative correlations with 'ritual practice' ($r = 0.171$, $p = 0.009$) and 'contentment index' ($r = -0.226$, $p \leq 0.001$).

The variable measuring the partner's increased, continuing involvement with Judaism had positive correlations with 'ritual practice' ($r = 0.229$, $p \leq 0.001$), 'ethnic behaviour' ($r = 0.234$, $p \leq 0.001$) and 'contentment index' ($r = 0.298$, $p \leq 0.001$).

The variable measuring how the partner helped ease the convert into the Jewish world had positive correlations with 'ritual practice' ($r = 0.231$, $p \leq 0.001$) and 'contentment index' ($r = 0.173$, $p = 0.004$).

The variable measuring the partner's non-recognition of the convert's new Jewish status had negative correlations with 'ritual practice' ($r = -0.149$, $p = 0.002$), 'ethnic behaviour' ($r = -0.141$, $p = 0.032$) and 'contentment index' ($r = -0.418$, $p \leq 0.001$).

Again, common sense would suggest that where the Jewish partner is involved in the religious aspects of the conversion, the convert would react to that religious support in a positive fashion. Where the Jewish partner does not recognise the validity of the conversion, then the convert naturally would experience this as a negative feedback on the hard work undertaken during the process and feel bad about herself (NB the strong negative correlation of -0.418), the results of the enterprise, and show little enthusiasm for changing ethnic or ritual behaviours.
The most conclusive results occurred when the contentment index was explored. The correlations between the positive support of the partner and the emotional feelings of the convert towards their Jewish status are generally stronger than those between the partners' support and specific actions. It seems that the converts most easily 'catch' the prevalent fashion of modern Jewish life, that people express their Judaism more through feelings than actions.

Support from the partner plays a vital role in helping the converts feel good about themselves, and based on that positive self image as a Jew, play a role in the religious side of family life. This need for respect and positive affirmation of their new Jewish status was expressed by Betty, who felt she had received no positive reactions to her conversion.

...I was looking for respect for what I had achieved, for what I was, and I

didn't have that. He never encouraged [me]... (Betty Jewish partner, converted 1989 when 27, p.5)

5.6.3.4. Correlations between specific items (Q 50) and some individual items from Q17, Q18, and Q24-28

Given the importance of partner support, some individual items from Q50, representing ritual and ethnic behaviour and affective outcomes, were correlated with some of the variables from Q17, Q18 and Q24-Q28.

In presenting these results, it was felt that it would be useful to define the type of activity or reaction (feeling, ritual behaviour or ethnic behaviour) that could be seen in relationship with the Jewish partner's actions or feelings, specifically whether the partner's reactions or feelings could be correlated with the convert's subsequent feelings of self-worth or feelings of contentment with the conversion, or ritual or ethnic behaviours. Only significant results have been posted to save space.

Table 5.21. Correlations between the Jewish partners' continued interest in the religious aspects of the conversion and contentment, ritual and ethnic behaviour

The more the Jewish partner became involved in Judaism and remained involved, the more the convert...	**Correlation coefficient**	**Significance level p**	**Type: Contentment or ritual or ethnic action or feeling**
...felt conversion had brought strength and unity into family life	0.308	≤ 0.001	Contentment
...felt that the conversion was not a big mistake	0.275	≤ 0.001	Contentment
...felt pleased that they had converted	0.267	≤ 0.001	Contentment
...felt at home in the Jewish community	0.266	≤ 0.001	Contentment
...felt loyalty to my Jewish heritage/adopted heritage	0.243	≤ 0.001	Ethnic feeling
... Felt Jewish 'inside' (i.e. personality, way of thinking, behaving)	0.221	≤ 0.001	Ethnic feeling
...felt a sense of self-fulfilment	0.219	≤ 0.001	Contentment
...stayed home Friday evening for religious reasons	0.218	≤ 0.001	Home ritual
...felt conscious of her Jewishness	0.218	≤ 0.001	Ethnic feeling
...was involved in Jewish home life (food, customs etc.)	0.216	≤ 0.001	Home ritual
...felt generally comfortable with the views expressed by members of the community	0.214	≤ 0.001	Contentment
...felt that they could not imagine being *not* being a Jewish	0.198	0.001	Contentment
...lit candles Friday evening	0.197	0.001	Home ritual
...felt an attachment to Israel	0.194	0.001	Ethnic feeling
...was observant of *kashrut*	0.189	0.002	Home ritual

...participated in Jewish religious life, synagogue observances etc.	0.178	0.003	Public ritual
...attended services	0.171	0.004	Public ritual
...felt close to other Jews	0.162	0.007	Ethnic feeling
...the convert attended a Seder	0.156	0.010	Home ritual
...the more likely the convert was to have a *mezuzah* on the door	0.139	0.021	Home ritual

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This analysis seems to suggest the common sense notion that the partners' continued interest in the religious aspects of Judaism is correlated closely to the converts' feelings of self worth, contentment with the conversion, and with items concerned mostly with home rituals. As was suggested above, the influence of the partner seems most potent in the affective domain and less relevant to ritual practice.

Table 5.22. Correlations between the Jewish partner's resentment of the convert's enthusiasm and knowledge of Jewish life and contentment, ritual and ethnic behaviour

Once the convert started to practice Judaism the more the Jewish partner resented the convert's enthusiasm and knowledge of Jewish life and the more the convert...	**Correlation coefficient r**	**Significance level p**	**Type: Contentment or ritual or ethnic action or feeling**
...felt that they were criticised for being too *frum*	**0.328**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...felt conversion had not brought strength and unity into family life	**0.260**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...felt generally uncomfortable with the views expressed by members of the community	**0.220**	**≤ 0.001**	Ethnic feeling
...did not feel at home in the Jewish community	**0.159**	**0.009**	Ethnic feeling
...did not participate in Jewish religious life, synagogue	**0.140**	**0.021**	Public ritual
...did not express an interest in Jewish culture (art, music, literature etc)	**0.140**	**0.021**	Ethnic feelings
...did not feel pleased that they had converted	**0.136**	**0.025**	Contentment

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This item expressing the partner's resentment correlated largely with affective and cultural items. When the proselyte felt that their Jewish partner was expressing resentment at their enthusiasm or Jewish knowledge, then they were left experiencing negative emotions about themselves, the conversion and the community.

Table 5.23. Correlations between the Jewish partner's help at easing the convert into the Jewish world and contentment, ritual and ethnic behaviour

The more the partner helped to ease the convert into the Jewish world, the more the convert...	Correlation coefficient r	Significance level p	Type: Contentment or ritual or ethnic action or feeling
...felt conversion had brought strength and unity into family life	**0.342**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...observed some form of *kashrut*	**0.250**	**≤ 0.001**	Home ritual
...felt that the conversion was not a big mistake	**0.227**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...the more likely the convert was to have a mezuzah on the door	**0.225**	**≤ 0.001**	Home ritual
...was likely to refrain from work on Rosh Hashanah	**0.182**	**0.003**	Public ritual
...was pleased with their decision to convert	**0.178**	**0.003**	Contentment
...was involved in Jew home life (food, customs etc.)	**0.177**	**0.003**	Home ritual
...participated in Jew religious life, synagogue	**0.167**	**0.005**	Public ritual
...the convert felt comfortable with the views expressed by members of the community	0.155	0.110	Ethnic feeling
...was likely to stay home Friday evenings for religious reasons	**0.127**	**0.037**	Home ritual
...was conscious of their Jewishness	**0.117**	**0.050**	Ethnic feeling

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Where the convert felt that their Jewish partner had helped ease them into Jewish life, there appears to be more significant correlations with ritual behaviour, both at home and in public. This shows a different pattern from all the other items from Q50. Becoming part of the wider Jewish community, rather than just the conversion class, or the partner's own Jewish family, does involve the adoption of different behaviours rather than just feelings of being Jewish.

Table 5.24. Correlations between the Jewish partner's non-recognition of the convert's new status as a real Jew, and contentment, ritual and ethnic behaviour

The more the partner does not recognise me as a real Jew...	Correlation coefficient r	Significance level p	Type: Contentment or ritual or ethnic action or feeling
...the less the convert was pleased with their decision to convert	**0.440**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...the more the convert felt that their conversion was a big mistake	**0.394**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...the less the convert felt at home in the Jew community	**0.366**	**≤ 0.001**	Ethnic feeling
...the less the convert felt conversion had brought strength and unity into family life	**0.353**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...the less the convert felt a sense of self-fulfilment	**0.320**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment
...the less the convert feels conscious of their Jewishness	**0.312**	**≤ 0.001**	Ethnic feeling
...the less the convert identified with	**0.218**	**≤ 0.001**	Contentment

the notion that they could not imagine *not* being a Jew			
...the less the convert was involved in Jewish home life (food, customs etc.)	**0.196**	**0.001**	Home ritual
...the less the convert was likely to refrain from work on Rosh Hashanah	**0.171**	**0.005**	Public ritual
...the less the convert participated in religious life, in the synagogue	**0.167**	**0.006**	Public ritual
...the less the convert felt I 'inside' (i.e. personality, way of thinking, behaving)	**0.163**	**0.007**	Contentment
...the less the convert felt comfortable with the views expressed by members of the community	**0.161**	**0.009**	Ethnic feeling
...the less likely the convert was to observe Kashrut	**0.156**	**0.011**	Home ritual
...the less the convert felt loyal to their Jewish heritage/adopted heritage	**0.123**	**0.043**	Ethnic feeling

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

When their Jewish partner refuses to see them as a real Jew, despite the conversion process, then the converts predictably feel more negative about their Jewishness and are prompted to carry out less ritual or ethnic behaviours.

Looking at the pattern that emerges from these correlations it can be deduced that:-

1. The strongest impacts arise from the positive appreciation on the part of the Jewish partner of the converts' efforts rather than their operational involvement in promoting a Jewish life; and

2. The most potent correlations can be seen between these expressions of appreciation and the psychological affect it has on the convert: making them 'pleased that they had converted', rather than influencing them to observe any particular ritual act.

This may reflect on a feeling of dissonance in the convert's minds: through study they are acquiring new skills for a completely different way of life – yet it seems, as will be shown in Chapter 6 (pp.184-241), that most converts convert for instrumental reasons, i.e. to promote family unity. This might make them feel that there is a degree of insincerity in their actions which is overcome when their partners affirm their new Jewish status. The correlations show where they feel appreciated and supported by their partners, the converts feel they have succeeded in bringing a measure of unity into their family's religious life. When support is missing, then everyone loses.

5.6.3.5. Exploring of possible relationship between own Jewish upbringing and the desire to ease one's partner into the Jewish world

In the results given above, the highest incidence of a partner's actions or feelings forming a correlation with the observance of ritual actions (6 in all) occurred when the variable '*my partner had helped ease me into Jewish life*' was explored. The question arose as to whether it was the act of helping the convert into the Jewish world that was important, or whether those who were recorded as having the highest score on this variable were themselves from backgrounds of greater Jewish observance. In other words, was it the Jewish background that the partners came from that was encouraging greater ritual involvement, or was it the act of helping the convert to participate in the Jewish world?

A test revealed a positive relationship between these two variables ($r = 0.190$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that the partner's religious background was also indicated in encouraging the observance of ritual acts.

The support that the Jewish partner shows is correlated with the religiosity of the partner's background. It is therefore probable that partners who show the greatest support also provide a current family environment that is more religiously active. Thus it could be that the relationship between support and outcome variables actually reflect the impact of family religiosity on outcomes.

However, it must also be remembered that the word 'support' can be thought of either as objective help, perhaps delivered for reasons of self-interest by the partner, or as some manner of emotional or psychological support. The high correlation between 'feeling respected' and other items suggests that the convert at least feels that the support is more than just objective help, i.e. it is seen as backed by genuinely positive feelings and not just instrumental in getting their partner converted.

5.7. Conclusion

It would seem self-evident that the attitude of the Jewish family and Jewish partner towards their own Judaism would have an effect on the religious choices of their convert partners. In part we found this to be true, but the strongest effect seems to have been on how the convert viewed themselves as content with the process and their new religious status than on the adoption of religious rituals, i.e. affective results rather than operational involvement in Judaism, with specific changes in ritual behaviour.

Fishman suggests that, at least in the American experience, Jews who marry Jews, either born Jews or those who have converted to Judaism, are far more likely to have enjoyed a deeper level of Jewish home practice and Jewish involvement, including education, than those who choose to marry non Jews. Fishman wrote:

> *...Jews who marry Jews are as a group more distinctive and countercultural than in-married Jews of the past. Although there are many secular Jewish marriages, secular Jews are the group most likely to follow the broader pluralistic norm and to marry non-Jews. Conversely, endogamous marriage in contemporary multicultural America is more likely to be associated with strong Jewish commitments than in the pre 1960s decades, when endogamous marriage was the norm for most American groups…Jews who encourage their partner or spouses to convert have Jewish educational and involvement levels that are closer to in-married than to intermarried Jews. It is no doubt true that the same background and attitudinal factors that predispose a Jew to marry another Jew or to ask a non-Jewish spouse to convert also predispose him or her to seek out more and deeper Jewish connections...* (Fishman, 2006, p.17)

The data from our Survey indicate that the higher the level of the Jewish family's observance as perceived by the proselyte, the more important was the observance of Jewish rituals in the proselyte's current religious life. The late buying into the process by the more observant families may have had an effect on our results. We noted particularly the U-shaped function which demonstrates a clash of two opposing trends, the greater ability of the more observant families to help the conversion process that was set against the lack of enthusiasm by this same group earlier on in the process.

However, it must also be noted that, unfortunately, there were insufficient data reported to plot the length of time people had been living with their Jewish partners, either before or after conversion, nor was there any information on the emotional interplay between the two partners, nor of the psychological makeup of the people involved – all of which must have had an influence on the proselyte, their feelings towards Judaism, and their consequent ritual and communal involvement. More qualitative work would be needed to explore these areas.

6. MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PRIOR EXPERIENCES

6.1. Why do people convert to Judaism? Background and hypotheses

6.1.1. The traditional view – 'Legitimate' motives for conversion

In traditional Judaism, acceptable motivation for conversion is defined in simple terms. As Maurice Lamm records in an online article:

> ...*The genuine desire to embrace Judaism for its own sake, "for the sake of Heaven" (*lishma*), was considered the sole legitimate ground for conversion permitted by the rabbis. Historically, it is the only motivation that "worked" for the Jewish people. The authorities rejected conversion for ulterior motives as unworthy, and indeed harmful, to the religious development of the Jewish people…Those ulterior motives range from materialism to marriage, but they were all rejected as grounds for becoming a Jew…* (Lamm n.d.)

An orthodox rabbi, Lamm explained that traditionally only two categories of motivation were recognised: *lishma*, literally 'for its own sake' (probably better translated here as a conversion based on spiritual conviction) or conversion out of convenience, whether this was for marriage, economic or other pragmatic reasons, i.e. an instrumental motive.

In his writings he acknowledges that this is a limiting paradigm and that today we should recognise that motivation can be multifactorial, that change can happen during a conversion course and that a more welcoming attitude would be helpful. As he continues in his internet article,

> *…Not the least of these considerations is that people in our open society can grow from accommodation to conviction…Often, they begin the long road of conversion for reasons of accommodation, yet, in the end, arrive at remarkably deep levels of spiritual conviction.*
>
> *Conversion generally will result from a complex of multiple motivations: to marry, to raise children in a one-faith family, to avoid conflict with parents. A desire to establish a home in a unified religious commitment for the purpose of bringing up children as Jews obviously savours more of sincerity than of personal gain, and must be for Heaven's sake…* (Lamm n.d.)

This traditional notion of accepting just two possible motives for conversion is still the main basis on which Orthodoxy approaches conversion, though there are signs of some movement towards a wider approach.

As Forster and Tabachnik said (though they were referring to the situation as they knew it in North America):

> *...it becomes apparent that currently the divergent opinions on conversion for the sake of marriage involve not so much Jewish law but the emotional attitude of scholars and their perception as to what is best for the communities...* (Forster and Tabachnik, 1991, p.46)

It is important to recognise that this traditional view of motivation may impact on the converts in this study and how others see them.

6.1.2. Modern American paradigms of motivation

There has been no systematic research carried out in British Jewish communities on conversion to Judaism. In the United States, much research has been undertaken and useful paradigms have emerged. Within this literature, the following suggestions are made as to how to understand the motivation behind conversion to Judaism. In some cases, the authors also make reference to the way that personal characteristics such as gender, age or married status might impinge on motivation.

6.1.2.1. Research by Egon Mayer

Much of the early American research into intermarried Jewish families (where conversion has not taken place) and also into conversion to Judaism was undertaken by Egon Mayer and different associates.

In a paper presented in 1979 to the American Jewish Committee (Mayer and Sheingold, 1979), Mayer lists four main factors that he felt lead to the conversion of an individual:-

> *32% converted for personal conviction*
>
> *38% for sake of Jewish partner*
>
> *9% for the children*
>
> *21% for a combination of reasons.*

The order given corresponds to the order that Mayer presents in the text, possibly in an attempt to mitigate the claim that people convert largely for the sake of marriage to a Jewish partner. He directly addresses this possible accusation with the statement:

> *...conversion primarily for family reasons can still be genuine...* (Mayer and Sheingold, 1979)

He enumerates a mixture of intrinsic reasons (e.g. the search of the individual for spiritual, cultural and ethnic identity) as well as extrinsic or instrumental reasons (e.g. marriage and the need for a unified religious home).

In 1987, Mayer examined the importance of the religiosity of the Jewish family and Jewish spouse when considering conversion motives. He concluded in that study:

> *...Converts tend to have very or moderately religiously orientated in-laws (66% father-in-laws, 60% mother-in-laws) and spouses (67%)...* (Mayer, 1987, p.76)

Critical of the work of such people as Richardson (1985), who present conversion as '*a process that brings the individual into a new relationship with a large secondary group*', Mayer and Lerer, in a slightly later study (1989, pp.15-6) examine in greater detail the influence of the smaller primary group, the family, as the means whereby the conversion is facilitated and reinforced.

In this research, Mayer and Lerer took data collected between 1981-87 in ten Jewish communities, a mixed sample of 398 converts, 9,365 people who reported that they had been born or raised as Jews and 996 who reported that they had not been born or raised as Jews and were not now Jews but with a few exceptions, were now married to a born and/or raised Jewish spouse. Examining the salient characteristics of those who did actually convert and using a series of regression equations, they established a number of independent variables that they suggested may influence that decision, namely:-

(i) Age,

(ii) Sex,

(iii) Education,

(iv) Immigrant generational status,

(v) Number of children,

(vi) Employment status of household, that is, whether one or more adults were in full-time employment,

(vii) Income/number of full-time earners,

(viii) Religion of parents (Jewish father or none Jewish),

(ix) Proportion of close friends Jewish,

(x) Raised as Catholic,

(xi) Raised as Protestant, or

(xii) Raised with no religion.

(Factors (x), (xi), and (xii) are dummy variables using other religions as a baseline).

They recorded only 6 variables as statistically significant, as shown in **Table 6.1.**

Table 6.1. Significant variables posted in research by Mayer and Lerer (1989)

Independent variable	Beta	Significance level
Age	0.134	0.009
Sex	0.183	0.001
Generation in US	0.138	0.002
Income/earners	0.116	0.007
Close Jewish friends	0.269	0.001
Number of children	0.114	0.007

Source: Mayer and Lerer (2008)

These results suggest that structural factors within the family play a small but significant role in whether or not the non-Jewish partner in an interfaith relationship decides to convert. Compared with those who had not converted at the time of the research, those who had chosen to convert were:

(1) more likely to be above 35 years of age at the time of their decision to convert

(2) more likely to be female

(3) more likely to come from families that have been in the US for at least three generations

(4) more likely to be in the higher socioeconomic groups .

(5) more likely to have a large circle of Jewish friends

(6) more likely to have children .

Even then, the influence of the variables is limited. Mayer concluded:

> *...[This research] shows that, taken together the eleven independent variables explain only 15% of the variance in the probability of conversion. Therefore, the available data leave a vast gap in the understanding of the factors that determine conversion into Judaism...* (Mayer and Lerer, 1989, p.17)

This research also suggests that there may be important individual and family psychological factors that are as yet untapped.

It was also noted in this later research that,

> *...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 socioeconomic status of the families of origin of the spouses as having a notable impact upon the likelihood of conversion. However, the nature of the available data in the present study did not permit a confirmation or disconfirmation of those findings...* (Mayer and Lerer, 1989, p.17)

Thus Mayer understood that there were many complex interactions, instrumental, intrinsic and personal characteristics and experiences that play a part in the motivation behind conversion, and that he had only managed to unravel a small part of that equation.

6.1.2.2. Forster and Tabachnik

Forster and Tabachnik (1991) developed a conceptual model that consisted of 'push' and 'pull' factors. These are defined as:

> *...background variables that represent potential PUSHes toward Judaism from a sympathetic home environment and PULLs from positive contacts with Jews, especially the partner and the partner's family...* (Forster and Tabachnik, 1991, p.64)

Once on the course, what they call Intervening factors come into play, such as study experiences, contact with the beliefs and practice and knowledge of Judaism, and the response they met from the community and family.

Table 6.2. Possible personal characteristics leading to conversion according to Forster and Tabachnik

PUSHES	**PULLS**
The convert's relationship with their own parents, resulting in either: 1. a positive feeling of freedom to choose own pattern of life, or 2. a negative feeling towards their parents leading them to reject the family pattern and choose another	Converts found family ties with their Jewish in-laws to be as close as (33%) or closer than (46%) their own family relationships
Converts' parents tend to be religiously active	Jewish friends either as children or as adults
Converts had fairly strong religious attachments in their youth	Strongest PULL came from their partner
57% are now dissatisfied with Christianity	PULLS reflect ethnic connections rather than religious ones

Source: Forster and Tabachnik (1991)

They then enumerated the top 4 reasons for actual conversion as:-

> *Concern about their children's religious upbringing – 63%*
>
> *Positive effects of Judaism on their own religious life – 61%*
>
> *Marriage to a Jew – 57%*
>
> *Positive regard for Jewish beliefs – 53%*

That is Forster and Tabachnik also see marriage and family as primary reasons for conversion and suggest that the convert also finds some form of religious integrity and challenge in the process. However, they also note that such information regarding these factors from the converts' backgrounds should be treated with caution for it...

> *...may just as well be that their attraction to a Jewish partner led them to consider Judaism, then to question their former religion and then to discover sufficient dissatisfaction to justify their converting...* (Forster and Tabachnik, 1991, p.70)

In other words, their stated motivational factors may have arisen through post hoc justification of their decision to convert in keeping with cognitive dissonance theory.

6.1.2.3. Fishman

Sylvia Fishman's analysis (2006, p.14) is not so much a model of motivation for conversion as a study of the nature of the convert's Jewish conduct after conversion. However, it is relevant here because this analysis of the nature of the convert's engagement with Judaism takes account of their original motivation for conversion.

Fishman approached the subject through a series of interviews with people who had already converted or who were contemplating conversion. Fishman identified three main typologies of conversion in the American Jewish community, which reflect different motivational qualities:-

- 30% Activist (Fishman, 2006, p.26)

    1. They had moved towards Jewish identity even before they met their current partner or spouse, with Jewish childhood friends.
    2. Their partners are deeply committed Jews.
    3. They have found social networks that reinforce and support their commitments to Judaism.
    4. They were often estranged from their own families.

- 40% Accommodating (Fishman, 2006, p.30)

    1. Motivated by the desire to follow the Jewish strength – or lack of it – of the Jewish partner, his family and his friends.

    2. They let the Jewish partner take the lead in rituals.

    3. They may join Jewish organisations but find most of their Jewish life within the home, extended family and friendship groups

- 30% Ambivalent (Fishman, 2006, pp.37-8)

    1. They do not care for organised religion and do not regard themselves as religious people.

    2. They converted to please their partner or his family.

    3. Or they converted to provide a coherent culture for their children.

    4. They may feel that they have betrayed their former faith or their birth family's faith.

    5. They feel passively Jewish, but this status does not affect their lives or their thoughts deeply.

Fishman reported the following factors as being important to the majority of those who decide to convert (Fishman, 2006, pp.70,76-7):

1. They feel that the Jewish way of life is good.

2. The support and encouragement of their Jewish partner.

3. The support and active advocacy for conversion of the rabbi.

4. The support of the Jewish family also advocating conversion.

5. Looking to have the same religious status as one's children.

She stresses in her report that each convert is, of course, an individual and that no one set of factors can describe any individual, specific circumstance or decision to convert.

6.1.3. Meeting a Jewish partner: A motive for conversion

In general society, most associate the idea of conversion with the changing of religious beliefs. However, from the evidence of the American paradigms and the interviews, it would seem that when it comes to conversion to Judaism, Maurice Lamm was right when he wrote:

...conversion to another faith, in this sense, is a marriage of convenience to

facilitate the convenience of marriage... (Lamm, 1991, p.80)

The hypothesis is that the enabling factor of the intended or actual marriage to a Jewish partner leading to the goal to bring up their children in a marriage united by faith is the main reason for seeking conversion. This is supported by the fact that the preponderance of the candidates are in their 20's or 30's (the age for marriage), and that they are either engaged or married to a Jew.

Examples from the interviews also support this hypothesis. Eli reported in her interview the following:

> *...So my theory was that if we were going to get married and have children it would be very complicated if we tried to have a mixed marriage, you know that I didn't convert. And with Edward having suggested to me and then me actually quite liking what I had found out, that is when I really started to take things really very much more seriously in my own mind...* (Eli, separated from Israeli, converted 1994 aged 33, p.2; Lamm n.d.; Forster and Tabachnik, 1991, p.64; Forster and Tabachnik, 1991)

Or there is Guy who explained the importance of family life and children in the following manner:

> ...*Gabby of course was Jewish and we had brought our children up to be Jewish. I don't regard myself as a terribly religious person but she had said it was a condition of marriage that our children would be brought up to be Jewish and I said absolutely fine, no problem. I have to say that from the very start I was entirely supportive of that*... (Guy, married to Gabby, converted 1993 when 36, p.4)

Guy had already known his wife for several years before marriage, had been married to her for fifteen years, had Jewish children, and then suddenly, it seems, decided to change his religious identity. What complex mixture of questions, needs, dreams, challenges in his life took him to this moment? Guy's own answer was inconclusive:

> ...*Ah, well I suppose the straight answer to that is I don't know...After about fifteen years of marriage I suppose the support I was giving the children and the family, I don't know, I suppose I became immersed in it. I felt Jewish, but I wasn't Jewish, that's the best explanation I can give*... (Guy, married to Gabby, converted 1993 when 36, p.1)

That is, it was a bundle of motives that led him to convert, though the desire to enjoy the same religion as his wife and children predominated.

Thus the interviews support the hypothesis that the main motive behind conversion is the desire to create a Jewish family.

6.1.4. Qualitative evidence from the interviews on the importance of personal characteristics and experiences

Several of the theorists cited above (Mayer, Foster, Tabachnik, Epstein and Fishman) draw attention to the role of personal characteristics in motivating individuals to convert to Judaism. In this section, I highlight the conclusions that can be drawn from the interviews conducted at the beginning of this study and derive some hypotheses from that analysis.

The evidence presented in the interviews and the American studies suggests the hypothesis that conversion to Judaism is generally not as a result of a 'vision on the road to Damascus,' i.e. a purely religious and ecstatic experience, but the result of a complex interplay between a mixture of social, ethnic, religious, emotional and historical factors that surround questions of marriage and family.

For some, theological issues did play a part in their motivation, and it is possible to hypothesise that some converts had already begun to question their birth family's religious affiliation long before they had considered conversion to Judaism. As Harry said:

> ...*I was never religious at school. I don't think I was ever baptised. I wasn't confirmed, but as I grew older I started to have a problem with this trilogy thing, I couldn't sort out who was this Holy Ghost for a start, not that I researched much on them to find out, and then there was this God and Jesus…* (Harry, married to a Hetty who converted in 1987, conversion 1996 aged 61, p.1)

Then there are the patrilineal Jews who seek conversion as a means of resolving confusion over their identity. The pain that this confusion often brings was expressed very clearly by Jack in his interview:

> *...I had a Jewish father who left Central Europe, came here in 1939, married my English, non-Jewish mother after the war having lost his first family. He thought as did many assimilated cultured people that it was dangerous to be Jewish, he brought me up without circumcising me and...I was baptised, I had a Christian upbringing. I was quite shocked when I told people my background, and they said, 'Oh well, you're Jewish anyway.' So I then discovered that the non-Jewish world regards me as Jewish, [while] the Jewish world didn't regard me as Jewish...* (Jack, married converted 1984 aged 33, p.1)

Also, from the interviews, there were many instances of converts having experienced feelings of interest in Judaism long before they converted. Guy talks enthusiastically of his grandfather's experiences during the war in the Middle East and the effect they had on his family:

> *...My grandfather...served in the First World War, in Egypt and Palestine. In fact he was on one of the first artillery guns to go into Jerusalem. And he had a lot of photographs at home...I guess the family was very pro-Jewish in the sense that the Six Day War was almost like the FA cup at home!...* (Guy, married to Gabby, converted 1993 when 36, p.2)

While for Ivy, her experience of Judaism came from her interest in social justice issues in the USA. She said:

> *...I realised that about 80% of the people that I was regularly involved with were Jewish. They were the ones who were doing the work that most interested me. I ended up moving into a communal house that was completely Shomer Shabbat...I started living a completely observant life without any religious framework whatsoever. But it suited me. I loved the rhythm of it, a feeling of how the time flowed, it gave my week flavour and punctuation, we would have wonderful meals on Friday nights...* (Ivy married to convert Ian, converted 1993 when aged 35 p2)

Whereas for Natalie, brought up in North London, it was more a social experience that attracted her to Judaism:

> *...so my social life revolved around going to Jewish homes and the first thing that struck me when I went there was how they treated their children. I can remember thinking well this isn't like in our house. They seemed affectionate with their children, they touched their children, they kissed their children. I remember thinking "Oooh this is completely different". You used to get very nice teas, and I thought "this is really very nice"...* (Natalie, widow, converted 1966 aged 20 p 1)

While it is possible that these statements were simply *post hoc* rationalisations to explain the later decision to convert, nevertheless this qualitative anecdotal data gives strong indications of areas that could be tested using quantitative data via the Survey. It was therefore decided to examine the correlations between various key sets of variables and motivational factors.

6.1.5. General theories on motivation

The complexity of assigning motives to conversion has its counterpart in work done in the general sphere by such researchers as Maslow, Arnold and Reynolds and D'Andrade. Maslow (1970), for example, has suggested a hierarchy of needs that provides a psychological model that could be applied to conversion decisions. When this hierarchy of needs is related to this study, the relevant questions that arise are: how much is the convert motivated by the need to belong to her partner's family/group, how much is she affected by the desire to achieve status

or be esteemed as part of that new group and how much is she motivated by the wish for self-actualisation, which in this case might, for example, be the desire to further one's own personal religious and spiritual search.

In conformity with the hierarchical logic of Maslow's model, a possible hypothesis that emerges is that most converts would be looking to satisfy their needs to belong to their partner's group, that is, be converting for instrumental reasons, whilst a smaller minority group would be seeking self-actualisation, for intrinsic reasons.

Arnold and Reynolds (2003) in their quest to understand what motivates people to shop, talk of just two underlying motivational schema: task orientation and hedonic fulfilment. That model too might be used to relate to those who are searching for the product of a new religion, spending time, energy and money to buy into that new group, a longer process than shopping but with some similar characteristics. Here too one can see Arnold and Reynold's dual model as mapping onto the instrumental reasons to convert for family, fulfilling a utilitarian need in their lives, such as meeting the needs of the Beit Din so they can raise a Jewish family, and the more hedonistic motivation such as enjoyment of the study process and the spiritual life that is then open to them.

From these very few examples, it can be suggested that the attribution of motives is an area that is acknowledged to be incredibly complex. As Maslow has pointed out (1970, p.66), goals can be dictated by hidden needs, so converts may consciously be converting to please their partners, but their unconscious motivation could be as diverse as trying to separate themselves from their parents or reaching for new spiritual heights.

It is also apparent that specific ideas about conversion to Judaism can be readily assimilated into a range of general theories of motivation; this suggests that these general models have very limited explanatory power in this context. Accordingly, no attempt has been made to produce a detailed analysis of the way empirical data on motivation to convert relate to models of motivation developed in the general sphere.

6.1.6. Theories of motivation derived from studies of other religions

There have been many studies of the general phenomenon of conversion and within these studies the notion that there are many different sources of motivation has also gained credence.

Speaking about this phenomenon, Lewis Rambo (1998) argues that the motivation to convert flows from the temperament and the predisposition of each convert – so that the motivational drives are as varied as the motivational structures and traits of the putative converts. He comments that, '*when people ask me why people convert, my response is, "Let me count the ways.*"'

In his seminal work on the subject, Rambo, quoting the research of John Loftland and Norman Skonovd (1965), suggests that there are six motifs of conversion (Rambo, 1993, p.14):

(i) Intellectual: knowledge via books etc.,

(ii) Mystical: traumatic burst of insight, voices, vision,

(iii) Experimental: active exploration of religious options, 'I'll pursue this possibility and see what spiritual benefits it may provide to me',

(iv) Affectional: interpersonal bonds, loved, supported, affirmed by the group,

(v) Revivalism: crowd conformity,

(vi) Coercive: intense outside pressure.

Rambo maintains that, while contact with a proponent of another faith is a very important motive for conversion, marriage was not seen as a major reason for conversion to the various Christian groups. Perhaps, though, his research could be seen as useful in understanding the growing proportion of those seeking conversion *lishma.*

Gration in his work (1983) also noted that conversion not only comes about through a myriad of reasons, but it is influenced by the political, social, economic and religious context within which the potential convert finds themselves. This of course has resonance with candidates for conversion to Judaism, most with Jewish partners, who experience Judaism and Jewish family life through their partners but are aware that they cannot be fully part of that life unless they convert.

However, in general, models of conversion to other faiths focus on the spiritual and theological drivers appropriate to a change in religious conviction. In Judaism, the change relates to ritual, culture, lifestyle and ethnicity as well as religious belief. Indeed, the latter may be a minor component. It follows that general models of religious conversion are unlikely to contribute greatly to an understanding of what is happening in the Jewish case.

6.1.7. Hypotheses arising from qualitative studies

It was determined that the type of motivation driving each of the convert's decision to convert would be most easily explained by their marital status, age, gender and prior experiences of Judaism. From the impressions gained in the interviews, the following hypotheses were developed:

- In terms of marital status, it was predicted that those who are not in a relationship will have more evidence of intrinsic motivation for conversion than those who are. It could be said that this is an obvious relationship, but it is a useful means of assessing the

construct validity of the derived measure of intrinsic motivation.

- That age would be related to motivation, with the intrinsic motivation increasing with age as any partnerships active at that time were unlikely to produce offspring whose status needed to be considered; therefore older converts are more likely to be converting *lishma.*

- That gender would have an impact, with women more concerned with faith matters and men more with family structure. This divide is seen both in Judaism and in other faiths. Robert Wuthnow, for example, notes that women are usually at the centre of the family's religious life stating that:

> *...Girls saw their mothers praying and heard them talking about God more than they did their fathers…and girls assumed such behaviour was appropriate for women. Boys saw the same behaviour, but assumed they should behave more like their fathers...* (Wuthnow, 1999, pp.56-7)

- That those with prior experiences of Judaism as young people would be strongly motivated to convert because of those experiences. This was suggested as being important by Fishman and evidenced in the interview material.

The relationship between motivation and two other very important sets of variables, the religious patterns of the birth families of the converts and that of their Jewish partners, was explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

However, it has to be noted that this modelling exercise is limited by the nature of the data that we hold, namely data from those who actually converted, not from those who may, for example, have had significant contact with Jews growing up but did not choose to convert. We also have to bear in mind the minimal effects that Mayer found such variables to have had on the decision to convert in his studies (Lerer and Mayer, 2008).

However, what is very clear from this theoretical and qualitative evidence is that while it is possible to suggest that the most powerful motivating factors will be concerned with marriage and bringing up a family united by religion, other, possibly hidden motives, will be present, depending on the individual circumstances and experiences of the individual converts.

6.2. Measurement of motivation

There were two different sources of data that were used to assess the motivation of RSGB (now MRJ) converts: the Beit Din Application forms and the results of the Survey.

6.2.1. Beit Din Application Forms

This material has been used to provide basic percentages and qualitative information regarding motivation.

6.2.2. Survey data

6.2.2.1. Independent variables: Personal characteristics and experiences

The independent variables used in the exploration of motivation were personal characteristics such as age, marital status and gender and previous contact with Jewish families. These variables were derived from direct questions in the Survey (Q57, Q58, Q68 and Q69).

6.2.2.2. Dependent variables: Motivation-related items in Q1

As was shown in Chapter 1, the Survey posed questions that first arose at the interview stage to better understand the complexities of the motivating factors as perceived by individual converts. To explore the question of motivation in some depth, we examined the ten items which comprise Q1 of the Survey.

I attempted to measure:-

- the frequency with which each item was cited,
- its perceived salience or importance to the converts, and
- the relationship between each motivational item and personal prior experiences and characteristics through a series of regression equations on individual items in Q1.

These ten items were explored initially using a four-point Likert scale (with the possibility of those who never had Jewish partners being able to mark those items as non applicable to them).

6.2.2.3 Dependent variables: Motivational factors derived from factor analysis of items in Q1

Based on the ten items in Q1, factor analysis using the Oblimin rotation method was carried out to explore the dimensions underlying the individual response items. (These will be fully explored in Section 6.3.2.2, pp 218=230).

6.2.2.4. Dependent variables: Individual items examining family pressure/support

A preliminary detailed investigation of 'family pressure/support' as a motive for conversion was examined through analysis of Q43, Q48, Q49 and Q50. This later question relied on a five-point Likert scale that was reduced to a three-point scale for ease of analysis.

I attempted to measure:-

- the frequency with which each item was cited
- its perceived salience or importance to the converts

6.2.2.5. Dependent variables: Motivational factors derived from factor analysis of family support/pressure items

Further analysis was carried out elucidating the very important area of 'family support/pressure'. There is of course, a psychological relationship between support and pressure. They are both subjective terms. That which can be offered as support can be perceived by the recipient as pressure and vice versa. An examination was made of all those items in the survey which reflected the attitude of the Jewish partner and the Jewish family to the conversion process as perceived by the convert.

Some of these items in this factor analysis would seem to post-date the actual decision to convert (e.g. *He/she became more involved in Judaism when I converted and this interest has continued ever since*), but many converts had a long established relationship with their Jewish partner and the partner's family and so these attitudes may still have had an influence on motive.

6.3. Results and discussion

6.3.1. Motivation as reflected in Beit Din Application Forms

In the randomly selected sample of 512 application forms, the reasons for conversion presented by the candidates were content analysed. The percentages of candidates for conversion who cited each category of motivation are shown in **Table 6.3.** Note that this table records how often candidates chose to mention these categories – i.e. they were open-ended responses, not closed questions involving a checklist of alternatives. Supporting the theory that, for many people, there are multiple motivations present in seeking any goal, most candidates mentioned several motives on their application forms.

Table 6.3. The proportions of the motivational themes identified in the Application Forms

Themes	#	%
1. Interest in learning about Judaism	**50**	**11**
2. Contact with Jews or Jewish family		
• Wish to establish a Jewish home, admiring Jewish family life	134	30
• Pressure from a partner or partner's family	9	2
• Enjoyment of a partner's family's way of life or Jewish family life	77	17
• A desire to bring up children in a religiously united family	224	50
• Involvement with a Jewish partner sparked the event	257	57
3. Previous connections with Judaism		
• Jewish father or other family connections	68	15
• Friends or work associates Jewish	120	27
• Connections to Israel	44	10
• Interest in the Holocaust	25	5
4. Spiritual or religious interest		
• Identification with Jewish moral values	36	8
• Enjoyment of festivals, rituals and/or Jewish traditions	85	19
• Loss of previous faith or no previous faith	86	19
• Identification with Judaism, seeking faith	198	44
• Enjoyment of Jewish community	73	16
• Enjoyment of Jewish culture	24	4
5. Having been previously rejected by the Orthodox Beit Din	**26**	**5**

Source: Application Forms (1958-2002)

Note: These percentages were derived from an analysis of the answers given to a question on the application form asking: 'Reasons for Application'. Those recorded as 'missing' have been excluded from the percentages. 12% did not provide any answer to this question on the Application Forms.

Five main themes of motivation were categorised with their dependent clauses. These can be illustrated through qualitative evidence taken from the Forms.

Sections 6.3.1.1-5 are descriptive sections which summarise the free-format descriptions of reasons for applying to convert given on the Application Forms. The quotations bring out some of the nuances and variations within the categories shown in **Table 6.3** above. In most cases, these quotations do not bear on the hypotheses identified – rather they provide a general background to later findings.

6.3.1.1. Interest in learning about Judaism

Rambo specifically mentioned learning as one of the pathways to conversion (Rambo, 1998, p.14) as did four of the interviewees. (Denise – married to a Jew, converted 1993 when aged 44; Eli – separated from Israeli, converted 1994 aged 33; Ivy married to convert Ian – converted 1993 when aged 35; and Mary – now a widow, converted 1956 aged 33).

Ivy, for example, talks about how '*the learning got her hooked*' (Ivy married to convert Ian, converted 1993 when aged 35 p3).

However, only 11% of the application forms identified learning about Judaism to be something valued. For example, a woman wrote in 2000:

> *...I am applying to the court for recognition as a Jew because it has given me spiritual enlightenment and I am looking forward to a lifetime of study and learning...* (Application Form, 2000, married, aged 32, no children, paternal grandmother Jewish, non-practising, married 5 years to a non-Jew)

6.3.1.2. Previous contact with Jews or partner's Jewish family

6.3.1.2.1. Wish to establish a Jewish home; admiring Jewish family life

30% of the applicants expressed admiration towards the Jewish life styles encountered in their partner's family. For example, in 1956 a woman wrote:

> *...After keeping a Jewish home and leading a Jewish life for the past four years, spending the Jewish festivals with my husband's family and friends – I believe in their way of living...* (Application Form, 1956, married, aged 40, no children)

6.3.1.2.2. Pressure from a partner or partner's family

The issue of pressure imposed by the Jewish family to encourage conversion is, possibly under-represented on the Application Forms. Applicants might have worried that any mention of pressure to convert would indicate a lack of personal desire for seeking conversion and so influence the court's decision as to whether or not it would accept their submission.

According to these forms (see **Table 6.3**, p.199), only 2% (9 converts) experienced such pressure. It was unusually expressed very clearly in 1971: '*Because my husband wishes me to become Jewish*' (Survey 581, female, married, 1971 aged 31) without giving any further explanation. A more subtle form of pressure is described in 1965:

> *...I think it would be right for me to become Jewish as my fiancé is and naturally he wants his children to be brought up in the Jewish faith. I am somewhat reluctant to give up the religion of my parents...* (Application Form, 1965, female, engaged, aged 32; went To the Chief Rabbis' court but as fiancé is a ladies' hairdresser he has to work on the Sabbath so they refused)

The word '*naturally*' seems to accept that the religion of her fiancé has to take precedence

over her own traditions. Maybe the patriarchal principle is at work here, that the perceived needs of the male has to take precedence, or maybe the woman feels that her fiancé has stronger religious ties, in that she doesn't talk about her religion, but '*the religion of my parents*'.

Though rare, this pressure to convert is commented upon throughout the period under study, so in 1990,

> *...My husband refused to marry me until I changed my religion. I would not do this as I had no knowledge of Judaism and thought it an insult to pretend I wanted to...* (Application Form, 1990, female, married aged 31, 15 month old baby)

Note that this young woman refused to bow to her fiancé's wishes and stood her ground. They married anyway, as she later writes: '*However he decided to marry me as he could see that I was adamant…*' After their marriage, her experiences of Judaism led her to re-evaluate his desire. She may have hoped that the reporting of the pressure in this way, and her reaction to it, would add weight to her final decision to convert. After all, in acknowledging that before it would have been '*an insult to pretend*', she is emphasising now the personal nature of her commitment.

6.3.1.2.3. Enjoyment of partner's family's way of life or Jewish family life

On 17% of the forms there was explicit reference to the enjoyment of Jewish family life, leading to a wish to convert. A male candidate wrote:

> ...*The Jewish way of life as experienced in my fiancée's home and in the homes of her relatives and our friends is a way of life I wish to become part of*... (Application Form, 1981, male engaged, aged 25)

This 'way of life' is seen as attractive and exciting.

6.3.1.2.4. A desire to bring up children in a religiously united family

On 50% of the forms, this desire was explicitly mentioned. In 1957 a woman stated:

> ... *As I have married a Jew who has strong feelings for his heritage I have decided for his sake to adopt the Jewish faith and to enable me to help him bring up our children to an awareness of Judaism, in harmony...* (Application Form, 1957 female, married, no children)

6.3.1.2.5. Involvement with a Jewish partner sparked the event

However, the main stated reason by 57% of the converts, flying against the traditional practice of not allowing conversion for the sake of marriage, was the fact they had a Jewish partner. Without that relationship, there would have been no conversion. There is this very honest statement from a 22 year-old engaged woman in 1966:

> *...it would be honest to admit that my first reason for intended conversion is to marry my Jewish fiancé. However, since studying Judaism and having observed the ceremony I have become increasingly interested in it and feel that it is the religion which I would be happy for me and my children to follow...* (Application Form, 1966, female, aged 22)

The family motive can even be continued beyond death. A really poignant letter appears in the files in 1946. It speaks about the tragic circumstances surrounding a widow, just 26 years old who was, as she put it, '*not particularly brought up in the Church of England*'. She met and married a Jewish Canadian man. In 1944 she was delivered of twins who died and her husband was killed in action a few months later. She had gone back to live with her parents but intended to join her mother-in-law in Toronto once she was Jewish. She wrote in her letter (there were no Application Forms yet):

> *...As you say I do not know Judaism, I only know my beloved husband is a Jew. I love him, not only the man but for all he stood for, his ideals, his way of living...perhaps it is this that is making me want to take the Jewish religion, but I do not think so, there is something deeper than this, something that I cannot explain. God is the maker of all mankind. He made me and I feel has caused me to live for a reason...God gave my dear husband to me and He has now taken him away. For a while, I admit, I knew bitterness and wondered why it should happen...but now I try to understand and believe that God knows best and that all these things are for a purpose. Perhaps I shall find the answer in the taking of the Jewish faith...*

It is clear from this letter that she would never have considered conversion to Judaism without having met and married her husband. It is also obvious that she had very little knowledge or experience of Judaism, her husband's Jewish family was many miles away and the war had intervened in their lives. It was the marriage, and then the tragedies that followed, that suggested to her a way forward. It is as if she felt that the conversion would bring her spiritual relief and a deeper, almost mystical connection, maybe even a degree of family unity with her deceased husband through adopting his way of living. It gave her hope for a future.

6.3.1.3. Previous connections with Judaism

6.3.1.3.1 Jewish father or other family connections

In speaking to potential converts, Jewish connections within the family are often mentioned, but in the forms, such a mention was made in only 15% of the cases. It is evident that while some patrilineal Jews were anxious to resolve their status, often meeting a Jewish partner actually sparks the conversion:

> *...I am going to marry a Jewish girl and we want to have a family that we can raise in a Jewish home. Also it seems to round things off for me in terms of my identity. My father was Jewish...My brothers and I were always interested in his roots and I am going to marry a Jewish girl and we want to have a family that we can raise in a Jewish home. Also it seems to round things off for me in terms of my identity. My father was Jewish...My brothers and I were always interested in his roots and felt 'cheated' that we couldn't boast the same...* (Application Form, 1987, male, engaged, patrilineal Jew, aged 27)

6.3.1.3.2. Friends or work associates Jewish

Again, it seemed from 27% of the Forms that the applicants, having mixed in Jewish circles for many years, had almost deliberately sought a Jewish partner. Indeed, in a few cases, it seemed to have become a family pattern. For example:

> *...I have always mixed with Jewish people and attended clubs in the Finchley area. My sister is married to a Jewish man and become Jewish. I have met a Jewish man. I would like to marry him and I felt that I would like to be of the same religion...* (Application Form, 1996, female, engaged, aged 22)

6.3.1.3.3. Connections to Israel and interest in the Holocaust

Usually, numbers of motives are bound together, especially with motives arising from Holocaust studies (5%) and identification with Israel (10%).

In the following extract we see this bundle very clearly:-

- Patrilineality,
- Love of Jewish life,
- Experience of Jewish festivals,

- Jewish partner,
- Wanting a Jewish family,
- Holocaust connections,
- Love of Israel.

> *...I myself am half Jewish...My paternal grandparents and many of the family in Czechoslovakia and Germany perished under Hitler...Thus the Nazi genocide as well as the founding of the Jewish state have a very personal meaning for me. I have grown up with a love and a respect for Jewish life and the Jewish faith. Attending a Jewish Day School, enjoying holidays at a Jewish Summer School, Jewish club; this has been my social Jewish upbringing. At home we had Seder, I would attend the high holy day services...I would like my family to be united in the Jewish faith. I am a firm believer in there (sic) being such a united atmosphere in the home and the marriage extending from synagogue to embrace every aspect of home life of our cultural heritage and for a spiritual and physical identification with Israel. My impending marriage made me finally take the decision...* (Application Form, 1968, female, engaged, aged 19)

6.3.1.4. Spiritual or religious interest

Given the link made in general society between conversion and faith or spirituality, it would seem that this area should prove particularly important when considering conversion to Judaism. However, given the prevalence, even in Forms about to be presented to the Beit Din, expressing marriage or Jewish family unity as the reason for conversion, it seemed important to look at the proportions ascribed to the various spiritual motives according to marital status.

Table 6.4. Percentage of each marital group mentioning an aspect of spirituality

Spiritual Motivational theme	Single	Engaged	Married	Widowed or divorced	%
a) Identification with Jewish moral values	8	8	7	19	9
b) Enjoyment of rituals/traditions/festivals/services	16	16	20	50	19
c) Loss or lack of previous faith	29	14	21	31	19
d) Identification with Judaism or seeking faith	71	39	42	56	44
Total #	38	196	202	16	

Source: Application Forms

Note: The column percentages do not sum to 100 because respondents gave multiple motives. These percentages were derived from an analysis of the answers to a question on the forms asking: 'Reasons for Application'. Those recorded as 'missing' have been excluded from the percentages (12%). Motives

6.3.1.4.5 and 6.3.1.4.6 concerned with 'Enjoyment of the Jewish community' and 'Enjoyment of Jewish Culture' have not been included as they are more ethnic considerations than spiritual ones.

From this one can see that those who were widowed or divorced, and probably older and more experienced, were more likely to make statements about wishing to convert for reasons of agreement with morality or enjoyment of festivals and rituals. Within the single group, the salience of 'faith' was stated most frequently, followed by those who were widowed or divorced. This seems to support the hypothesis that single people, perhaps quite naturally, are most interested in conversion for 'faith' reasons. It is interesting that the percentage of candidates as a whole who mentioned 'faith' as a reason for conversion was 44%, less than the 57% who gave their motive as 'having a Jewish partner'.

The following sections give examples supporting these individual statements of conversion for the sake of Jewish spirituality.

6.3.1.4.1. Identification with Jewish moral values

For some (9%), it is the perceived moral teachings and practices of Judaism that attracts them. This was true for a teacher who wrote what could be seen as a highly idealised, but very thoughtful, view of ethical issues:

> *...The wish to convert to Judaism has to do with values developed slowly, sometimes ploddingly, sometimes painfully, sometimes joyfully, but always with the reward of having developed a little more insight into the nature of life and the nature of the Almighty. The concepts of justice, liberty, humanism, moral, intellectual and spiritual growth, loyalty, political and social responsibility, love courage and sensitivity towards all people are values in which I believe. I rarely achieve them, but I try...From my limited knowledge of Judaism, it seems a similarity exists between the teachings and commitments of the Judaic community and what I am and wish to be in a much more complete, reciprocative way...* (Application Form, 1988, female, divorcee but now engaged to Jewish man, aged 45, a teacher)

She further explains that she is marrying a Jewish man and enjoys the festivals, but the Jewish ethical approach seems to predominate as the reason for conversion. For her, Judaism seems to be defined in terms of a particular moral stance together with a special spiritual relationship with God. Mrs D. indicates that she sees not only no contradiction between the values that she has always espoused and Judaism; indeed, she feels that Jewish teachings will help her develop these values and encourage her to express them in her life. However, again it seems clear that it is her impending marriage to a Jew that precipitated the event.

6.3.1.4.2. Enjoyment of festivals, rituals and/or Jewish traditions

19% make mention of the enjoyment of rituals. In 1955 a woman expresses her excitement with Jewish life:

> *...I have lived the Jewish way of life for 12 years and I want to be Jewish, the cleanliness of everything, the food is good and I try to keep a good Jewish home. I love the Sabbath and the lighted candles and table on Friday night...* (Application Form, 1955, female, married aged 36, two children)

Her form indicated that she considered that it was a large commitment on her time and energy to convert to Judaism, but the rituals, here described not in any spiritual way, but as an ethnic and practical expression of Judaism, had convinced her to follow the path of conversion.

6.3.1.4.3. Loss of previous faith or no previous faith

Rambo talks of the various changes in religious affiliation that may take place through conversion. It can mean:-

- No faith affiliation to a faith affiliation,
- One faith affiliation to another faith affiliation,
- One orientation within a faith affiliation to another orientation.

But whatever the path, he suggests that...

> *...it will mean a radical shifting of gears that can take the spiritually lackadaisical to a new level of intensive concern, commitment and involvement.* (Rambo, 1993, p.2)

19% of the applicants to the Beit Din chose to make comments about the lack of faith in their birth families, or their disillusionment with that faith.

> *...My parents are Christian. I was not baptised or brought up in any particular faith. My husband has a strong attachment to the Jewish religion and to the Jewish people. Because I do not wish to weaken in any way his attachment and because I think it desirable for husband and wife to profess the same religion I wish to be accepted into the Jewish faith...* (Application Form, 1958, female, married, no children, aged 23)

She had not been brought up within a faith tradition, but her husband had, so she obviously

felt it was her role to support him. It does not seem that her own 'faith' came into the equation.

On another Form, the applicant explained her long term difficulties with Christianity:

> *...As a Christian, I had had severe difficulties over Christianity's fundamental tenets, and while I knew I believed in God, I could not readily accept such concepts as immaculate conception, resurrection and trinity—which are so central to that theology...* (Application Form, 1972, married, no children, aged 27)

But the details on her form made it clear that she was wishing also to marry a Jew.

6.3.1.4.4. Identification with Judaism, seeking faith

44% of the sample expressed some connection with the idea of conversion for the sake of seeking a faith, or of identification with Judaism. This raises a question, namely: what was meant by the word 'faith' on these forms?

Some Patrilineal Jews or people who had been adopted by Jewish families often appear to use the word 'faith' or 'religious' to mean something like, 'part of the Jewish people' or 'taking part in family life' – that is, ethnic concerns, rather than simply affirming theological insights. There was, for example, Miss E. who wrote that she had '*been brought up in the Jewish faith, I have always considered myself to be Jewish*' (Application Form, 1950, female, patrilineal Jew, engaged, aged 21).

On the other hand, the term is also used by some with obvious theological connotations. This is particularly true where there was prior dissatisfaction with the religion of their birth family, which also possibly led to them being more open to the religious teachings of Judaism.

Consider the extraordinary journey described by a man in his 50's, married to a non-Jewish woman:

> ...*there have been three constants running through my life:*
>
> *1. From my earliest childhood I have believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*
>
> *2. I have always had close association with Jewish friends.*
>
> *3. I have struggled to reconcile what I was taught as a Christian with my understanding of the Bible.*

In particular, over the last 10 years I have been drawn to explore what I could only describe as 'feeling Jewish.' I unsuccessfully started to trace my genealogy to find any Jewish relatives. I have taken part in five charity bike rides in Israel where I felt a tremendous affinity with the land and I started to explore the Jewish roots of Christianity...

I could not fathom from the Christian teachings how God could suddenly forgo the previous 2000 years of Jewish practice and start up what was basically a new religion... (Application Form, 2002, male, married to non-Jew, aged 54)

This was conversion *lishma* with no Jewish family trying to influence his decision. Indeed, despite a search, there were no obvious Jewish antecedents to find. There had been contact with Judaism over the years, but there had also been a long-term dissatisfaction with Christianity. There was an emotional pull to the Jewish people expressed as '*feeling Jewish*' and gradually becoming identified with Jewish concerns expressed through those charity bike rides in Israel. But it was theology above all else that was the main motivation for this conversion.

Sometimes, a couple will present themselves as candidates, and usually, theological matters predominate.

...*We have found ourselves and God in Judaism. Having done so we have no alternative but to become Jews and live God's law and commandments as given through Moses, bringing up our son...to love the Jewish faith as we do...* (Application Form, 1974, couple in their 30's with infant son)

In addition to these more theological associations with Jewish 'faith', there were instances recorded where some aspect of a mystical experience motivated the convert. One such case in 2001 involved a single woman of 53 with a child of ten. She had been brought up as a Christian but no longer followed that faith. She worked as a teacher and therapist. She believed that she had a mystical connection with the Jewish people. She wrote:

...*I believe I was born with a Jewish soul but into a Christian family in the post-war year of 1948. In the past three years I have explored through dreams and regression work a few other lives I may have lived in which I was Jewish and male including a recent life as a polish Jewish partisan during the Holocaust*... (Application Form, 2001, single woman with child of 10, aged 53)

She was accepted but after just two years she dropped out of the community with no explanation and there was no way to renew contact so unfortunately, the reasons why she dropped out cannot be brought to this research.

6.3.1.4.5. Enjoyment of Jewish community

Similar to the perceived attraction of the Jewish home, there were 16% who saw the warmth of community life as an important element in their wish to convert.

> *...My introduction to Judaism came when I was 12 years old. My best friend at school was Jewish and she used to take me home Friday evenings for Shabbat dinner...at the age of 17 I went to Israel to work on a kibbutz for the summer...I went back the following year for nine months at...where I worked with the children. I married a Jewish man at the age of 20, unfortunately it broke down...*
>
> *I have been with [partner's name] for five years [a Jew] and we are all very happy together. I am now 31 and a great portion of my life has been spent living round Jewish people. I enjoy the way of life and the feeling of being part of the Jewish community...* (Application Form, 1990, female, divorcee with child of 11, now with Jewish partner, aged 31)

This is a person who has had long-term relationships with Judaism, both in private homes and in Israel. The ethnic feelings attached to the Jewish way of life and the community are attractive, she has had two Jewish partners. It does not seem to be the theology, but the ethnicity and community which pull her towards being Jewish.

6.3.1.4.6. Enjoyment of Jewish culture

Recently, an interesting development in use of language has become evident. In 5% of the Forms the phrase 'Jewish culture', rather than the older phrase, 'Jewish way of life,' has appeared. The term first appeared in the applications in 2000. A woman wrote on her form, '*I appreciate Jewish culture and values*' (Application Form, 2000, female, single, born in France, aged 33). While in 2002 there was the comment:

> *...I can't imagine life without Jewish culture and lifestyle. Since I met...over four years ago, I have participated in all the festivals, Friday nights and life cycle events with him, his family and our friends. I cannot imagine a time without this structure together in the future...* (Application Form, 2002, female, engaged, aged 37)

She also went on to mention briefly 'belief in God', but it was the secular word 'culture' that she used to describe what for some are religious occasions, e.g. festivals, Shabbat and life-cycle events.

6.3.1.5. Prior rejection by Orthodox Beit Din

Records of previous applications to the Orthodox Beit Din have been falling in recent years, either possibly because it has become 'known' in the community how demanding the Orthodox Beit Din can be, or else because that Beit Din has become more accommodating in recent years, so that people wishing to join the traditional community have recently found more of a welcome.

Various reasons were given as to why candidates gave up applying to the Orthodox Beit Din. Sometimes, they felt that the demands were just too great. This was true for a young man adopted as a baby by a Jewish family and brought up within the Orthodox world.

> *...engaged to a Jew, brought up as a Jew, adopted by a Jewish family.*
>
> *As an adopted child my religious standing cannot be accepted by the [Orthodox] Beit Din unless I make certain observances which I feel I am unable to do...(*Application form 1963, male, engaged, aged 20)

Or for a teenage girl, brought up as a Jew by her Jewish father:

> *...having been brought up a Jewess and attended Jewish school and private Hebrew lessons since the age of five I now desire to accept the Jewish religion and formally adopt the faith.*
>
> *After being interviewed by the court of the Chief Rabbi I was informed that I would have to be resident in an Orthodox household away from home and also advanced studies which I could not afford...* (Application Form, 1966, female, engaged, aged 17)

For others it was the practical difficulties of the demands made upon them:

> *…The one problem was that I was not willing to leave my work and live in a Jewish family in London [Plymouth was not sufficient]...* (Application Form, 1978, female, single, aged 44)

Such demands led some people to seek conversion through the Reform Beit Din.

6.3.1.6. General conclusions from the Application Forms

From this examination of the Application Forms, it can clearly be seen that the main trigger for seeking conversion was the establishment of a relationship with a Jewish partner. After that, other motives, such as the wish to create a family united by religion, the attraction of Jewish family life, Jewish ethical values and Jewish theology, or family or childhood connections with Judaism came into play.

6.3.2. Survey data

The same picture emerges from the Survey data. Once the perceived tensions of mentioning such instrumental motives to the Beit Din was no longer an issue, an even greater emphasis on the importance of having a Jewish partner and wanting to bring up a family united by faith is mentioned as motivational factors.

It must be noted that in this section, motivation has been examined using both statistical analysis and qualitative data. The following areas will be discussed:

(i) Ratings of the 12 closed questionnaire items from Q1 and predictors of motivation based on personal characteristics and prior experiences,

(ii) Motivational factors derived from factor analysis of items in Q1 and predictors of motivation based on personal characteristics and prior experiences,

(iii) Ratings and qualitative evidence of the pressure/support continuum from Jewish partners and families,

(iv) Factor analysis of closed items measuring family pressure/support,

(v) The relationships between the motivational factors.

6.3.2.1. Ratings of the 10 closed questionnaire items from Q1 and predictors of motivation

It was decided that these ten items in Q1 needed to be subjected to a more forensic examination, especially with a view to see if prior experiences or personal characteristics could be identified as predictors of differing motivations.

The relative importance of each of these factors in order of their importance can be seen in **Figure 6.1**.

Table 6.5. Reasons for deciding to convert – The importance of different items (Q1)

Item from Q1	Very important or important	Slightly important or not at all important	Not applicable	Total
	%	%	#	#
I felt that I needed to find a more meaningful faith	46	54	7	315
I had a Jewish partner and I wished to respond to his/her wish that I convert	55	45	104	340
I had a Jewish partner and I wished to respond to his/her *family's* wish that I convert	17	73	124	332
I was attracted to the religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism	71	29	2	338

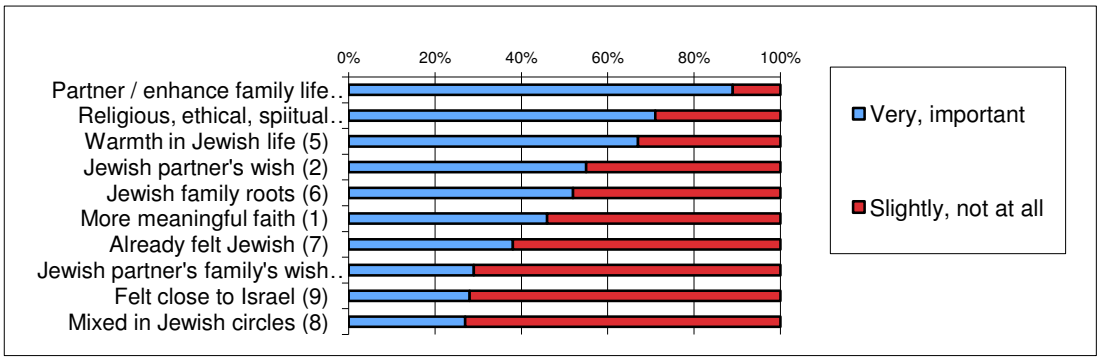
I was attracted by the warmth I saw in Jewish life	67	33	4	335
I have Jewish family roots that I wished to affirm	52	48	242	346
I already felt Jewish to some extent and I wanted to develop this	38	62	8	326
I mixed a lot in Jewish circles and this caused me to think about conversion	27	73	12	325
I felt close to the Land and the people of Israel	28	72	9	323
I had a Jewish partner and felt that conversion would enhance our future life as a family.	89	11	69	352

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: The calculated percentages exclude 'not applicable' and 'missing'.

Obviously, in the majority of the cases, having a Jewish partner was the key trigger to the convert coming into contact with Judaism. Meeting and establishing a long-term relationship with a Jewish partner is an enabling factor which then allows the non-Jew to sample the religious product 'Judaism', and on the basis of that experience, to decide whether or not to convert. Once sampled, the prospective convert can display more intrinsic or more instrumental reasons, or, indeed, both.

Figure 6.1. Reasons for deciding to convert in descending order of salience for the respondents to the Survey



S

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

It was decided to thematically explore the ten items in Q1, employing both qualitative evidence and a series of regression exercises to see if any predictors can be established behind the stated motives.

(i) Faith

'I felt I needed to find a more meaningful faith' (Q1.1)

One of the hypotheses developed at the beginning of this process from the interviews and the extant literature suggested that religious motivation is likely to be one of the more potent drivers behind the decision to convert. With the caveat that the answers in the Survey are a post hoc explanation of the reasons for conversion, the respondents were almost evenly divided on the question of the importance of 'faith' matters in motivating conversion (see **Table 6.5**). 46% felt finding a more meaningful faith to be important or very important, while 54% rated it as having little or no importance.

That less than half of the responses mention the importance of faith in their decision to convert is perhaps surprising given that the majority of converts come from a Christian background, where faith is generally deemed to be more important than ethnicity or even, arguably, ritual, when considering religious identity.

This faith motive is undeniably emphasised in many of the articles written about converts in American literature. As one of the authors explained:

> *...As has often been pointed out, Jews by Choice tend to understand Jewishness in terms parallel with Christianity. They see themselves as leaving one faith community for the sake of another. Judaism is a faith pure and simple...* (Meyer, 1990, pp.81-2)

In the Survey, difficulties with their earlier faith are recorded.[16] People, brought up as Christians, stated that they could not accept such concepts as '*the immaculate conception, resurrection and the trinity*'. Sometimes they have been struggling with these spiritual issues for a long time before they took the route to become Jewish, but the final push usually came as a result of being involved with a Jewish partner.

There is, unfortunately, no comparable evidence available in this study that might indicate the numbers of people who are unhappy with traditional Christian theology who have not chosen to convert to Judaism, despite having met a Jewish partner, except evidence from silence.

There are also descriptions of mystical experiences that led to conversion. A respondent to the Survey explained that it was a mystical dream that led her to seek conversion. She wrote:

> *...When I was 18 I had a dream in which I was shot in the back of the head by a Nazi – I remember the colours of the room etc. When my daughter was born I used names for her which I later found out were "yiddishe" names...*

[16] E.g. Survey nos. 211, 604, 86, 158 plus others.

(Survey 281, female, married, converted 1979, aged 27)

But these descriptions of such mystical experiences are few in number.

The results of a stepwise regression exercise carried out to explore Q1.1 can be seen in **Table 6.6**.

Table 6.6. Predictors of responses to '*I converted to find a more meaningful faith*' (Q1.1)

Predictor	Significance level	Beta	Cumulative % of variance explained by the predictors
Age at conversion	0.001	0.223	4%
He/she still doesn't recognise me as a real Jew	0.003	-0.156	6%
As time went on, they began to resent my enthusiasm and greater knowledge	0.037	-0.156	7%

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

In total, these predictors account for 7% of the variance in the motivational strength of a search for a meaningful faith. Of this, the age of the convert at the point of conversion explains 4%, with those who were older at that point most likely to convert for reasons of faith. The other variables show the negative predictive force of the Jewish partner's or the Jewish family's disapproving response to the conversion process. That is, older converts whose partners saw the conversion process as religiously valid and whose family rejoiced in the convert's new knowledge and enthusiasm for Judaism were most likely to convert for reasons of faith.

'I was attracted to the religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism' (Q1.4)

When considering the dependent variable that they wished to convert because of item Q1.4 (**Table 6.7**), four variables proved to be significant.

This accounts for 9% of the variance in this motivation factor.

Again, the older the convert, the more they reported a 'spiritual' motive behind their conversion. The religious support of their partner, their acceptance of the convert's enthusiasm for the process and the learning, also helped to promote 'spiritual' motivation. Fishman mentioned that her 'Activist' converts tended to marry partners equally interested in Jewish learning and practice (Fishman, 2006, p.14).

(ii) Family pressure/support

'I had a Jewish partner and wanted to respond to his/her wish that I convert' (Q1.2)

'I had a Jewish partner and wanted to respond to his/her family's wish that I convert' (Q1.3)

Table 6.7. Predictors of responses to '*I was attracted to the religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism*' (Q1.4)

Predictor	Significance level	Beta	Cumulative % of variance explained by the predictors
Age at conversion	0.001	0.193	4%
He/she saw the conversion as something we had to get through but not really interested in the religious aspects	0.002	-0.189	6%
Once I started to practice Judaism, he/she resented my enthusiasm and knowledge of Jewish life	0.002	-0.190	7%
He/she became more interested in Judaism when I converted and this interest has continued ever since	0.021	0.122	9%

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

An interesting pattern emerges (see **Table 6.8)** when exploring how the male or female respondents to the Survey judged the influence of their partner or their partner's family on their decision to convert. Perhaps unsurprisingly, both see their partner's influence as having more salience then that exerted by their partner's family.

Again, using the stepwise multiple regression, three items were predictive of the judged importance of satisfying the Jewish partner's wish that the non-Jewish partner convert (Q1.2). They were:

- **Age at conversion.** The younger the proselyte, the more important they felt it was to respond to the wishes of their Jewish partner. The first variable accounts for 5% of the variance in this motivation factor (p = 0.001, Beta = -0.219).
- **The degree of the convert's own families anger at the idea that '*I needed to convert to satisfy the wishes of my partner or his/her family*'** (Q35.6). The second variable accounts for a further 3% of the variance of this motivation factor (p = 0.001, Beta = 0.165). The anger of their own family could have led to the convert feeling that they needed to comply with the wishes of their partner's family even more, or perhaps

their compliance with the Jewish family's wishes had helped enflame the anger of their own family.

- **The Jewish partner's religious background** (p = 0.044, Beta = 0.102). The more religious the Jewish partner's family, the more the converts felt that they had to comply with their partner's wishes to convert.

When employing the same stepwise regression techniques to consider the predictors of responses to Q1.3 ('*I had a Jewish partner and wanted to respond to his/her family's wish that I convert*'), four variables, accounting for 5% of the variance, were found to be statistically significant:

- '*He/she saw the conversion as something we had to get through but not really interested in the religious aspects*' (Q50.1). The first variable accounts for 3% of the variance (p = 0.001, Beta = 0.160).

- '*They helped me learn more about being Jewish*' (Q47.2). This variable added a further 3% to the variance (p = 0.002, Beta = 0.110).

- '*Despite some concerns, they* [the non-Jewish birth family] *just wanted me to be happy*' (Q35.1). This variable added a further 2% to the variance (p = 0.039 Beta = 0.107).

- The Jewish partner's religious background (Q44). This last variable added 1% to the variance (p = 0.027, Beta = -0.117). The complete model thus accounts for 9% of the variance.

Table 6.8. Importance of family pressure as perceived by males or females

	Important or very important	**Slightly important or not important at all**	**Not applicable**	**Total sample size (#)**
Male partner's influence	32%	38%	30%	85
Female partner's influence	37%	26%	37%	278
Both male and female partner's influence	35%	32%	33%	363
Male partner's family's influence	19%	39%	42%	85
Female partner's family's influence	15%	41%	44%	278
All Both male and female partner's influence	17%	40%	43%	363

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: The calculated percentages include the 'not applicable' categories as they are so large.

That is, those converts who expressed the desire to satisfy the expectations of their Jewish partner's family did not have partners who were particularly interested in the religious side of the conversion, but they felt that their partner's family did help them with the conversion, though they perceived the family's religious involvement as low. They also felt that their action had the support of their own family, who just wanted them to be happy.

(iii) Wishing to create a Jewish family

> *'I had a Jewish partner and felt that conversion would enhance our future life as a family' (Q1.10)*

Given the prevalence of converts with Jewish partners, providing the trigger for most of the conversions, it is perhaps not surprising that this variable was recorded as a very potent driver behind their decision by 89% of the respondents to the Survey.

In this post-conversion document, concerns as to what the rabbis sitting on the Beit Din might feel about this instrumental motive as a valid motive for conversion, did not have to be considered, which may explain its high recording.

This trigger was specifically mentioned in the response from a woman who converted in her 20's:

> *Although conversion was entirely my idea, if I had not married a Jew I would never have been exposed to Judaism and thus wanted to find out more*.
> (Survey 127, female, married, teacher, converted 1988 aged 27)

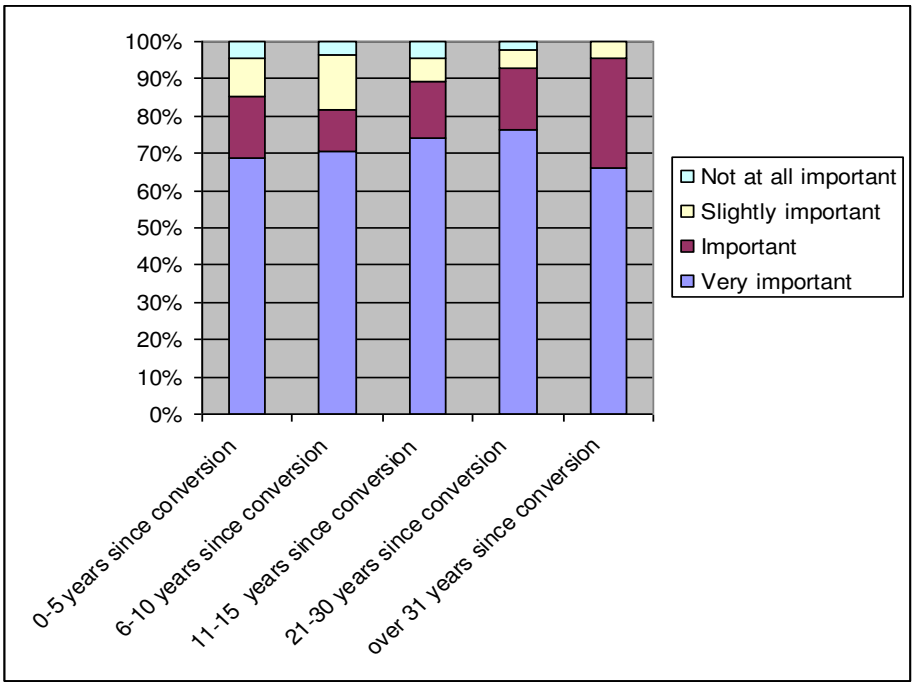
The consistent presence of the motivation of '*wanting to enhance their future family life*' (Q1.10) in successive cohorts of proselytes can be seen in **Figure 6.2**.

Table 6.9. Predictors of responses to '*I had a Jewish partner and felt that conversion would enhance our future life as a family*' (Q 1.10)

Predictor	Significance level	Beta	Cumulative % of variance explained by the predictors
1. Age at conversion	0.001	-0.281	10%
2. He/she helped ease me into the Jewish world	0.001	0.206	16%
3. Once I started to practice Judaism, he/she resented my enthusiasm and knowledge of Jewish life.	0.008	-0.133	20%
4. They were worried they'd be excluded from my life.	0.027	-0.104	21%

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Figure 6.2. '*I had a Jewish partner and felt that conversion would enhance our future family life*' (Q1.10) as a function of years since conversion



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

The independent variables that together are found to be predictors of the respondents' scores account for 21% of the total variance. Four are statistically significant, shown in **Table 6.9**.

That is, the younger the convert, the more their partner eased them into the Jewish world and was pleased by their enthusiasm for Judaism. And the less their own birth family was worried about the decision, the more the convert converted to enhance their future life as a family.

Allied to this wish to create a Jewish family is the item concerned with the degree of warmth they felt existed in such households that attracted them.

'I was attracted by the warmth I saw in Jewish family life' (Q1.5)

Stepwise regression revealed one significant predictor: Q1.7 '*I already felt Jewish to some extent*' ($p = 0.028$, Beta = 0.265). This predictor accounts for 3% of the total variance in this motivational factor. That is, the more a proselyte already felt Jewish, the more they appreciated the warmth of Jewish family life. Possibly, they were already experiencing that warmth.

Three items exploring areas of prior experience of Judaism were examined:-

- '*I already felt Jewish to some extent and wished to develop this*' (Q1.7)

  Only one variable, age at the time of conversion, accounting for 2% of the variance, was identified as a predictor for this motivation factor (p = 0.021, Beta = 0.156). Presumably, the older the proselytes were, the more experience they had had of Judaism, most often with a Jewish partner.

- '*I mixed a lot in Jewish circles and this caused me to think about conversion*' (Q1.8)

  It was to explore this area that Q57 ('*Did you have any contact with Jews when you were growing up*') had been included in the Survey. The results of that specific question are reported in **Table 6.10** and it can be seen that just under half of the respondents (40%) report that they did have prior contact with Jews. It does not unfortunately tell us what was the nature of that contact, nor at what age it occurred nor how long the contact had been maintained. Specifically, it would have been very helpful if it could be ascertained the relationship described was that experienced with their present Jewish partner or with other individuals.

  An analysis of this dependent variable, targeted at those who had mixed in Jewish circles and who saw this as a motivational push towards the decision to convert, identifies two independent variables as predictors accounting together for 5% of the strength of the variance of this motivation factor.

Table 6.10. Reporting prior contact of converts with Jews

Contact?	**#**	**%**
No	208	60
Yes, through family members	27	8
Yes, through friends	108	32
Total	343	100

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

  - The first again concerned the age of the proselyte (significance p = 0.012, Beta = 0.344), and

  - The second considered the strength of the statement that the partner's family did not think that the conversion had made them a real Jew (p = 0.032, Beta = -0.275). This last records the reaction of the family to the conversion once it has taken place, but it can be seen as indicative of how the family felt towards the conversion throughout the process.

  The process here seems to be a bit circular, with perhaps the predictors and the motive all creating a virtuous circle, but it seems that the older the proselyte and the more the Jewish family thought of the proselyte as a prospective Jew in positive ways, the more

they attributed their decision to convert to mixing in Jewish circles.

(iv) Experiences of life in Israel

'I felt close to the Land of Israel and its people.' (Q1.9)

Table 6.11. Predictors of the statement, '*I felt close to the Land of Israel and its people*' (Q1.9)

Predictor	Significance level p	Beta	Cumulative % of variance explained by the predictors
Marital status at time of conversion,	0.009	-0.290	4
Negative Jewish family reaction in the early days	0.003	0.217	6
Gender	0.003	-0.217	7
Partner attended Jewish secondary school	0.018	0.162	8
Proselyte's family felt that proselyte was being disloyal to family	0.032	0.119	9
Had Jewish roots that proselyte wished to affirm	0.040	0.113	10

Source: Survey (Tabick 2005)

The stepwise regression analysis of this item in the survey revealed that six independent variables accounted for 10% of the total variance of this motivation for conversion. The results of this analysis are seen in **Table 6.11**.

The variable '*Marital status at the time of conversion*' was configured so as to exclude those in relationships with non-Jews and to form an ordinal trend from being single to being married. It indicates the link between being married or in a long-term stable relationship with a Jew and motivated to become Jewish because of a feeling of closeness to the Land and the people of Israel.

The second strongest independent variable indicates that the more the Jewish family felt or expressed hostility to the non-Jewish partner, the stronger the motivation to convert due to identification with Israel and its people.

Gender too plays its part with men more likely than women to be motivated by a relationship to Israel.

Where the partner attended Jewish secondary school it seems that love of Israel becomes a stronger motivational force, probably because the Land of Israel and its needs and politics features so much in the life of Jewish secondary schools, and many organise educational trips to Israel lasting a few months.

Again, it seems important here that the proselyte's own family does not take the possibility

of conversion as being a hostile act against the birth family for this motivational factor to operate.

And the fact that the proselyte also had Jewish roots, possibly with friends or family already living in or connected with Israel, is correlated with their positive response to this variable of motivation.

6.3.2.2. Motivation factors derived from factor analysis of items in Q1 and correlations with personal characteristics and prior experiences

The following Pattern Matrix emerged from a Principal Component Factor Analysis. Using the Oblimin rotation method, three underlying dimensions were revealed (converging within 13 iterations), which together account for 65% of the variance.

By observation of the items loading on each factor, the underlying factor constructs can be thought of as:-

- **Intrinsic motivation to convert,**
- **Family pressure,**
- **Desire for family unity.**

Table 6.12. Pattern Matrix for Q1 of the Survey

	FACTOR LOADING		
	1 Intrinsic	**2 Family Pressure**	**3 Family Unity**
Feelings of Jewishness	0.743	0.094	-0.189
Closeness to the Land and people of Israel	0.717	0.017	-0.072
Mixing in Jewish circles	0.653	0.046	0.223
The attraction of Jewish family life	0.645	-0.168	0.481
The attraction of the religious and ethical aspects of Judaism	0.615	-0.333	-0.180
Feeling the need for a more meaningful faith	0.564	-0.212	-0.340
Jewish family roots	0.556	0.245	-0.071
Responding to my Jewish partner's family's wishes	0.149	0.839	-0.171
Responding to my Jewish partner's wishes	-0.050	0.814	0.142
Wanting a family united by religion	-0.134	0.015	0.849

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

6.3.2.2.1. Factor 1

The most salient dimension seems to be the degree to which 'intrinsic motivation', both ethnic and religious, played a part, positively or negatively, in the decision to seek

conversion. It explains 34% of the variance.

In examining 'intrinsic motivation', factor analysis pointed to the following variables loading highest on this factor:-

Q1.7 (Feelings of Jewishness)	**0.743**
Q1.9 (Closeness to the Land and people of Israel)	**0.717**
Q1.8 (Mixing in Jewish circles)	**0.653**

And, to a lesser extent:-

Q1.5 (The attraction of Jewish family life)	**0.645**
Q1.4 (The attraction of the religious and ethical aspects of Judaism)	**0.615**
Q1.1 (Feeling the need for a more meaningful faith)	**0.564**
Q1.6 (Jewish family roots)	**0.556**

6.3.2.2.2. Factor 2

The second factor reflects the strength of the 'Jewish family pressure' to convert. It explains 17% of the variance. Two variables load onto this factor:-

Q 1.2 (Responding to my Jewish partner's family's wishes)	**0.839**
Q1.3 (Responding to my Jewish partner's wishes)	**0.814**

6.3.2.2.3. Factor 3

This third factor reflects the level of their 'desire for family unity', exemplified by responses to items such as:-

Q1.10 (Wanting a family united by religion)	**0.849**

And, to a much lesser extent, but still reflecting this theme:-

Q1.5 (The attraction of Jewish family life)	**0.481**

This explains 14% of the variance.

It was decided to examine the influence of some predictor variables in turn on each of the three dimensions of motivation. I focused on some of the main individual characteristics measured in

the Survey, namely:-

(i) Marital status,

(ii) Age at the time of conversion,

(iii) Time elapsed since the date of the conversion,

(iv) Gender, and

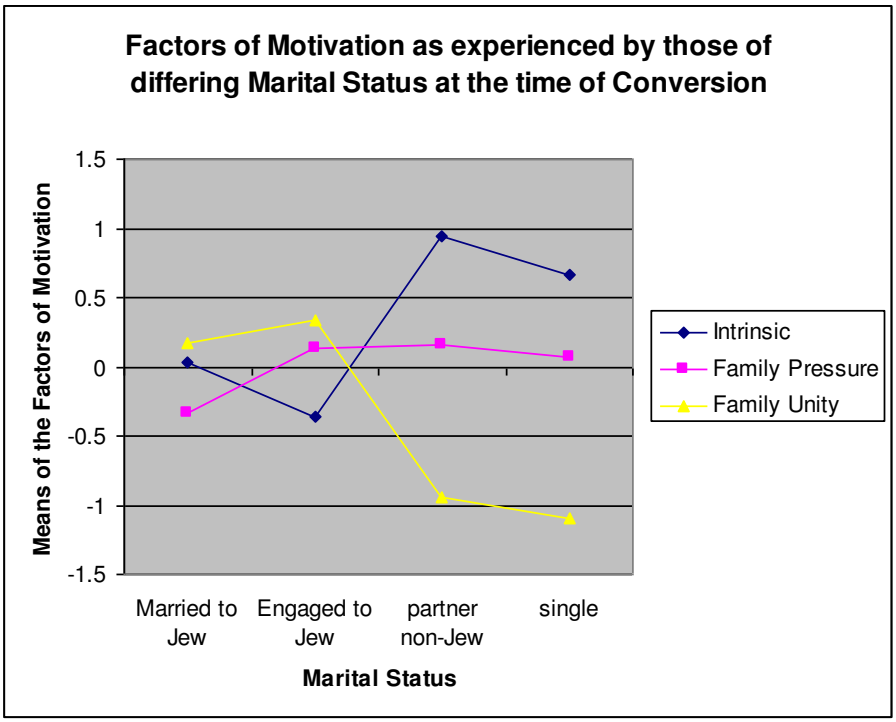
(v) Prior experiences of Judaism.

(The relationships between these three factors of motivation and two other very important prior experiences, namely the religion of the birth family and the religious backgrounds of the Jewish partners, were explored in Chapters 4 and 5).

6.3.2.2.4. Influence of marital status on the three motivational factors

Using a comparison of means, the following results, shown in **Figure 6.3**, were obtained. **Figure 6.3** illustrates the relationship between these three motivational factors and marital status very clearly. It seems that, for the already married, all three dimensions are almost equally balanced. They are, after all, married and already encountering some enjoyable experiences of Judaism through participating in a Jewish family.

Figure 6.3. Levels of motivation as a function of marital status at the time of conversion



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

a) Intrinsic motivation

From the interviews and the American studies, a hypothesis was developed that stated:

> *Those converting as singles or those in a long term relationship with a non-Jew will regard religious issues as a potent driver in their desire to convert.*

This is borne out by a clear trend in the intrinsic motivation across the four categories: lower when married to or engaged to a Jew, higher for those married to non-Jews or converting as singles. This difference is statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$) and is consistent with the analysis of the relationship between marital status and Q1.1 and Q1.4, as well as the 'intrinsic' themes identified from the Application Forms carried out earlier in this chapter.

One would expect converts who were married to non-Jews at the time of their conversion to exhibit particularly strong levels of intrinsic motivation since their personal relationships do not require any engagement with Judaism. Indeed, it could be argued that generally, these relationships would be expected to militate against any such involvement. To a slightly lesser extent, in that they do not have partners who might perhaps be pulling them in a different direction, single people also do not have any obviously extrinsic reasons for considering conversion, so those who do convert are clearly motivated by strong levels of intrinsic factors. Both these groups are, after all, making a very strong statement, not influenced at all by the marriage factor, namely that they wish to follow the Jewish faith. They also, for the same and obvious reasons, rate the motive to create a future Jewish family, of low potency.

Thus a woman married to a non-Jew, wrote of her motivation to convert:

> *...Powerful spiritual experience. Childhood self-identification with the Children of Israel from earliest Bible reading. Intellectual rejection of Christian doctrine...* (Survey 57, female, married, converted 1995 aged 33)

Clearly, these are strong intrinsic drivers for conversion.

For those engaged to Jews at the point of conversion, intrinsic reasons are not perceived as being of such importance. It seems that these candidates are anxious to sort out family matters before marriage is entered into.

b) Family pressure

There is also a statistically significant ($p = 0.001$) variation when looking at the factor

measuring 'family pressure', though it must be noted that the measures across the categories are barely changed. It is interesting that the lowest scores are among those already married to a Jew – otherwise the measures remain very similar. The most obvious explanation is that the pressure to convert is greatest before marriage so as to allow a Jewish wedding or to stop the relationship. After marriage, the family has less immediate reason to push for conversion. Perhaps though, this may also reflect the presence of those with non-Jewish partners or converts who are single and are converting *lishma* but yet include amongst those categories some with Jewish backgrounds who have Jewish family exercising some pressure on their decision to convert.

c) Desire to create a Jewish family

The results here portray a mirror image of those which occurred when exploring Intrinsic motivation. For those already married or engaged to a Jew, there is a greater degree of potency to seek conversion to create a united Jewish family, while the opposite holds true for those not in this situation. This result too is statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$).

6.3.2.2.5. Influence of age at the time of conversion on the three motivational factors

a) Intrinsic motivation

Using a comparison of means, the results shown in **Table 6.13** were obtained.

Table 6.13. Comparison of means of intrinsic motivation by age at conversion

Age group at conversion	Mean of intrinsic motivation
Under 30 years	4.79
31-40 years	4.88
Over 41 years	5.61

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

In the case of intrinsic motivations for conversion there is a defined upwards movement: the older the age at conversion, the more potent the intrinsic motivation becomes. These variations in Intrinsic motivation are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$).

Usually, a higher degree of personal security and awareness of their own identity and needs comes with greater age enabling one to be less compliant with expectations placed upon them by another's wishes and become more independent, converting for one's own reasons and not to please another. They are also often beyond that stage when they need to think of the religious needs of their children.

The two most potent variables in the 'intrinsic motivation' factor are:-

- Q1.7 ('*I already felt Jewish to some extent and wanted to develop this*'), r = 0 .743; and
- Q1.9 ('*I felt close to the Land and people of Israel*'), r = 0.717.

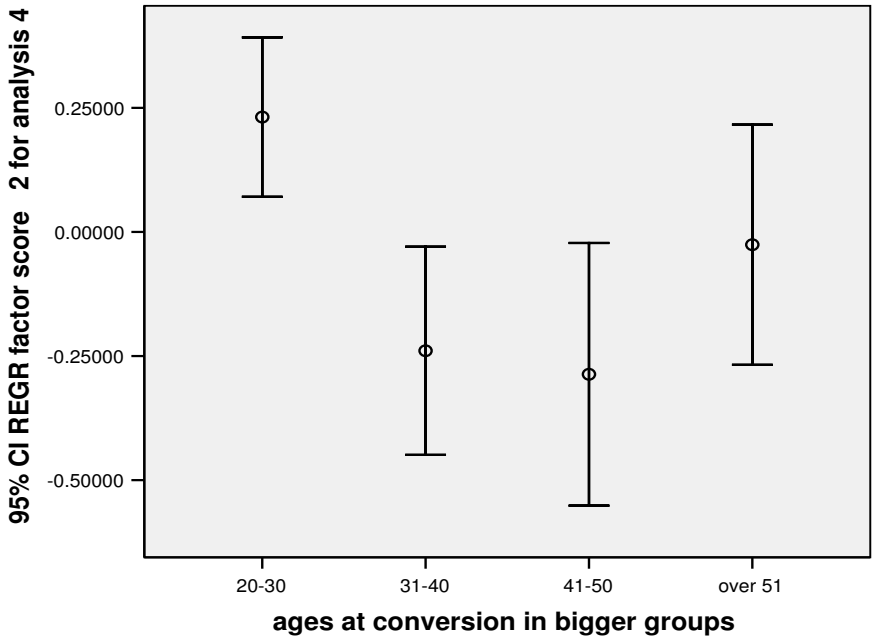
The older the proselyte, the longer many of them will have had contact with Jewish people or their Jewish partner and therefore the more Jewish they will already feel and as many Jews have relatives or friends in Israel, any long-term relationship with Jewish family or friends would enable a putative proselyte to 'catch' this love of the Land.

b) Family pressure

Here, the age groups have been split into four to reflect the special needs that appear to be connected with older converts.

Using a comparison of means, the strength of the desire to convert as a result of family pressure as a function of age at conversion presents a 'U' shaped result (see **Figure 6.4**).

Figure 6.4. Changes in motivation for reasons of family pressure against age at time of conversion



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Family pressure to convert is experienced mostly by the younger converts, for then the

status of future children will be involved. Then it rises again in the older age groups, maybe because questions concerning burial emerge.

Such is the case described by a widow of 86 who explained:

> *I became Jewish in 1983 as my husband had died and I wanted to be buried alongside with him*. (Survey 326, female, widow, converted 1983 aged 63)

These relationships are statistically significant ($p = 0.001$).

c) Desire to create a Jewish family

Using a comparison of means the results shown in **Table 6.14** were obtained.

The results here are almost the mirror image of those found in the tests between age and intrinsic motivation, as would be expected given that this issue is unlikely to arise in older converts. These relationships are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$).

Table 6.14. Means of '*Desire to create a Jewish family*' motivation by age at conversion

Age group at conversion	Mean of '*Desire to create a Jewish family*'
under 30 years	5.18
31-40 years	5.18
over 41 years	4.44

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

6.3.2.2.6. Influence of time elapsed since the date of the conversion on the three motivational factors

a) Intrinsic motivation

Using a comparison of means, the results were significant ($p = 0.005$); therefore a correlation was carried out. This produced a significant result ($r = -0.127$, $p = 0.019$), indicating that the further the conversion recedes into the past, the less potent intrinsic motivation becomes.

This may reflect a historical trend, or that memory diminishes the potency of this factor as family life assumes a greater importance in the converts' lives or, as there has been an increase in singles and those married to non-Jews in recent years, that the variation

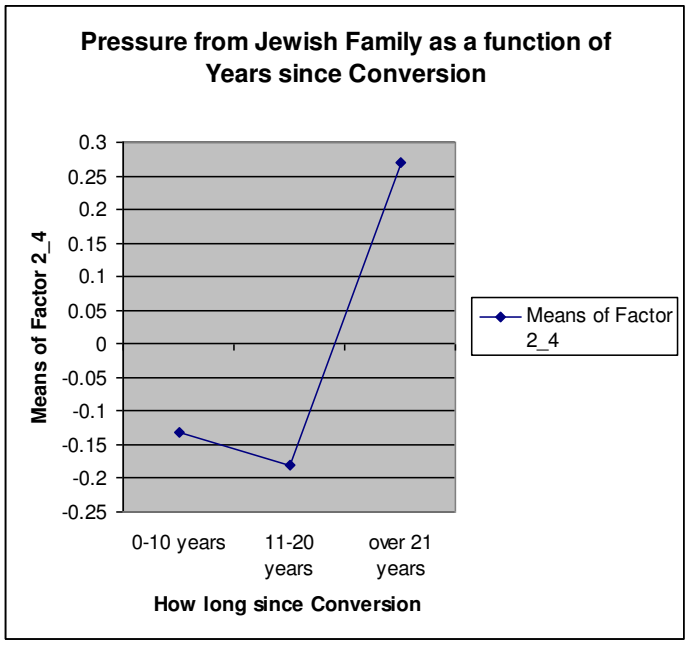
in the makeup of the sample has helped produce this result. (It has already been demonstrated that these categories tend to value Intrinsic motivation more highly than those in relationships with Jewish partners).

To test this hypothesis, a regression test was carried out. The predictors, time elapsed since conversion and religious status of partners, produced one model that explained only 2% of the variance and was not significant (p = 0.064). The Beta value for years elapsed since conversion was -0.033 (p = 0.578), and for the religious status of partners the Beta result was 0.118 (p = 0.044), suggesting that the recent changed makeup of the sample had indeed been involved in the transformed manner in which the converts viewed the potency of Intrinsic reasons to convert over the years.

b) Family pressure

A comparison of means indicated that those who converted over 21 years ago were more influenced by the strength of family pressures upon them to consider conversion than in the other periods under study. This difference was significant (p=0.013), and demonstrated in **Figure 6.5**.

Figure 6.5. Pressure from the Jewish family by years since conversion



Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

This may have arisen because in the past because:-

- Jewish families may have felt more able to express their wishes for a conversion to take place, or

- There were families who felt intermarriage to be more of an issue than it is today, or
- The memories of the salience of such pressure has increased over the years, or
- Maybe this has been influenced by the increase in the perceived legitimacy of the search for individual self-fulfillment.

c) Desire to create a Jewish family

Using a comparison of means, the following results were obtained, shown in **Table 6.15**.

This variation too is statistically significant (p = 0.007), the further the conversion recedes into the past, the more potent are the converts memories of their desire to convert to create a united Jewish family. These results portray a mirror image of the earlier results of the relationship between time elapsed since the conversion and the intrinsic factor of motivation. It is possible that the changed makeup of the sample may also be at work here.

Table 6.15. Intrinsic motivation by years since conversion

Time elapsed since conversion	Mean of intrinsic motivation
0-10 years since conversion	4.82
11-20 years since conversion	5.08
over 21 years since conversion	5.20

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

6.3.2.2.7. The influence of gender on the three motivational factors

The gender of the converts was seen as one possibly important factor by Mayer in 1989 but, here, the results were not significant, as shown in **Table 6.16**.

Table 6.16. Gender by mean scores

	Intrinsic motivation	Family pressure	Family unity
Males	5.07	4.97	4.89
Females	4.99	5.01	5.03
ANOVA	0.538	0.758	0. 323

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

However, despite the insignificant results found here in **Table 6.16**, the positive

correlation reported later in Chapter 7, between intrinsic motivation and the partner's religious support. (See Section 7.3.2.4 p…..) Factor analysis of closed items measuring family pressure or support would seem to suggest that male converts, who in general, in this convert population, have female Jewish partners, experience a greater level of support in religious matters from their female Jewish partners than vice versa. This finding reflects the general pattern in society of the female being more involved in religious matters than men (Durre, 2002; King, 1995; Plaskow and Christ, 1989).

This involvement in intrinsic matters, though, would seem to contradict research conducted by Greenwood (2002) who suggested...

> *...In keeping with men's instrumental/productive orientation, men who participate in Jewish life and/or become Jews prize their role as actors capable of making a concrete difference and effecting change in the world…* (Greenwood, 2002, p.5)

That is, according to her research, the decision to raise Jewish children and the significant activity that went into the implementation of that decision was seen to be an important male goal.

This contradiction is underlined in Ian's interview where he describes his motive to convert as this very instrumental/productive orientation mentioned by Greenwood.

> *...we were going to get married and I wanted to participate in what she was doing and that required me to convert and be accepted by the community. So that was it...You know, there were not great thoughts about it or difficulties or concerns it just seemed like this is, you know, what we need to do and so this is what I'll do.*
>
> *...But as far as spiritually, I wasn't looking for that and didn't expect it. That doesn't mean I haven't gotten anything from, you know, reading the Torah or being involved in discussions, but that's not why or what I was looking for, why I converted...*
>
> *...another reason why I converted because if I'm going to be involved in something I want to have a, you know, a full, you know, voting voice because that's just the way I am. You know, I get involved in things, put my two cents in and, you know, see what I can do to improve it and make it a better situation. So, you know, just get involved and active and things...* (Greenwood, 2002, p.5ff)

There is another factor to be considered. Aune, Sharma and Vincent argue that women have become more predominant in religious matters through the increasing secularisation of society. As they explained:

> *...The core characteristics of secularising modernity – rationalisation, separation of church and state, bureaucratisation, industrialisation, capitalism – were mainly driven forward in the public arena by men. The division of women and men into 'separate spheres', coupled with the privatisation of religion as it lost its social influence, feminised religion, connecting it with women's activities in the private sphere. It is difficult to know exactly how this feminisation contributed to men's declining attendance or women's increasing attendance, but it is clear that these changes occurred, and that the existing preponderance of women as churchgoers is connected to this...*
> (Aune, Sharma and Vincent, 2008, p.5)

There seems to be a contradiction here with Greenwood's research where the emphasis is on the *instrumental/productive orientation* of men. However, my study suggests that men, albeit influenced by their women partners supporting them in this spiritual sphere, are motivated by intrinsic reasons for conversion.

The lack of significance in these tests reported in **Table 6.16** concerning gender maybe reflect the clash between these two trends:-

- Males are generally more motivated by instrumental concerns than spiritual ones, but
- Those supported by their female partner's involvement in religious matters tend to see the intrinsic motive as being more potent.

6.3.2.2.8. The influence of prior experiences of Judaism (Q57) on the three motivational factors

When exploring this subject, we can find much evidence in the Survey's qualitative data of those who had a long experience of contact with the Jewish world before they decided to seek conversion – though only 27% of the respondents to the Survey declared that this variable was important or very important to them. It has to be noted, however, that this exercise is limited by the nature of the data that we hold – that is, we only have data from those who actually converted, not from those who may have had significant contact with Jews growing up but did not choose to convert.

One of the hypotheses proposed:

> *There is a correlation between positive experiences of Jews and Judaism when growing up and a later decision made to convert.*

From comments made in the Survey, it is clear that some converts did have a positive prior experience of Judaism which they link with their later decision to convert, such as:

> ...*Before I met my husband I was mixing in Jewish circles and dating Jewish men. It was right for me*... (Survey 66, female, engaged, converted 1990 aged 37)

In the interviews, for Ian, it was a touching spiritual memory based on a childish misinterpretation of a ritual act,

> ...*my only memory of Jewish people when I was small was that there was a Jewish family in my town and they had a* mezuzah *on the door...somehow as a very small child, and I mean very small, I thought this was an intercom to God because they would touch it when they came in and I thought they were talking to God.* (Ian, married to convert Ivy, converted 2 years after her in 1995 aged 35 p 1)

For others, it was not experiences from their youth, but the long association with their partner's Jewish family that they made reference to in the comment section:

> ...*[we] had a civil wedding some 16 years prior to conversion. It took me that length of time to decide it was finally right for me...* (Survey 345, female, married, converted 2001 aged 41)

Thus, we have evidence that prior experiences of Judaism did, for some of the converts, feature in their decision to convert. Hence, it was decided to see how this item (Q57) might interact with the three motivational factors.

a) Intrinsic motivation

Fishman (2006, p.14), in particular, had emphasised prior positive experiences of Judaism, before the converts had even met their Jewish partners, as part of the makeup of those converts she described as 'Activists'. (The 'Activist' converts also shared the enthusiasm for the more spiritual and ritual aspects of Judaism, but Fishman's description of them could not be seen as being totally aligned with the Intrinsic factor as described in this study).

Examining the responses from the Survey, the following results were found, shown in **Table 6.17**.

These results indicate that those who had prior knowledge of Judaism through family members regarded the intrinsic motive as being more potent than the other groups. This may reflect that those with such prior knowledge may well come from proselytes with Jewish fathers or grandparents whom it has already been shown are attracted to the ethnic

items contained in this factor. This relation is statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$).

Table 6.17. Contact with Jews by intrinsic motivation

Contact with Jews growing up?	Means of intrinsic motivation	#
No	4.82	208
Yes, through family	5.49	27
Yes through friends	5.15	108

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

b) Family pressure; and c) Desire to create a Jewish family

There were no significant results when this item was correlated with the motive measuring family pressure ($p = 0.825$) or the factor measuring the desire for a united Jewish family ($p = 0.093$).

6.3.2.3. Ratings and qualitative evidence of the pressure/support from Jewish partners and families

In Chapter 4, we looked at the question as to whether the proselyte experienced feelings of family *pressure* to convert as opposed to enjoying feelings of family *support*. The results are repeated here for convenience.

As can be seen in **Table 6.18**, in the middle of the process, once the relationship was fully established, 43% felt some pressure or encouragement to convert (first three categories), 34% were aware that the Jewish family would prefer it if they converted, though there was no overt pressure or encouragement, while 23% felt that there was absolutely no pressure, overt or implied, from the Jewish family to convert.

In addition, the families and the Jewish partners were asked their opinion of the validity of the approach to Judaism as followed by the Movement for Reform Judaism. These results are shown in **Table 6.19**.

Table 6.18. Once the relationship was established, the extent of pressure exerted by the Jewish family to convert

	#	%
Strong pressure exerted	16	6
Subtle pressure/hints	37	13
Encouraged but no pressure	65	24
No active encouragement but convert knew that the family would like conversion to take place	94	34

No encouragement, the family thought it irrelevant	63	23
Total	276	100

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: 'Missing' or 'not-applicable' answers are excluded from these percentages.

Table 6.19. Feelings towards Reform Judaism as expressed by the Jewish partner and the Jewish family

Item	**Yes**		**No**	
	#	**%**	**#**	**%**
Did the Jewish family express negative views about Reform Judaism?	53	15	227	62
Did your Jewish partner express negative views about Reform Judaism?	24	8	266	92

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Note: The calculated percentages exclude 'not applicable' and 'missing'.

Thus there was a general positive feeling towards the Movement for Reform Judaism in the eyes of both the families and the partners. This positive attitude may have been part of their general perspective on the Jewish community, or may have arisen out of a perception that the issue of conversion would be better dealt with by the Reform movement.

In Chapter 5, the analysis of Q47 and Q50 demonstrated a very positive view of the support given by both the Jewish partner and the Jewish family of the convert. The families were seen as enjoying the converts developing enthusiasm and knowledge (87%), and helping them learn about being Jewish (65%). The converts also felt that the family respected them for becoming Jewish (75%) but at the same time had less confidence that the families believed that the process would make them into a 'real' Jew (52%).

The Jewish partners' responses were also perceived in very positive terms by the converts: they helped ease them into the Jewish world (80%), were interested in the more religious aspects of Judaism (75%), and increased that interest through the conversion process (65%). A higher proportion of the partners than their families (90%) did see the process as leading to the converts being seen as 'real' Jews. That attitude must have been a source of encouragement in the decision to convert and during the learning process.

6.3.2.4. Factor analysis of closed items measuring family pressure/support

This section explores the fundamental factor of 'family pressure' identified in the first analysis and identifies three further motivational factors based on closed-questionnaire items listed in **Table 6.20** below, with their appropriate factor loadings. The aim was to identify the factorial structure underlying the items that relate to family pressure.

Table 6.20. Pattern Matrix examining the issue of 'family support'

	Component		
	1	**2**	**3**
Did the Jewish family apply any pressure on you to convert to Judaism now that the relationship was established?	-0.043	0.138	0.710
Late family support	0.791	-0.110	-
They respected me for becoming Jewish	0.774	-	-
They thought the conversion would not make me a real Jew	-0.742	-	-
They helped me learn more about being Jewish	0.717	-	-
They treated me just like any other Jewish relative and did not make an issue of my conversion	0.712	-	-
We had little or no contact	-0.676	0.142	-
As time went by, they began to resent my enthusiasm and greater knowledge	0.554	0.207	-0.117
Early family support	0.535	-0.123	-
Did the Jewish family express negative views about Reform Judaism?	0.531	-0.100	0.129
He/she still doesn't recognise me as a real Jew	-	0.783	-
Once I started to practice Judaism, he/she resented my enthusiasm and knowledge of Jewish life	-	0.770	-0.103
He/she saw the conversion as something we had to get through but was not really interested in the religious aspects	-	0.725	0.148
He/she became more involved in Judaism when I converted and this interest has continued ever since	-	-0.609	-
Did your partner express any negative views about Reform Judaism?	-	0.387	-
I had a Jewish partner and wanted to respond to his/her wish that I convert	-	-	0.858
I had a Jewish partner and wanted to respond to his/her family's wish that I convert	-	-	0.840
How would you describe your current partner's Jewish background – i.e. the level of practice in his or her family home?	-	-0.105	-0.110
He/she helped ease me into the Jewish world	-0.111	-0.154	-

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

Extraction method: Principle Component Analysis.

Method: Oblimin with Rotation Keiser Normalisation.

Rotation converged in 13 iterations.

This further factor analysis revealed three underlying dimensions:-

1. **General strength of family support**

   The variables which loaded highest on this factor were:-

   - **Late family support (0.791)**
   - **The family respected me for becoming Jewish (0.774)**

- **They did not think the conversion would make me a real Jew (-0.742)**
- **The family helped me learn about being Jewish (0.717)**
- **They treated me just like any other Jewish relative and did not make an issue of my conversion (0.712)**
- **The family had no contact with the couple (-0.676)**

2. **Degree of buy-in to the conversion process by the partner**

   The variables which loaded highest on this second factor were:-

   - **He/she still doesn't recognise me as a real Jew (0.783)**
   - **He/she resented my enthusiasm and knowledge (0.770)**
   - **He/she saw the conversion as something we had to get through but was not really interested in the religious aspects (0.725)**
   - **He/she became more involved in Judaism when I converted and this interest has continued ever since (-0.609)**

3. **Proselytes desire to satisfy expectations**

   In this last factor, the variables which loaded the highest were just three:-

   - **I had a Jewish partner and wanted to respond to his/her wish that I convert (0.858)**
   - **I had a Jewish partner and wanted to respond to his/her family's wish that I convert (0.840)**
   - **Did the Jewish family apply any pressure on you to convert to Judaism now that the relationship was established? (0.710)**

These three dimensions account for 46% of the variance.

The three factors derived from this analysis are highly predictable from the items that are included (whether the family has been supportive or not, or had contact with the couple, whether their partners had been supportive or not, whether the converts felt that they had converted in order to respond to the desires of their partner or his family). However, the fact that the support of the family was seen in very general terms while the support of the partner is seen more in terms of perceived engagement in the religious elements of the process is worthy of note.

What this indicates is that the converts perceive a difference between the expression of a general level of support from the Jewish family and the strength of the level of interest in the religious aspects of the conversion by their partners. That is, the convert perceives different types of support being proffered, one that is just generally helpful, or not, while the other

measures the strength of support more specifically concerned with the convert developing their religious and spiritual knowledge and sensitivities.

The third factor is closest to the 'family pressure' factor that emerged from the previous factor analysis of Q1 of the survey, with the addition of one further item, that increases the strength of this factor as a measurement of family pressure: '*Did the Jewish family apply any pressure on you to convert to Judaism now that the relationship was established?*'

The examination of these dimensions confirms the complexity of the issues involved when it comes to unraveling the balance between what is perceived by the proselyte as aggressive pressure to convert and what is welcomed by other converts as active support for the same step.

It seems from the qualitative evidence that this wish for a conversion of the non-Jewish partner can range from a gentle expression of a mere desire, or hint, or maybe even just a hope that conversion will take place to the opposite extreme, namely that the wish became expressed as threats, or a level of emotional blackmail or even coercion that the conversion must take place.

In the interviews, 10 out of the 11 converts with Jewish partners cited pressure to convert from the Jewish family as a difficult issue for them. However, this high proportion may have come about from the way in which the interviewees were chosen. Firstly, those who volunteered for or agreed to the process may have had particular issues they wished to highlight and secondly, being worried that those who had suffered from high levels of pressure from the Jewish family might no longer be members of a community, and so would be difficult to bring into the Survey, I oversampled those who were unhappy in some way with the process.

Thus, in the interviews with Angela and her partner Andrew, the horror of the Jewish family at their son's relationship with a non-Jewish girl and the expectations of her fiancé that she would convert were very clear to Angela. There was also a very clear sense of injustice at this expectation in that Andrew and his parents were, in Angela's eyes, and even in Andrew's eyes, not actually involved in Jewish life, yet they had a clear wish for their daughter-in-law to convert. Angela noted:

> ...*We had a registry office marriage, but I know that his parents were very disappointed "that I wasn't a nice Jewish girl" and in fact at that point Andrew wasn't leading any sort of Jewish life so it would have been very difficult for him to have actually married somebody Jewish...* (Angela, married, converted 1981 aged 31, p.1)

Andrew, for his part testified:

> *...To my parents' alleged horror, you know, I was marrying a* shikse*. Which I found to be totally, totally, totally two-faced, because what did they ever do themselves? They would protest that they did more but the reality was they*

> *did almost absolutely nothing. But being thirty and being a good Jewish and a fairly dominated son I suggested to Angela that she might consider converting...* (Andrew, married to Angela who converted 1981, pp.2-3)

This coercive pressure was also commented upon by respondents to the Survey. One woman wrote '*I felt great pressure from my husband's family that I would be unacceptable as a wife if I didn't convert*' (Survey 37, female married converted 1983 aged 26).

The religious support, or lack thereof, was also commented upon by respondents to the Survey. As far as many of the converts were concerned, ethnic and communal links with family and heritage were seen as more important for the Jewish partners than what certainly the convert understood as religious reasons for conversion. Thus a woman observed that...

> ...*My Jewish husband is not particularly interested in attending regularly but goes to the important festivals and friends bar mitzvahs etc...*[but] *I am glad I converted to Judaism and am happy to be accepted as Jewish. It seemed a small thing to do to please my husband and my family...* (Survey 119, female, married converted 2004 aged 54)

There were however some positive comments regarding their partner's religious interest. One commented that she had been motivated to become Jewish because of the...

> *...continuing support of a partner. I could see the passion he had for his religion and felt it would be harder for him to stop being Jewish than for me to become Jewish...* (Survey 34, female, married, converted 1999 aged 33)

But, maybe positive religious support by a convert's partner was regarded as too obvious a component of their relationship to comment upon, which may explain the relative dearth of positive examples even though from the statistics it is clear that such support was indeed available to many.

6.3.2.5. The relationships between the motivational factors

Following a correlation exercise, the following results were obtained, shown in **Table 6.21**. (As the second set of factors produced a more detailed set of dimensions measuring the level and different types family support/pressure, they were used in this analysis rather than the more general family pressure factor which emerged from the first factor analysis exercise).

From this analysis it can be seen that there are statistically significant correlations between the intrinsic motivation factor and the factors measuring the convert's perception that she is fulfilling family expectations and the partner's buy-in to the conversion process. Where these relationships are positive, it may be that the partner's religious support for the conversion led to

the proselyte feeling that intrinsic motivation was important to her/him, or that the partner, seeing it was important to the proselyte, developed his religious support for her motivation. Or even that the proselyte, feeling an intrinsic desire to seek conversion, chose a partner who would support her on that spiritual path. The ethnic elements included in the intrinsic motive would relate well to the desire to fulfill family expectations of a convert.

Table 6.21. Relationships between motivational factors

Motivational factor	Correlated to motivational factor	r	p
Intrinsic motivation	General family support	≤1	0.996
	Buy-in to the conversion process by partner	**0.150**	**0.026**
	Proselyte's desire to satisfy expectations	**0.185**	**0.006**
Desire for family unity	General family support	**0.185**	**0.006**
	Buy-in to the conversion process by partner	**-0.194**	**0.001**
	Proselyte's desire to satisfy expectations	0.016	0.816
General family support	Buy-in to the conversion process by partner	**0.191**	**0.004**
	Proselyte's desire to satisfy expectations	0.048	0.481
Buy-in to the conversion process by partner	General family support	**0.191**	**0.004**
	Proselyte's desire to satisfy expectations	0.073	0.227
Proselyte's desire to satisfy expectations	General family support	0.048	0.481
	Buy-in to the conversion process by partner	0.073	0.227

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

There were significant relationships between the motive to '*form a family united by religion*' and the factors expressing a general level of family support for the conversion and with the partner's buy-in to the conversion process. However, the latter correlation was negative. The spiritual and the ethnic dimensions of these factors can be seen to be separated out here, with the general family support and the desire to form a family united by religion very naturally reinforcing each other, but not correlating positively to a partner willing to support the religious and spiritual parts of the process.

When tested further by a comparison of means ($p \leq 0.001$), there was an interesting U-shaped pattern that emerged between the factor measuring the desire for family unity and the partner's buy-in to the conversion process. It demonstrates that this factor is important both when the partner was seen as buying-in to the conversion process and also when the partner had absolutely no interest in that area. Perhaps this indicates that the desire to form a Jewish family unit could be motivated either by the wish to celebrate religious events together, or to provide a non-religious ethnic Jewish family unit. This would need more specific exploration to try and unravel this area of motivation.

6.4. Conclusion

From an examination of the Application Forms, interviews and the Survey data, it is clearly demonstrated that conversion to Judaism rarely comes about through a 'Damascus Road' type of mystical experience. Instead, most conversions are firmly embedded within the

social/emotional experiences of meeting a Jewish partner and deciding that conversion to Judaism would enhance future family life.

While it must be acknowledged that for some at least, especially those converting as singles, or with non-Jewish partners, the conversion was *lishma* in the traditional sense of the word, nevertheless there is a consistency that emerges from the studies conducted in America and the results that have emerged in this study, namely, that in the majority of cases, where marriage to a Jewish partner is connected to the conversion:-

- The enabling factor is meeting a Jewish partner and, through that...
- ... experiencing something of Jewish social life, rituals and culture, followed by...
- ... a triggering factor, most often recognising the value of having a unified Jewish family unit within a marriage, especially when a life cycle event such as their own marriage, or the birth or *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* of their own child or the death of someone close to them occurs...
- ... and that this general pattern holds for the majority who come to the conversion with a Jewish partner, while recognising that other more intrinsic motivations are often present.

Dennis Prager, picking up this latter notion that more intrinsic reasons for conversion are often also present with those connected to marriage, noted:

> *People do not become Jews in order to attain salvation (they can attain to it, according to Judaism, without converting). People certainly do not become Jews to become popular...Anyone who moves from a majority culture to Judaism is usually doing so for idealistic reasons, even if marrying a Jew is the original impetus.* (Prager, 1995, p.86)

It is also very important to stress the often complex bundle of motives that bring people to the point of conversion and to note that motivation can change. As one woman commented:

> ...*I began the conversion process in order to further my relationship with my then partner. During the conversion course I realised that Judaism had something to offer me personally and my journey of learning about Judaism began there, and will continue for the rest of my life...* (Survey 59, female, serious relationship, converted 1988 aged 46, that partnership failed, then married non-Jew who also converted)

The salience of the different elements of the bundle also probably change as different concerns emerge in the life of the convert.

7. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION AND LEARNING ATTITUDES

7.1. The learning process

7.1.1. Background and hypotheses

It would seem self-evident that motivation is critical to the success or not of the learning process. But what is fundamental to traditional Jewish approaches to conversion is whether the learning is motivated by 'genuine' intrinsic commitment (e.g. a spiritual yearning) or by more instrumental and extrinsic factors (e.g. a desire to satisfy the wishes of the Jewish family). The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for conversion, which has been central to Jewish thinking since the Talmudic era, has an almost exact parallel in contemporary psychological research on motivation and learning. As Lepper wrote:

> *…A student who is intrinsically motivated undertakes an activity "for its own sake", for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes…An EXTRINSICALLY motivated student performs "IN ORDER TO obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself," such as grades, stickers, or teacher approval...* (Lepper, 1988)

Lepper has also stated that:

> *…intrinsically motivated students tend to employ strategies that demand more effort and that enable them to process information more deeply…*[and that]*…Students with an intrinsic orientation also tend to prefer tasks that are moderately challenging, whereas extrinsically oriented students gravitate toward tasks that are low in degree of difficulty. Extrinsically oriented students are inclined to put forth the minimal amount of effort necessary to get the maximal reward...* (Lepper, 1988)

Also, Condry and Chambers found that:

> *…when students were confronted with complex intellectual tasks, those with an intrinsic orientation used more logical information-gathering and decision-making strategies than did students who were extrinsically oriented…* (Condry and Chambers, 1978)

It seems plausible to suggest that the differences in learning style associated with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in classroom learning might also have their parallels in the way in which Jewish behaviours and beliefs are acquired by converts. Thus, it is important to be able to determine whether converts are motivated by intrinsic or instrumental (extrinsic) factors and to assess how this relates to their acquisition of Jewish identity.

Thus we could hypothesise that high levels of intrinsic motivation would awaken different forms of learning and Jewish behaviour than conversion that is motivated by family pressure or the desire to form a family united by religion. Unfortunately, the data do not support a statistical analysis of teaching or learning styles, though some qualitative evidence can shed some light on this area of study. But the data do allow us to look at the correlations between motivation and attitudes to the learning process and, later in this chapter, between motivation and Jewish life outcomes.

There are cases in which the prevailing motives are clearly either intrinsic or extrinsic. The difficulty in presenting suitably organised learning to students who have varied motivation was commented upon by several of the respondents to the survey.

> *...To have a separate class for singles and those converting to have a Jewish wedding…Had to keep reminding myself that to get to the Promised Land you have to go through the wilderness first...* (Survey 363, female, single, converted 2004 aged 52)

> *...few of my class…are ever seen again – I think this is sad – people's intentions sometimes are simply for 'convenience'...* (Survey 147, female, married, converted 1970 aged 30)

These converts suggest that their primarily intrinsic motivation for conversion required different teaching methods to those who were converting for the purpose of marriage, which could be classed, in this instance, as an extrinsic motive, and their statements give witness to the wide range of motivations present in any group of converts.

On the other hand, while much literature tends to regard intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as being mutually exclusive, there is no rational reason for this to be the case. Indeed, in the qualitative material examined for this study, the desire to seek spiritual values is often combined with the desire to satisfy the convert's Jewish partner.

> *...First I want to become Jewish because my fiancé is Jewish. We wish to belong to and be committed to the same faith and to spread that commitment to our children in the future.*

> *Second, Judaism is a religion that I have become increasingly interested in for some time. I believe in the one and only God and have many respects for the principles and nature of the Jewish way of life...* (Application Form, 1972 female, engaged, aged 28)

With someone motivated primarily by intrinsic drives, it would seem likely that they would respond more fully to the teaching that is on offer during the course and find the visit to the Beit Din to be most fulfilling. They would possibly also be more interested in continuing their education, especially in having some sort of group where converts are given specific

challenges.

Those responding primarily to the pressure or support exerted by their Jewish partners or their families might feel that they lack control over what is happening in their lives and so respond negatively to the learning experience. This negativity came to the fore in Fay's interview. Talking about the class she said it was...

> *...Very difficult. It's very difficult to convert to a religion you don't believe in. <laughter> And trying to convince people that you do, when you don't… <Laughter> I don't remember very much about it, really....It was OK. But it didn't stick in my mind. I don't think I actually learnt a tremendous amount from it...I mean there were things like on Yom Kippur, half way through I went, run out food shopping to eat anything I could, preferably, something, just rebelling...* (Fay, married, converted 1987 aged 28, pp.2-3)

Or those doing the course primarily for the sake of their partner might react differently, and respond positively to the immediate learning experience, and when married, have extrinsic reasons to remain close to what they have learnt, but possibly drift away when divorced or widowed. As Olive said in her interview:

> *…I think when my husband died…I was very sad at that time and I couldn't bring myself to go to synagogue…...* (Olive, widow, converted 1948 aged 24, p.2)

Certainly, some of the respondents to the survey were very aware that different sources of motivation might be present in their hearts and they saw a need to be certain that it was the '*right' reason…I felt very strongly that I had to do it for me, i.e' not just for my partner. I had to fit my core beliefs and values into a Jewish framework. I also wanted to be certain if that for any reason in the future our relationship ended, I wouldn't say, 'I converted for you'.* (Survey 306, female, married, converted 1999 aged 27)

To see if any patterns emerged, I first explored the relationship between the factors of motivation and the attitudes aroused by the course, and between motivation and experiences of appearing before the Beit Din.

7.1.2. Measurement of motivation and the learning process

(ii) Motivational factors, as described in Chapter 6 (Sections 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3 pp.221-3 and Section 6.3.2.4 pp.235-9)

Intrinsic,

Wishing to create a family united by religion,

General family support,

Religious support from the partner, and

Proselyte's desire to satisfy expectations.

(iii) Using the Oblimin Rotated Pattern Matrix, a factor analysis was carried out on Q5, Q8, Q11, Q14, Q16 and Q17 of the survey concerned with the process of conversion and its immediate aftermath (shown in **Table 7.1**). This analysis explains 42% of the variance. The analysis revealed four factors:-

- **Positive feelings towards the results of the process** (replaced by the contentment index);
- **Ongoing help and support after the conversion**;
- **Support received during the process;**
- **Positive feelings towards the Beit Din.**

The rotation converged in 13 iterations.

Table 7.1. Pattern Matrix based on Q5, Q8, Q11, Q14, Q16 and Q17

	FACTOR LOADING			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Pleased with conversion	0.798			
Extremely unhappy with conversion	-0.798			
U can't imagine not being a Jew	0.610			0.239
Converting brought strength and unity into family life	0.560		0.113	-0.203
A feeling of self-fulfillment	0.555			0.167
Never feeling at home in the Jewish community	-0.520	0.210		-0.130
Dislike of social attitudes and opinions of many Jews	-0.393	0.143		-0.128
Once converted merging into the community is preferable		-0.786		
Rabbis should help set goals for new converts		0.731		0.131
Continuing classes should be arranged	0.105	0.676		
A personal mentoring scheme should be set up		0.668		
Provision of a community forum for converts would be good		0.659	-0.165	
Providing proselytes with life cycle support to cope would be good		0.572		
A feeling of regret when the course ended	-0.104	0.356	0.242	
How much practical support by the rabbi or tutor			0.909	
How much intellectual support by the rabbi or tutor			0.839	
How much emotional support by the rabbi or tutor			0.815	

Wanting more practical help, less theory		0.256	-0.522	
Efficiency of the Reform Beit Din				0.856
Sensitivity of the Reform Beit Din				0.818
The extent of feelings of intimidation in front of the Beit Din				-0.440
The extent of feelings of spirituality before the Beit Din				0.133
Never feeling at home in the Jewish community		0.218	-0.238	-0.102
Wanting more of an intellectual challenge		0.176		
Feelings of rebellion against the rabbi/tutor	-0.263		-0.210	
Appearing before the Beit Din was part of an ongoing process		0.118		
Appearing before the Beit Din was just to get a stamp of approval		-0.105		-0.119
Feeling of no encouragement to present real reasons for conversion	-0.247	0.190	-0.243	0.144
Worry over having to present a spiritual commitment	-0.365			

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

By observation of the items loading on each factor, the underlying constructs have been defined as follows:-

- **Factor 1** measures the strength of **Positive Feelings towards the Results of the Process**. The variables that loaded most onto this factor were:-

  Q17.1. Pleased with conversion 0.798

  Q17.8. Unhappy with conversion (loads negatively) **-0.798**

  Q17.7. I can't imagine <u>not</u> being a Jew 0.610

  Q17.4. converting brought strength and unity into family life 0.560

  Q17.6. a feeling of self-fulfillment 0.555

  This factor echoes the findings of the contentment index (explained below) created from Q17. In analysis, the contentment index is used rather than this factor.

- **Factor 2** measures the strength of the desire for **ongoing help and support after the conversion**. Loading onto this factor are:-

  Q16.5. Once converted merging into the community is preferable (loading negatively) **-0.786**

  Q16.2. Rabbis should help set goals for new converts 0.731

  Q16.3. Continuing classes should be arranged 0.676

  Q16.6. A personal mentoring scheme should be set up 0.668

Q16.1. Provision of a community forum for converts would be good 0.659

- **Factor 3** measures the strength of the **support received during the process.** The variables which load most highly onto this factor are:-

  Q8.1. How much practical support by the rabbi or tutor 0.909

  Q8.2. How much intellectual support by the rabbi or tutor 0.839

  Q8.3. How much emotional support by the rabbi or tutor 0.815

  Q5.6. Wanting more practical help, less theory (loading negatively) **-0.522**

- **Factor 4**, the last dimension to be considered here, reflects the strength of **positive feelings towards the Beit Din**:-

  Q14.1. Efficiency of the Reform Beit Din 0.856

  Q14.2. Sensitivity of the Reform Beit Din 0.818

  Q11:3. The extent of feelings of Intimidation in front of the Beit Din (loading negatively) **-0.440**

(iv) **Contentment index**, as described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3.1, p.66)

7.1.3. Results and discussion

The following correlations were found between the motivational factors and the learning attitudes, shown in **Table 7.2**.

Proselytes with high levels of Intrinsic motivation express a positive appreciation of the work of the Beit Din and a positive desire for ongoing support. They approached conversion understanding the importance of the more intrinsic items, such as faith, family rituals and learning, and they wish to continue on this path after the conversion. It seems that, the more intrinsic the motivations for conversion were, the more practical help and support the proselyte feels they would like both during and after the conversion process.

There were many in the Survey who did suggest that post-conversion meetings would have been helpful to them. For example, one respondent commented:

> *...Perhaps looking back, to have had a monthly or occasional get together, as if still a class, but without the stress of "examination"*... (Survey 147, female married, converted 1970 aged 37)

Those who rated family unity highly felt positive about the support they had received from their

rabbi or tutor during the learning process. The majority of candidates going through the process do so at least partly for family reasons, so the system reflects their special needs – and if in a class or group the students support each other. They are also usually part of a Jewish family unit where further support can be received.

Table 7.2. Correlations between motivation and learning process

Motivational factors	**Learning attitudes**		
	Desire for ongoing help and support after the conversion	Perceived support received during the process	Positive feelings towards the Beit Din
Intrinsic	**r = 0.272** **p ≤ 0.001**	r = 0.143 p = 0.52	**r = 0.234** **p ≤ 0.001**
Wishing to create a family united by religion	r = 0.130 p = 0.064	**r = 0.178** **p = 0.003**	**r = -0.163** **p = 0.009**
General family support	r = 0.050 p = 0.495	r = 0.104 p = 0.156	r = 0.138 p = 0.059
Religiously support from partner	r = 0.067 p = 0.346	**r = 0.178** **p = 0.015**	**r = 0.247** **p = 0.001**
Proselyte's desire to satisfy expectations	r = 0.020 p = 0.790	r = 0.043 p = 0.562	r = 0.142 p = 0.053

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

However, this group had a negative response to the work of the Beit Din. They might have felt worried that the members of the Beit Din would not appreciate their family orientated motivation for conversion. An extreme example of this dilemma was expressed by Pat, who is now divorced and has returned to Christianity, which, she said, she had never left (though of course, this might be a post hoc rationalisation for her current way of life, or, indeed, a way of distancing herself from her ex-husband). Pat said:

> *...That's when I told my ex-husband I didn't know whether I was going to be asked to denounce Christianity, I will answer the questions but if I have to denounce Christianity I wouldn't do it....*
>
> *I was doing it because that was what he wanted me to do. And I was doing it for as and when I had the children...*
>
> *I thought would be the hardest thing to deal with that he wasn't going to love our children as much as he did his first son by his previous marriage. I wanted our unit to be perfect and complete and the thought of his other son coming every other weekend to us was going to be the favourite, and he wasn't going to love my children. It was mainly for that reason that I did it, rather than on the religious side because he wasn't really religious...* (Pat, divorced, converted 1994 aged 29, now reverted to Christian faith 2)

This demonstrates how powerful can be the motive to convert to establish family unity, in that it can even prevail over the candidate's desire to remain loyal to her birth religion.

There are two significant results related to the strength of the Jewish partner's religious support for the conversion. The first is the measure of support the proselyte feels she has received during the process of conversion, and the correlation between this religious support from her partner and general positive feelings towards the Beit Din. These converts obviously feel content that their hard work and achievement was recognised.

7.2. The effects of motivation on Jewish life outcomes

7.2.1. Background and hypotheses

In this section we examine the relationships between motivation and the development of differing Jewish lifestyle outcomes.

It has long been understood in such areas as medical settings that ensuring that the client acquires what might be called the right motivation for such enterprises as changing diet, or sexual practices or smoking are vital to the long term success of the enterprise. According to Rollnick, Heather and Bell it is acknowledged that:

> *...most patients do not enter the consultation in a state of readiness to change their patterns of drinking, smoking, exercise, diet or drug use; therefore, straightforward advice-giving will be of limited value and will lead to the kind of non-constructive dialogue often encountered in the addictions field...* (Rollnick, Heather and Bell, 1992)

That is, correct motivation has to be evoked if successful long-term changes in behaviour or attitudes are to be achieved. The results of the medical research lead us to explore whether there is a parallel in the correlations between motivation and Jewish lifestyle outcomes.

Certainly, where there is lack of support from the Jewish partner for the religious/spiritual road we can hypothesise that this will have a negative impact on long term outcomes of the process. As Natalie said:

> *...I hadn't discussed it properly with my boyfriend and looking at it as an adult now I realise it was what I wanted was a way in but what he wanted was a way out. And so as I was sort of going along to all the services and everything we then got married and moved out of London and I found where the nearest Synagogue was…But he wasn't keen at all…My husband still wouldn't really involve himself with any Jewish community in any way…I think over the years that wasn't a big problem between us but I felt that it was an unfairness between us...* (Natalie, widow, converted 1966 aged 20, pp.2-3)

Unfortunately, she also did not have any support from his family which may have been a factor in the total cessation of Jewish religious practice in her family life, even before she was widowed.

However, mitigating this process is the complicating factor that proselytes are generally part of a pair and, as was demonstrated in Chapter 5, the Jewish background of the partner and the strength of his desire to carry out Jewish rituals and live a Jewish lifestyle also mediate the process of change and the adoption of Jewish outcomes. Thus, it would seem right to suggest that the motivational factors alone cannot fully explain the strength of practical or affective outcomes, or which feelings/rituals/practices/habits in particular will become part of the outcomes engendered by the conversion.

7.2.2. Measurement of motivation and Jewish life outcomes

(i) Motivational factors as described in Chapter 6 (Sections 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-3 and Section 6.3.2.4, pp.235-9)

Intrinsic,

Wishing to create a family united by religion,

A general strength of family support,

A more religiously orientated strength of support perceived as coming from the partner, and

The strength of personal desire on the part of the proselyte, to satisfy expectations

(ii) The three dimensions of Jewish identity outcomes as described in Chapter 3 (Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 pp.60-81)

- Ritual observance
- Feelings of ethnicity
- Strength of desire to promote Jewish growth through involvement in continuing education and services.

(iii) To examine the relevance of a finding in American research that there is a danger that converts do not react negatively to their children's out marriages, special attention was given to the relationships between motivation and Q22.3 (*If my son or daughter wished to marry a non-Jew I would do everything possible to prevent it*), measured on a five-point Likert scale.

(iv) The Contentment Index, as described in chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3.1, p.66)

7.2.3. Results and discussion

7.2.3.1. Correlation between motivation and out-marriage

These results in **Table 7.3** show strong positive correlations between Intrinsic motivation and ethnicity, Jewish growth, and particularly with the contentment index.

Table 7.3. Correlations between motivation and Jewish life outcomes

Factors of motivation	Ritual behaviour	Ethnicity	Jewish growth	Contentment index
Intrinsic	r = 0.096 p = 0.104	**r = 0.367** **p ≤ 0.001**	**r = 0.324** **p ≤ 0.001**	**r = 0.530** **p ≤ 0.001**
Create a family united by religion	r = -0.018 p = 0.767	**r = -0.207** **p ≤ 0.001**	**r = -0.216** **p ≤ 0.001**	r = 0.023 p = 0.667
General family support	r = -0.086 p = 0.232	r = 0.025 p = 0.727	r = -0.023 p = 0.725	**r = 0.176** **p = 0.009**
Religious support from the partner	**r = 0.158** **p = 0.028**	**r = 0.171** **p = 0.017**	r = 0.116 p = 0.118	**r = 0.377** **p ≤ 0.001**
Desire to satisfy expectations	r = 0.112 p = 0.120	**r = 0.155** **p = 0.030**	r = 0.086 p = 0.235	**r = 0.238** **p ≤ 0.001**

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

The relationship between Intrinsic motivation and feelings of ethnicity are to be expected as both express feelings of belonging to the Jewish people, such as:-

- Q1.7 ('*I already felt Jewish to some extent and wanted to develop this*') r = 0 .743
- Q1.9 ('*I felt close to the Land and people of Israel*') r = 0.717
- Q1.8 ('*I mixed a lot in Jewish circles and this caused me to think about conversion*') r = 0.653
- Q1.5 ('*I was attracted to the warmth I saw in Jewish homes*') r = 0.645
- Q1.6 ('*I have Jewish family roots that I wish to affirm*') r = 0.556

While the factor measuring feelings of ethnicity has such high loading items as:-

- Involvement with Jewish heritage (0.836),
- Involvement with Jewish culture (0.774),
- Involvement with their relationship to the state of Israel (0.736),

- Involvement with their feeling of intrinsic Jewishness (0.648),
- Involvement with their relationship to other Jews (0.637).

That is, these two factors share many areas of common interest.

Intrinsic motivation also correlated strongly with growth, which loaded highest on such items as:-

- Continuing Jewish education (0.822), and
- Attendance at services (0.807).

These two activities are perhaps related to the search for a more meaningful faith and the attraction to the religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism, items that were also loaded onto this intrinsic factor.

This does bear out part of the hypothesis that increased salience of intrinsic motivation would lead to Jewish lifestyle changes. It seems that ethnic changes have occurred, but not specific ritual changes. These were only affected when the religious support of the convert's partner became an important part of the motivational bundle, highlighting the importance of harnessing the religious encouragement of the partner to bring about such change.

The results also reveal strong negative relationships between:-

(i) Creating a united Jewish family and ethnicity, and

(ii) Growth,

thus creating a perfect mirror image of the stance taken by those for whom the intrinsic motive had the greater salience. It would seem that the creation of an official, legally recognised Jewish family unit is seen as an end in itself with little desire for further changes to be made in lifestyles.

Indeed, growth also does not lead to feelings of contentment. It would seem plausible to suggest that those who had converted largely in the hope of creating a family united by a common faith would feel content once that had been achieved. Approaching the learning process in a very focussed manner in order to fulfil the specific goal of marrying one's partner under the *huppah*, we could hypothesis would lead to feelings of contentment if that goal is met. It could be likened to a successful shopping trip, or meeting a description of a goal orientated task, effectively completed. However, no such significant correlation was found.

All motivational factors, with the exception of the desire to create a family united by religion, produced stronger significant correlations with the contentment index than with any other factor. It seems that producing positive feelings about the results of a long-term commitment to learning and participation in community life is more effective that being able to change

behaviours.

7.2.3.2. Correlations between motivation and Q22.3 relating to out-marriage

In the American studies, there have been some concerns about the possibility that conversion leads to only one generation of Jews. As Epstein noted:

> *...Egon Mayer's study(1982 p3) showed that many converts would not even discourage their children from marrying someone who was not Jewish. In the Reform leadership study, more than 50% of the converts responding – leaders I remind you – would not even be bothered a great deal if their children converted to Christianity! There is here a world of difference between converts and born Jews, and one that augers badly for our future...Let us make no mistake, the data we now have at hand should serve as a dire warning: unless we act decisively, many of today's converts will be one generation Jews – Jews with non-Jewish parents and non-Jewish children*... (Epstein, 1994, p.127)

Whether this same tendency holds true among the British Reform converts was explored here, shown in **Table 7.4**.

Table 7.4. Correlations between the motivational factors and Q22.3 '*If my child wished to marry a non-Jew I would do everything possible to prevent it*'

Motivational factor	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance level (p)
Intrinsic	**0.276**	**≤ 0.001**
Desire for Jewish family unity	**-0.156**	**0.003**
General family support/pressure	-0.037	0.582
Religious support of partner	0.072	0.287
Desire to satisfy expectations	0.062	0.360

Source: Survey (Tabick, 2005)

The positive correlation between those who score high on Intrinsic motivation and Q22.3 reflects the fact that this factor contains items concerned with establishing a Jewish home life, such as being attracted to the warmth of Jewish homes and the attraction of the religious, ethical and/or spiritual aspects of Judaism. We demonstrated above that, though converts who score highly on this factor are not significantly related with ritual behaviour, they are positively correlated with ethnicity and a desire to look for ways to increase their Jewish involvement. So it would seem logical that they would also wish for the Jewish status that they have worked so hard to achieve should be passed onto their children.

On the other hand, the correlation between the desire for Jewish family unity and Q22.3 suggests that it is as if the converts on this dimension have not really chosen Judaism as a

religion, but as a means to a happy family via identification with their partner's religious label, and that therefore they would not mind their children marrying a non-Jew. The wish for religious family unity seems to apply only to their immediate situation, not committing them to actions or attitudes which may help sustain that religious unity through to succeeding generations. As Dow Marmur has taught, there needs to be reasons to seek Jewish survival, and these reasons come through study and practice (Marmur, 1982, pp.11-8).

The results from our study confirm this attitude, though there is insufficient data about the long-term outcomes to check if this attitude towards intermarriage has any relationship to the marriage choices of the children of the converts who responded to the Survey.

7.3. Conclusion

Certainly these results bear out the research carried out by Rollnick, Heather and Bell that emphasise the difficulty of changing actual behaviours and a person's way of life through a period of instruction. Most of the motivating factors leave the proselytes feeling good about the conversion, and in three out of the five motivating factors explored, they also feel Jewish inside. But there are few positive correlations with actual changes in behaviour. Here, there seems to have been limited positive significant correlations, only with two of the rituals, and only with those factors that express religious support from their Jewish partner. This supports the hypothesis that the proselyte needs to feel personal religious reasons for wishing to convert rather than reacting to the wishes or even the pressure of others around her for changes in lifestyle to occur.

Sociological research into the passing on of Jewish heritage to succeeding generations have generally shown that it is the religiosity of the home that is the most salient factor in the passing on of Jewish life outcomes, and then only to a limited extent. (Schmool, Miller and Lerman, 1996)

Education alone has very little impact on long-term outcomes, possibly especially here where the experience of an active Jewish home can, of course, only come from one partner in the relationship. The results reported above underline the importance of the need to review teaching methods employed in conversion courses to ensure that the converts become active participants in the learning process, and that discussions are held in a non-threatening manner so that the question of motivation can be addressed in the open.

It would seem that merely providing information about Judaism, or using very direct, paternalistic styles of teaching that may not impact on the motivation that led the person to choose conversion, could, by analogy with the medical arguments, lead to a similar phenomenon and interact with the converts' ambivalence about the need or the expectation for habits and lifestyles to be changed. Indeed, according to Rollnick, Heather and Bell (1992) even

more seriously, such lack of acknowledgement of differing motivation, may set up active resistance to real change in lifestyles.

There were comments in the interviews that suggested that the teachers or rabbis running the courses were not always aware of the emotions their students were experiencing. The interviewees mentioned particularly their mixed motives concerning the whole notion of conversion that they felt were never challenged. Fybush, for example, talked about the mixed messages his wife Fay had clearly expressed through her questions to the rabbi:

> *I was surprised Fay asked awkward questions, which* [the rabbi] *didn't know how to cope with…When he was talking about* ever min hachayim [a limb from a living animal]*,* mitzvot *of* B'nei Noach [commandments to all people]*, you know, and Fay just upped and said "Well, what about a* Brit*?"* [a circumcision]*...that put him off, and there were other cases when Fay would quite upset classes...* (Fybush, married to Fay who converted 1987 aged 28, p.6)

Fay's description of her initial reasons for converting are highly salient in this discussion. She said of herself that...

> *...I started to think about converting because, as a gift, well as something nice for him, well, a gift for him because he came to live in this country which is what I wanted.* [Her partner had been born in Israel and that was where they had met] *It was like, not a bargain, but it was, he did something I wanted to so I did something that was important to him. I mean, to me, it didn't matter one way or the other...* (Fay, married, converted 1987 aged 28, p.1)

Fay's motivation for conversion and the lack of appropriate acknowledgement and response by the teacher was definitely leading to tense confrontational situations.

Pat felt that she had been openly antagonistic throughout a process that she felt had been forced upon her by her husband. She described how she felt that the rabbi had been entirely negligent in not picking up the negative signals about motivation that she felt she had clearly broadcast throughout the process of conversion:

> *...I think firstly that it was abundantly clear that I wasn't doing this because I really wanted to, I wouldn't go for a couple of weeks or a couple of months even and suddenly turn up again. You could see I wasn't doing it wholeheartedly…Nobody even asked me what my beliefs were or did I still believe in Jesus. I don't think it was taken that seriously. Because I didn't believe in it and I think the writing was on the wall and I think it was abundantly clear...* (Pat, divorced, converted 1994 aged 29, now reverted to

Christian faith, p.4)

Certainly, for people like Fay and Fybush, the conversion process was not able to meet their specific emotional needs, which after all was going to affect their motivation and thus the practical and affective outcomes of the course. (Though it is doubtful if any system of teaching could adapt that far).

> *...If I think about it in terms of* <long pause> *our experience of conversion...then, the only comment I would make is that I would have liked for the relating to us as people, you know, as individuals...we have needs, not just in a Jewish context...* (Fybush, married to Fay who converted 1987 aged 28, p.13)

But what is very clear is that where possible, intrinsic motivation and the religious support of the Jewish partner need to be supported and nurtured, as they seem to provide the conversion process with the best long-term possibilities of success, as determined by previous research into the promoting of Jewish identity to future generations. These results indicate that conversion mostly for marriage tends to not be overly effective in the transmission of Judaism to future generations.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. Context

A leading headline in the Telegraph newspaper, August 15th 2012, asks the question, 'Is this the last generation of British Jews'? The article, written by Jonathan Wynne-Jones, reflects the real anxiety amongst many British Jews that the twin realities of assimilation and intermarriage will bring about the demise of British Jewry within the next few generations. The promotion of conversion in the progressive synagogues – Liberal, Reform and Masorti – has been advocated by some as a positive response to these socio-demographic trends. But detractors tend to see conversion as little more than sticking plaster placed on a gaping wound. They argue that it will, at best, stave off the collapse of the community for a generation or two.

In the absence of any previous study on this topic in Britain, this research seeks to examine the characteristics of those 5,198 people who had converted to Judaism through the auspices of the Reform Movement in the period 1952 to 2002. I set out to explore the social and psychological impact of conversion on this population, to examine the nature of the Jewish identity created in these young people (for they were predominantly young) and the durability of their commitment to Judaism through time. And recognising the large variation in their attitudes and behaviour, I also sought to examine the influence of motivational and biographical factors on their level of Jewish identity.

Whilst the primary goal of the research was to examine the outcomes of the conversion process in this particular sub-group of the British Jewish population, it was also hoped that the findings would provide community leaders and planners with a better understanding of the impact of conversion on community dynamics, and the findings should also assist rabbis who invest so much time in teaching and encouraging converts in their own congregations.

In this conclusion, I shall attempt to bring together the findings of this research following, in broad terms, the chronological order of the conversion process. Hence, the account begins by looking at the motivation to convert, the effect of the convert's religious background, the attitudes of the birth family, the role of the Jewish partner and his/her family, the convert's experience of the conversion process, their current Jewish identity, and, finally, the impact of conversion on the promotion (or otherwise) of Jewish continuity.

At each stage in the process, I record first, the main findings in abbreviated form and then go on to consider any issues or ambiguities arising from those findings that are worthy of further comment or lend themselves to further investigation.

8.2. The beginnings of the process

8.2.1. The convert's motivation

(i) A common motive for conversion?

Traditionally many would equate 'conversion' with the idea of an awakening of a new religious worldview that leads eventually to a formal wish to change one's faith. But there are other possible drivers to conversion, and in the present study a sudden or gradual awakening of a new religious perspective does not seem to be the main motive. That said, there is a methodological difficulty in reaching a firm conclusion about any particular motive, whether spiritual or more prosaic, because of the nature of the analysis that was used.

In the chapter on motivation, I sought to examine the motivational process by conducting factor analyses of the questionnaire items that reflected different possible reasons for conversion. The output of such an analysis is, of course, a definition of the main motivational factors on which our respondents can be shown to *vary*. Thus, by definition, Factor Analysis does not reveal motives that are constant and common to all converts, but only those motivational factors on which they diverge. If there were an item "I chose to convert because I felt Judaism was the right faith for me", and if all the respondents were to have responded "strongly agree", then that item would not have found a place in the factor analysis – i.e. it would not have loaded on any of the factors – even though it was clearly a potent driver of the decision to convert.

It is possible, in principle, that such a common and invariant motive exists. But since the questionnaire incorporated items on all the motives for conversion that had emerged in the qualitative research (and any other plausible ones), and since all of these motives did in fact feature in the output to the factor analysis, it is a reasonable supposition that there is no one driver that is present in all respondents and that has been missed by the Factor Analysis. It would seem that respondents do, in fact, vary in the extent to which they are motivated by each of the factors that have been examined.

(ii) The three main factors

In Chapter 6, three main motivational factors (Sections 6.3.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2.2, 6.3.2.2.3, pp.221-3) are identified: Intrinsic, reacting to family pressure and a desire for family unity, as explained in more detail below:-

- Intrinsic: this first factor is composed mainly of variables concerned with ethnicity and religious faith. The highest loading variables are: feelings of Jewishness, closeness to the Land and people of Israel and mixing in Jewish circles. There is thus a close affinity between this intrinsic factor and the ethnicity (Section 3.3,

pp.67-74) factor of Jewish identity. Somewhat weaker loadings are associated with variables that are more traditionally identified as 'religious' matters, namely the attraction of Jewish spiritual and ethical values and the desire to find a more meaningful faith. However, all of these variables reflect a desire to experience something associated with Jewish life and are hence 'intrinsic'.

- Family Pressure: the second factor reflects the degree of pressure or coercion exercised by the Jewish family. Only two variables load on this factor, one reflecting the Jewish partner's *family's* wish that conversion take place, the other reflecting the Jewish *partner's* wish for that to occur.

  The idea of family pressure was explored further by a separate factor analysis, including the variables which explored the manner and level of support given to the converts by their Jewish partners and the partner's Jewish family. These were not directly related to motivation but I felt they were tangential to this area. This factor analysis revealed a further three sub-dimensions (Section 6.3.2.4, pp.235-9) experienced by the converts, general family support, the religious support of their partner and a desire to meet the Jewish family's expectations.

- Desire for family unity: the third factor reflects the level of desire that the family share a single religion, Judaism, and represents the level of commitment of the convert to the pursuit of Jewish family life. The two factors that load on to this factor are: wanting a family united by religion and the attraction of Jewish family life.

I will not comment here on the detailed relationships discussed in Chapter 6, except to consider some of the more unexpected and potentially important findings.

(iii) The desire for family unity

In absolute terms, the motive related to the desire for a unified family life (Q1.10), drew the strongest level of agreement (89% agree / strongly agree). In other words, a large proportion of the respondents made their decision to convert, at least in part, in order to enhance their future family life. Thus the desire to create an ethnically or religiously coherent family is perhaps the driver that comes closest to what might be characterized as a common factor in the decision to convert. That said, the findings, as set out in Chapter 6, indicate that a bundle of different motives, with varying salience in each case, are also affecting the decision to convert.

Although the family unity motive was strong and ubiquitous, there was some variation across respondents, and this variation was sufficient to allow an examination of the statistical relationship between the desire for family unity and the convert's developing Jewish practice. This was not at all what might have been expected on intuitive grounds.

Ironically, the findings demonstrate that the stronger the desire for family cohesion as a motive for conversion, the less religiously Jewish was the household that was formed. The instrumental motive to create a unified Jewish family was negatively correlated with the achievement of spiritual or ritually observant outcomes. And furthermore, the family unity motive was associated with a greater tendency to express disappointment with the life that the converts had chosen for their families.

In contrast, we find that the more intrinsic the motivation for conversion, the greater contentment was recorded by the convert and this in turn led to a greater response to ritual observances.

Taken together, this might suggest that whilst instrumental motives associated with family unity are the most powerful drivers of the *decision* to convert, they do not generate the depth of commitment or even the retrospective satisfaction that arises from intrinsic motives related to ethnicity or spiritual experience. This raises the interesting question of precisely what model of Jewish existence underlies the thinking of those who convert to create a unified Jewish family (given the negative correlation with ritual practice and with satisfaction over the conversion). One possibility, not tested here, is that the desire for family cohesion essentially reflects an abstract desire to harmonise the ethnic/religious classification of the family, but without attaching any meaningful content to that classification.

(iv) Conversion without belief

One should not conclude from the positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and subsequent commitment, that religious belief is necessarily the key to successful conversion as identified in this study. Whilst it is true that the intrinsic factor contains some items that have spiritual connotations (e.g. the attraction of religious and ethical aspects of Judaism and the feeling of a need for a more meaningful faith), the main focus is the desire to satisfy feelings about being Jewish, being connected to Israel and being attracted by Jewish family life – all ethnic motives. These ethnic variables all load on the intrinsic factor more heavily than the spiritual ones. So the appropriate conclusion from these data is not so much that religious belief is a necessary condition for successful conversion, but rather that some genuine, intrinsic desire to be Jewish (whether ethnic, spiritual, social or even national) is a stronger predictor of Jewish identity post-conversion, than conversion for the instrumental purpose of building family cohesion.

What constitutes an intrinsically desirable feature of Jewish existence can be very broad indeed. Thus, whilst it might be hard to envisage the enjoyment of Christmas dinners as a motive to become a Christian, yet our converts talk about the intrinsic appeal of Jewish family life, including such things as Friday night dinners or Passover celebrations, as part of the package of reasons they decided to convert to Judaism. It would seem that though

many of these items can be seen, especially from the qualitative evidence, as being enacted in a secular way and stripped of much of their spiritual basis, they still present a coherent and attractive package that is seen as intrinsically desirable for its own sake.

(v) Faith based converts

I turn finally to the characteristics of those who did identify more spiritual reasons for their conversion. They were more likely to be at the older end of the age range, with partners who recognized the validity of the conversion, whose birth families were most accepting of the change and whose partners gave them specific religious support to help them change their lifestyles.

It is possible that this finding might simply be an artefact of the fact that older converts are less likely to have instrumental reasons for conversion since they are less likely to have young children at home or have an expectation of more children. On the other hand, it might also be reasonable to suggest that older, more mature, well supported converts have an inherently higher probability of spiritual motivation driving the conversion.

8.2.2. The convert's religious background

(i) Prior religious experiences

As would be expected from the wider British society from which most of the converts emerge, the majority of the candidates for conversion come from the Anglican communion and have had a typical Anglican upbringing based on moderation in religious matters. The second largest group of converts comes from the Catholic Church. The majority of the Catholics also describe a moderate religious upbringing, but a sizeable minority (36%) – larger than that reported in any of the other religious groups - had experienced intense religious education and practice within their birth family.

Thus, there was a minority at one end of the religious spectrum, who, within their various religions, had experienced a high degree of religious enthusiasm while growing up. At the other end of the continuum, another minority had been raised in very secular or even militant atheist households.

This profile of religious commitment and intensity has changed over time, with the more secular wing becoming proportionately larger among the most recent converts. Nonetheless, overall, the majority of our respondents can be found firmly in the middle of the continuum, experiencing in their formative years a moderate or moderate/secular form of whatever was their birth family's religion.

In common with many who inhabit this middle Christian ground, some of our converts reported their disagreement with the Christian beliefs of the Incarnation, the Trinity and the Resurrection, though it is difficult to ascertain whether these difficulties were present before the conversion was mooted, or arose later as a justification for leaving their birth religion.

(ii) Religious intensity and motivation to convert

There were no significant relationships between the intensity of converts' prior religious experience and the strength of particular motives for conversion. However, a proxy measure of religious intensity is whether the convert comes from a secular background or from one of the religious groups**.** This variation is described in Section 8.2.1 (iv) p.260 and does include an association between having belonged to a religious group and level of motivation.

(iii) Religious intensity and subsequent Jewish identity

As was the case with the convert's strength of motivation, intensity of religious upbringing was not generally associated with any significant variation in Jewish practice or identity post-conversion. Counter-intuitively, those who had an intense religious upbringing did not seem to transfer that mindset to their new religious life and were not significantly more observant, committed or motivated than their secular counterparts. It could be, of course, that the empirical measures lacked the statistical reliability needed for these relationships to emerge, but that seems unlikely given the statistically robust findings that were obtained using the same measures in other analyses.

Assuming then that prior religious intensity and post-conversion behaviour are genuinely uncorrelated, a possible explanation is that a key motive for conversion of those exposed to the most intense religious upbringing was to escape the very intensity associated with their birth religion; on this view, conversion to Judaism acts, in effect, as a means of leveling variations in religious intensity by allowing those at the more intense end of the religiosity scale to move to a more moderate and personally acceptable point on the continuum.

Perhaps a more plausible hypothesis can be developed from the idea that the emphasis on ritual practice, cultural engagement and ethnic belonging in Jewish life does not require (or depend upon) intense levels of religious belief. This is true both as a matter of religious dogma[17] and of empirical reality among born Jews (Lerman, Miller and Schmool, 1995).

[17] Bennett Alan: Reform Judaism online http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1355

'*While Judaism considers trust in God a paramount religious virtue (see Genesis 15:6, Isaiah 7:9, Samuel 22:29-36, Psalm 31, and Job 2:9), the Bible does not contain a single commandment insisting that we believe in God.*

Thus those coming into Judaism with relatively weak levels of religious faith, or even with a secular world view, are likely to find themselves drawn into the same level of ritual practice and ethnic behavior as those with more intense religious backgrounds. It might even be argued that the style of Jewish life to which converts are introduced tends to mute or discourage the religious expression of those with the deepest sense of religious faith because of the prevailing tendency to associate religious practice with ethnicity rather than belief.

These are, of course, untested speculations, but they would be amenable to empirical testing by means of a longitudinal study of the evolving religious characteristics of converts prior to, during and after conversion.

(iv) Prior religious affiliation and motivation to convert

In contrast to the weak, statistically non-significant relationships between intensity of religious upbringing and post-conversion behavior, the converts' prior religious affiliation (i.e. whether she was Catholic, Protestant, Secular etc.) did generate statistically significant relationships with various measures of motivation to convert and with aspects of post-conversion Jewish identity.

The complex relationships between birth religion and motivation to convert are set out in detail in Chapter 4 together with various post-hoc suggestions as to how those relationships might be explained. Perhaps the most unexpected finding was that (leaving aside those from mixed Jewish backgrounds), the highest levels of intrinsic motivation to convert were observed in those from non-religious backgrounds, whereas the highest levels of instrumental motivation (to create a united Jewish family) were found in those from religious backgrounds. Put simplistically, it would seem that those without a religious background are seeking primarily to satisfy a desire for a more meaningful personal life (whether religious or ethnic), whereas those who have already experienced a degree of religious life convert largely to create a religiously consistent family life.

(v) Prior religious affiliation and Jewish Identity

The impact of birth religion on Jewish identity (post-conversion) is also extremely complex

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There are two reasons. First, Judaism is not interested in professions of faith; its primary emphasis is on how we act: "Not study is the chief thing but action" (Pirkei Avot 1:17). Thus, from a Jewish perspective, the most significant question is not "What are we expected to believe?" but "What are we expected to do?" And so, even a Jew who's not sure God exists is required to behave in accordance with Jewish ethical teachings.

Second, Judaism's early emphasis—in the Bible and in the teachings of our ancient rabbis—is on honouring our covenant with God rather than speculating about the nature of God. Consider our first Hebrew ancestor, Abraham (originally known as Abram). Author Bruce Feiler explains: "'Abram went forth as the Lord had commanded him'…joining the covenant with his feet, not his words…He doesn't believe in God; he believes God. He doesn't ask for proof; he provides the proof.'

and is discussed fully in Chapter 4. There is, however, one finding of broader significance and that is the observation that of all the birth religions, converts from a Catholic background develop the strongest levels of ethnic identification with the Jewish people. Bearing in mind that Catholics also reported the most intense religious upbringing, and that Catholic ritual and dogma is markedly different from the Jewish approach, this too requires some explanation.

A post-hoc hypothesis is that Catholics, like Jews, are encouraged to see their fundamental identity as being something more than simply Britishness paired with a minority religion. Both religions have a strong international presence, a focus outside Britain (i.e. the Vatican and Israel respectively), a separate language for religious discourse and a potent source of guidance and constraint on personal conduct (the Papal edict and the Rabbinate). Thus Catholics might be expected to have developed a distinctive sense of peoplehood that is likely to be stronger than the sense of identity experienced by other Christian or secular groups, and similar in intensity to that of the Jews. On one view, that might make it *more* difficult for a Catholic to acquire a sense of Jewish ethnicity, having been grounded in a strong sense of Catholic identity. But on another view, someone with a strong sense of peoplehood might be expected to be able to transfer the focus of that ethnicity to another group more easily than someone who has not developed the mental constructs of feeling part of a distinctive people. It would seem from these findings that the second view is the more credible.

The same dual expectation that strength of prior affiliation might on one view enhance, and on another diminish, a person's appetite to engage in a new religion is put forward by R. Barro and J. Hwang (2007) in a thorough analysis of religious conversion across 40 countries and multiple religions. They found no significant relationship between strength of adherence and propensity to convert. They suggest that *'the most important influences on the conversion decision are the benefits and costs as perceived by individuals."* The present findings, which associate strong engagement in Catholicism with more intense ethnic identification with Judaism *among those who have converted*, is not necessarily inconsistent with the Barro and Hwang findings. What this suggests is that strong adherence is not a predisposing factor to conversion, but that those who do convert with strong adherence transfer that commitment more effectively to their new religion or ethnicity in terms of strength of ethnic identification. Note that, as reported under Section 8.2.2. (iii), p.262 intensity of prior religious experience does *not* correlate with religious practice.

8.2.3. The attitudes of the birth family

(i) The paradoxical effect of opposition

In general, the converts found positive support from their families and this might be

expected to act as an enabling factor in the conversion process, in a sense giving them permission to proceed along that path. But although the absolute levels of birth family support were generally high, there were variations in the degree of support, and the correlations between level of support and the convert's subsequent level of Jewish identity was paradoxically negative.

The three variables that were used to measure birth family support were, as it happens, formulated in a negative form, (that birth families were worried about being excluded from their child's new Jewish life, that they were angry at the conversion, and that they ostracised their child). Nonetheless these measures of negative attitudes (in effect, opposition) were found to be *positively* correlated with the convert's Jewish identity and behaviour.

Three different models may explain this outcome:-

- The first suggests that this is an example of cognitive dissonance at work. Given that this group of converts had chosen conversion, despite their families' opposition to such a step, they found they had a strong need to diminish the cognitive dissonance they were experiencing through intensifying the desirability of Jewish life outcomes.

- The second explanation is purely artefactual. It suggests that where the birth family is strongly opposed to the conversion, their attitude might indeed cause some putative candidates to withdraw from the process. This would mean that those who proceeded to conversion, despite the opposition of their families, would comprise those potential converts who were most strongly attracted to Judaism. In other words, the families' opposition might act as a filter removing the least enthusiastic candidates.

- The third model reverses the causality and suggests that the converts who adopt the most intense Jewish identity behaviours may provoke negative feelings or hostility in their birth families. These feelings on the part of the family may have emerged later in the conversion process but retrospectively assigned to the early stages by the converts themselves seeking a coherent and less painful account of their history.

As with many of these post-hoc explanations for the empirical findings, one would need to conduct a longitudinal study of the attitudes of all the players to be able to tease out the causal processes involved.

8.2.4. The Jewish partner's identity

(i) The stereotype of the out-married Jew

While noting that there is a growing proportion of people who are converting *lishma,* the majority of the candidates coming forward for conversion have Jewish partners, and their

own Jewish family experiences growing up

A common assumption among Jewish communal commentators is that the young men whose wives/partners come forward for conversion (and the majority of the Jewish partners are men) must have experienced a weak Jewish background to have chosen a non-Jewish partner. However, these data show that the Jewish partners of the converts were mostly brought up in Orthodox synagogues and had a fairly typical Anglo-Jewish background in terms of Jewish education and involvement in youth activities. The findings are thus consistent with previous research such as the 1995 JPR survey which found that Jewish education and involvement in Jewish youth activity does not have much impact on marriage choice, once parental background is allowed for (Schmool, Miller, Lerman 1996).

Indeed on the assumption that - barring observant Orthodox Jews - there is a large element of chance in the choice of marriage partner, it might be expected that out-married young men whose relationship with their partners is such that conversion takes place are likely to be just as strongly committed as young men who happen to have married Jewishly.

If marriage choice were wholly random with respect to ethnicity, then the Jewish partners of converts would – as a matter of logic – be likely to be *more* committed on average than those who had (by chance) married Jewishly. This is an unrealistic assumption, but it is useful heuristically because it demonstrates that the closer young Jews as a group come to disregarding ethnicity in marriage choice, the more the partners of converts to Judaism will represent *stronger* levels of Jewish identification than is found (on average) among those who are married Jewishly. (This follows because, on the random choice model, out-married Jews will be just as strongly identified as in-married Jews, and so the subset of the out-married who encourage their partners to convert are likely to be more strongly identified than the in-married).

(ii) An implication for Jewish identity formation

There is already some evidence of the disjunction between Jewish identity behaviours (like Jewish marriage) and intrinsic feelings of Jewish ethnicity (what Miller has termed ‘mental ethnicity’). Basing his analysis on the 1996 JPR data, he showed that in-married and out-married sub-samples exhibited levels of mental ethnicity that hardly differed from each other. This clearly belies the notion that warm feelings of being part of the Jewish people necessarily leads to behavioural differences in terms of marriage choice. From a Jewish communal policy perspective, such findings tend to undermine one of the basic tenets of the ‘Jewish continuity’ movement, namely that the promotion of a sense of Jewish identity is the key to reversing the tide of assimilation. From a theoretical perspective, these findings raise issues about the way Jewish identity (at least the ‘mental ethnicity’ element) should be conceptualised, suggesting that Jewish identity is becoming just one element in a set of

multiple, equally salient, identities and that it no longer drives key life choices.

8.2.5. Role of the partner's Jewish family

(i) The Jewish family's religiosity and the Jewish identity of the convert

In general, the level of religiosity displayed by the Jewish partner's family had very little effect on the convert's motivation, contentment with the process, or level of ethnic identity. There was, however, a statistically reliable relationship between the religiosity of the family and the current ritual behaviour of the converts. For several rituals, particularly the placing of *mezzuzot* on doorframes and the observance of *kashrut*, there is a relatively strong positive correlation between the Jewish family's religiosity and the level of observance of the ritual. This seems to be consistent with other research that suggests that behaviour (in this case ritual practice) is more easily influenced by social pressure and home experiences than feelings and attitudes (such as ethnicity or contentment) (Goodman and Gregg 2010).

Whilst the overall correlation between ritual observance and the partner's family's religiosity is positive and linear (i.e. observance increases with family religiosity), more detailed analysis of the data reveals that at the lowest level of family religiosity there is a relatively high level of observance; i.e. the relationship is almost U-shaped. In simplistic terms, this finding coincides with the intuitive 'theory' in Jewish tradition that it is better (for the transmission of Jewish identity) to keep no rituals at all, than to observe them half-heartedly. A more robust explanation might appeal to the concept of tolerance for ambiguity, the suggestion being that inconsistent role models have a limited impact on people with a low tolerance for ambiguity. In contrast, and somewhat paradoxically, the experience of unequivocal non-observance underlines the logical possibility of consistent observance as an alternative. There is clear evidence that among born Jews inter-generational religious mobility is greatest among the offspring of 'middle-of-the-road' traditional Jews (JPR, 1995) and less common among the children of secular or strictly observant Jews, and Miller (2010) has speculated that the mobility may arise particularly among children with a low tolerance for ambiguity.

With regard to the non-significant correlation between family religiosity and measures of ethnic identity and motivation, one should recognise the possible effect of two contradictory processes. On the one hand, people exposed to more observant Jewish families are more likely to want to keep those rituals in their new home. But, on the other, the more religious families were less likely to engage enthusiastically in the conversion process in the early stages and this may have discouraged the convert. Hence the net effect of these two processes may be neutral.

(ii) The Jewish family's negative view of converts

A worrying factor that became apparent in the survey data was the number of converts (16%) who felt that their partner's family did not regard them as 'real' Jews, even after the conversion process had been completed with a visit to the Beit Din. Evidence from the interviewees suggested that there is a wide degree of negativity expressed by Jews generally towards those who convert – although there is no robust empirical evidence to support this.

The analysis of this issue falls outside the empirical focus of this thesis. But as an incidental observation, it is worth noting that opposition to outmarriage and negative views of converts may flow from cultural memories of long periods of history when Jews were forced to convert by majority Christian or Muslim societies. That perspective may explain why elements within the Jewish world still exhibit a feeling of being an embattled minority leading perhaps to Emile Fackeneim's famous proclamation of the 614th commandment, that 'we should not give Hitler a posthumous victory'.[18] Any betrayal of the Jewish future, by means of intermarriage without conversion, or to some, even with a conversion (let alone the Jewish partner's rejection of his or her Jewishness), would be taken as a betrayal of that extra commandment promulgated by Fackenheim.

Negative attitudes to intermarriage and conversion could also be related to the frankly racist connotations that some attach to the claim that Jews are, the 'Chosen people'. For most modern theologians, this Chosenness is related to the idea of responsibility and duty to carry out God's words, but to some, there is a strong ethnic, even racist timbre, to the phrase 'the chosen people'. Yehudah Halevi, (c.1075-1141) a mediaeval Jewish poet spoke of the higher nature of a Jewish soul that could never be reached by converts, and something of the same view can be found in other writings, especially those of a mystic nature (e.g. Shneur Zalman of Liady Tanya part 1, Chapter 1 p.6a). As a community, Jews tend to expect non-Jews to leave behind them their birth religion, but many would find such an action undertaken by their own Jewish child to be challenging, even threatening, or, as one interviewee told me, 'appalling'.

These comments and speculations highlight the importance of gathering more reliable data on Jewish attitudes to converts, not least as an additional (and very rich) source of evidence on Jewish perceptions of non-Jews. This is an area in which robust empirical data is virtually non-existent.

[18] Quoted in many of his works, e.g. Fackenheim, Emil L., *Faith in God and Man After Auschwitz: Theological Implications Yad Vashem*, April 2002.

8.2.6. The conversion process

(i) Attitudes towards the process

Here, the survey results are most helpful to the synagogues and the rabbis organizing conversion courses. While most converts expressed satisfaction with the teaching, there were those who complained that the class was too slanted towards those, in truth the majority, who were converting for marriage, and not enough attention was given to those who were seeking a more spiritual path. There were also comments made in the survey requesting a more experiential approach to the learning and a minority expressed the view that continuing help after the visit to the Beit Din would be much appreciated.

In terms of the theoretical findings, in Chapter 7, four factors linked to the conversion process are identified: positive feelings towards the results of the process (later replaced with the contentment index), the desire for ongoing help and support, the level of satisfaction with the support received during the process and the strength of positive feelings towards the Beit Din (Section 7.1.2, pp.244-7)

- Positive feelings towards the results of the process. This factor was composed entirely from variables found in Q.17 of the survey which examined how the convert now feels about their new religious status and the general features of the process. This was replaced with the Contentment index that was based on all the variables in that section to give a more reliable index for analysis.

- Desire for ongoing help and support after the conversion reflected the strength of the wish for post conversion intervention by the rabbi or teacher offering new goals or extra classes or some sort of community forum for converts.

- Satisfaction with the support received during the process, the variables that loaded onto this factor demonstrated the high levels of satisfaction the converts felt in terms of the practical, emotional and intellectual help they had received from their rabbis or tutors.

- The last factor, Positive feelings towards the Beit Din, again demonstrated the high level of satisfaction most converts felt about the efficiency and sensitivity of the Beit Din.

(ii) Association between motivation for conversion and attitudes to the process

Proselytes with high levels of intrinsic motivation express a positive appreciation of the work of the Beit Din and a desire for ongoing support. They approached conversion understanding the importance of the more intrinsic items, such as feeling very Jewish and wanting to find more acceptable (at least to them) ethical and spiritual teachings, and they wished to continue on this path after the conversion. It seems that, the more intrinsic the

motivations for conversion were the more practical help and support the proselyte feels they would like both during and after the conversion process.

While those who were seeking family unity as a primary motive for conversion were happy with the teaching, (after all, it is in most cases geared towards such candidates), they had far less positive views of their formal appearance before the Beit Din. Such attitudes are entirely predictable given that the Beit Din session represents, at least symbolically, the opportunity to substantiate what are presumed to be intrinsic motives for conversion and a fundamental commitment to Judaism. Those driven mostly by instrumental goals of marriage and family unity may well have anticipated that the rabbis sitting on the Beit Din would consider their application invalid or perhaps limited in some way. Whatever the reason, the critical finding is that, compared with the intrinsically motivated, those with strong instrumental motives had less positive views both of the Beit Din session and of the conversion process as a whole – and even of their acquired Jewish status. It is also significant that these differences between the instrumentally and intrinsically motivated groups were sustained over many years.

The practical implications of this finding are quite significant. Assuming that the goal is to develop attitudes among converts that are as positive as possible, at least three possible responses suggest themselves: (i) to re-orientate the conversion process so that candidates with purely instrumental motives are screened out, (ii) to re-structure the process so as to try to develop a more intrinsic appreciation of Judaism among those whose initial motivation is purely instrumental, or (iii) to recognise explicitly that conversion for instrumental reasons is legitimate and acceptable, and that candidates in this category will not be expected to disguise their true reasons for seeking conversion.

8.2.7. Current Jewish identity

The key questions for those interested in the process of conversion to Judaism are whether converted Jews develop the same forms of Jewish identity as born Jews, whether the strength of that identity is stronger or weaker than that of born Jews, and whether it is as sustainable through time.

(i) Jewish identity factors (Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, pp.60-83)

Like born Jews, the ‘new’ Jews created by the conversion process vary in the strength of their Jewish identity; i.e. they vary in the intensity of their ritual observance, the salience of their Jewish ethnic identity and the depth of their spiritual/religious commitment. These three Factors (Observance, Ethnicity, Religiosity/Spirituality) mimic those generated by previous factor analytic studies of born Jews (see Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.2 and 3.3.2, pp.56-9).

But the Jewish identity of converts to Judaism differs from that of born Jews in two important respects, as described in Sections 8.2.7 (ii) and 8.2.7 (iii).

(ii) A fourth factor

First, converts also vary on a fourth factor, Jewish Growth, which has not been identified in previous studies of born Jews. This somewhat diverse construct seems to reflect the level of commitment to Jewish development through education and participation and, to a lesser extent, the desire to promote Jewish identity in the respondent's children.

That a developmental theme should emerge in a sample of converts is not unexpected. It is, after all, through structured classes that they acquire much of their knowledge, and so the appetite for further learning, having been ignited by the conversion process, is likely to vary between respondents and hence to constitute a salient variable in their Jewish identity. There is an implied challenge here, in that the goal for the Rabbinate might be to develop this appetite for Jewish development so that ultimately it becomes a characteristic of all converts to Judaism (and then no longer a variable to emerge in a factor analysis). That said, it is a positive sign that there is sufficient variation in the appetite for Jewish development for this to emerge as a factor.

That born Jews do not vary greatly in their desire to develop Jewishly (as they do in their ritual observance or ethnic identity) can be interpreted in many ways – and all would be purely speculative. What is of interest, however, is the impact of the dramatic expansion in vibrant new forms of learning and Jewish development within the Anglo-Jewish community.[19] One hypothesis is that, in response to these environmental changes, the Jewish Growth factor may also emerge as a salient variable in the Jewish identity of born Jews in future surveys.

(iii) Position on the identity dimensions

Secondly, converts also differ from the Jewish community sampled in previous surveys (largely a 'born Jewish' sample) in relation to their absolute levels on the three core dimensions of Jewish identity:-

Ritual observance

On ritual observance (both light and demanding rituals) converts display a level of

[19] For example, the growth of the participation in and the regularity of the Limmud conferences and, within the United Synagogue congregations the emergence of the Tribe organisation as a means of Jewish learning.

observance that approaches that of the (nominally) Orthodox community and is significantly greater than that of born Reform Jews.

Like other Jews, those rituals which take the most effort (e.g. *kashrut* and Friday night home rituals) had the lowest levels of observance whilst those annual events that may sometimes serve an ethnic rather than religious purpose (e.g. the Passover Seder) have the highest levels of observance. But throughout the spectrum, the Reform converts display levels of observance above Reform Jews generally and only marginally below traditional Orthodox Jews. An important consideration in terms of the sustainability of the converts' identity is whether the high average level of observance (relative to their religious peer group) arises purely from the compliant behaviour of those recently converted, or whether the difference is maintained many years after conversion.

Taking attendance at Shabbat services as an example, the proportion of converts who attend regularly is much higher than born Jews immediately after conversion. It then falls, but it is still at levels that exceed the average percentages of synagogue attendance of born Jews who now identify themselves as members of the Progressive synagogues. This level rises again 16-20 years after the conversion, (around the time that their children would be celebrating their *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*) and then decreases.

The regression of converts' frequency of synagogue attendance towards group norms might be regarded as religiously disappointing, but ethnically constructive, in that it signals the assimilation of prevailing Jewish norms into the convert sub-group. Indeed the very process of regression might represent a degree of pressure to conform with the 'lower' levels of observance of born Jews.

However, with most other ritual indices, the performance level gradually *increases* from the date of conversion, although it again reaches a high point 16-20 years after conversion, and then gradually tails off. The maintenance of the converts' observance above the level of the group norms has the opposite implication to that observed in the case of synagogue attendance. It is religiously appealing, but ethnically somewhat less positive in that it signals a failure by the converts to assimilate prevailing Jewish norms. Indeed the maintenance of higher standards of observance may be, paradoxically and uncomfortably, an element in the attitude noted above that converts do not qualify as 'real Jews'.

The difference between the pattern of synagogue attendance through time and the pattern of observance of other rituals probably arises because one of the conditions of the conversion process involves regular synagogue attendance, and the converts who responded to the survey around the time of their conversion will have observed that very public ritual that would have been monitored by their rabbi or teacher.

Ethnic identity

With regard to the Jewish ethnic identity of the converts themselves, two interesting and not wholly convergent conclusions emerge from our data.

First, there is no doubt that the majority of the converts developed a clear and deep sense of Jewishness. This is evidenced most clearly in their rating of the importance of "feeling Jewish inside" to their sense of identity which was substantially stronger in the sample of converts than in born Jews assessed in JPR (1995).

It is equally clear from the data that the affective identity of these converts is strong and positive even when they exhibit no other Jewish behaviour. Most poignantly this is reflected in the comments of Natalie, now a widow. She told me of her pain at the non-recognition of herself and her children as Jewish by her partner's family, and the lack of desire by her husband to follow Jewish ritual or to remain a member of a synagogue. Now living in a non-Jewish area, her children having experienced no Jewish education, yet she said:

> *….it's* [Jewish identity] *not something you can cast off really. It's not something you can sort of change. It's a bit like being a stick of rock, in the middle you have got to be what you feel comfortable with. I feel as if there is still like different divisions, like there is first division Jews, and second division Jews. Maybe I am on the reserve bench somewhere. They are all Jewish, but some are more Jewish than others. You know .I don't feel, you know, up there, but if there was a form I would put Jewish because it's the only thing I feel comfortable with really…(*Natalie, converted 1966 when 20, engaged to a Jewish man, now a widow p 4)

A plausible explanation for the positive and enthusiastic acceptance of Jewishness in the majority of the respondents is that it is driven by cognitive dissonance. Unlike born Jews, the converts have actually had to make a positive decision to become Jewish. They have worked hard to achieve that end and in many cases have faced overt or unspoken hostility from their birth family and allusions (sometimes internally generated) to their having acted with disloyalty towards their family and/or religious heritage. In some cases, as noted above, they may also have experienced some negative attitudes from fellow Jews. The dissonance created by such experiences would, in classic cognitive dissonance theory (CDT), lead to very strong levels of commitment to their new identity and would reinforce belief in its value and the importance of its continuity.

However, though converts have strong feelings of being Jewish, and recognise the importance of establishing networks of Jewish friends (holding this to be even more important a value than born Jews), in reality, a smaller proportion of their friends is

Jewish. This may of course be a hangover of friendship groups formed before their conversion.

Ethnic identity and Jewish continuity

Another feature of the converts' Jewish identity is, however, inconsistent with the preceding analysis of their feelings of Jewish consciousness, and this relates to the converts' views about the importance of Jewish continuity based on the Jewish 'growth' questionnaire items.

For a group who are strongly driven to value their Judaism, and who have overcome obstacles to achieve Jewish status, it is surprising that only 4% would do "everything possible to prevent" the out-marriage of their children – a figure that contrasts with 21% among born Progressive Jews and 61% among born Orthodox Jews (JPR, 1995). Active opposition to a child's intermarriage is, of course, a proxy measure of commitment to Jewish continuity. Such low response rates on this item are not only inconsistent with the CDT model, but they also represent a failure to assimilate a core element of the Jewish value system in which continuity is probably the most powerful ethnic imperative.

A glib explanation is that a convert's recognition that he or she has in some sense rejected their own religious or ethnic heritage, would make it difficult – perhaps hypocritical – to oppose the same action (albeit in the reverse direction) of their offspring. This is unconvincing for two reasons. First, the evidence from the attitudinal items points not simply to a reluctance to try to prevent a child's out-marriage, but to relatively low levels of concern about the prospect of assimilation in general. Whilst the recognition by the convert that they had themselves 'married out' might lead them tactically to avoid personal intervention with their own children, it cannot explain the weak levels of concern about the prospect of their children's assimilation. Second, this explanation ignores the powerful effect of cognitive dissonance which, as argued above, would tend to convince the convert that they had found a superior and highly valued way of life which should be sustained in the next generation. Thus in line with CDT, the convert's marriage into Judaism, would not be seen as equivalent to a marriage out of Judaism.

The low level of concern about Jewish continuity might also suggest that the primary motive for conversion is the instrumental and time-limited goal revealed in the motivation chapter, namely the desire to create a united Jewish family while the children are growing up. Certainly, if the convert had not internalised a commitment to, and affective bond with, his or her Jewishness, then it follows that the children's' choice of marriage partner once they enter adulthood would not be a source of great concern.

However, the identity data show that such bonds are developed as or more strongly in converts than in born Jews, so that a short-term commitment to Jewish family life would not adequately reflect the outcome of the conversion process, nor would it adequately explain the low level of interest in promoting Jewish continuity.

Unfortunately the survey data are not rich enough to provide a clear explanation for the apparent contradiction between the converts' firmly established and high levels of ethnic identity and their relatively weak level of concern about the transmission of that identity to future generations. A possible conclusion is that cognitive dissonance works in a rather subtle way in the present context.

Given that the cognitive dissonance associated with conversion will have generated a strong belief in the value and importance of their new Jewish identity, the question arises as to how the convert can represent the importance of their new identity *to themselves*, if it is not through their commitment to their family's Jewish continuity?

The answer to this question may lie in the particularistic nature of Judaism as a religion. Whilst in Judaism individual Jews are seen as part of an inter-dependent religious community with an overall group destiny, there is no expectation that the Jewish religion is the only appropriate, or even the desirable religious pathway for other peoples. This allows the convert to regard Judaism as the right lifestyle for *the convert herself*, but not necessarily for everyone. The idea that converts see their choice of Judaism as being ideal for themselves - perhaps a good fit to their own personality and worldview - neatly explains why strong feelings of Jewish identity and the high value placed on that identity can coexist with relative ambivalence about the marriage choices of their children. The logic is that a convert's decision to embrace a lifestyle that is particularly ideal for him or her should not necessarily constrain the life choices of their children. This view may also have its roots in the converts' own religious backgrounds (the majority came from a Christian or nominally Christian family) where the idea of salvation is a personal construct not grounded in the notion of peoplehood..

This is an intriguing hypothesis that is amenable to empirical testing by examining (i) whether converts are more likely to see an association between Judaism and the features of their own personalities/world view than born Jews and (ii) whether there is a negative correlation between the perceived strength of that association and the level of commitment to Jewish continuity.

Religious identity

One of the clearest markers of the converts' religiosity and spiritual commitment to Judaism is their attitude to the status of the Torah. Again we find that the proportion of

the converts who believe that the Torah was written by God, or inspired by God but written by man, are both higher than the levels expressed by born progressive Jews, though in this case, both are also lower than the levels of belief in traditional circles. The proportion of converts who hold with the divine origin of torah, or the presence of divine inspiration, decreases with time since conversion and does approach that of progressive Jews generally. Here, they do appear to gradually assimilate the views of the Jewish community that surround them, though of course, it is not possible to say whether these temporal changes represent a dilution of belief within the individuals concerned (i.e. a life cycle effect) or simply a cohort effect arising from the less spiritual values of the older respondents in the sample.

(iv) The factorial structure of Jewish Identity in more detail

It was suggested earlier (in sections 8.2.7 (i)-(iii), pp.274-5), that the Jewish identity structure of converts resembles that of born Jews, but with the difference that converts generate an additional factor (growth) and score higher than born (Progressive) Jews on each of the other three factors (observance, ethnicity and religiosity). That is something of an over-simplification, however, since the fine detail of the three common factors also differs between born Jews and converts, particularly in relation to the place of 'demanding' and 'light' rituals in the factorial structure.

In younger born Jews (the most relevant comparator group), ethnicity takes two forms: (i) a factor which reflects the strength of the respondent's practical involvement in Jewish social activity (behavioural ethnicity). The behavioural form incorporates not only the degree of mixing with fellow Jews but also the respondent's level of involvement in the 'light' rituals which, according to Miller (2003), function as ethnic identifying events rather than expressing a purely religious motivation. And (ii) a factor which represents a person's strength of 'feeling Jewish' which is relatively independent of practical action (mental ethnicity).

However, among the proselyte sample, perhaps unsurprisingly, ethnicity is a less variegated and potent element of identity; there is a single ethnicity factor which incorporates group identifying behavior and feelings of belonging to the group – but does not include the light rituals such as Seder which have become the hallmark of ethnic ceremony.

Again, in young born Jews, demanding ritual performance combines with religious belief variables to create a single dimension of religiosity. In contrast, among proselytes, the levels of performance of the light rituals load on the same factor as the demanding rituals to create a single ritual practice dimension, while the more spiritual elements of Judaism are separated off into its own spirituality factor.

Put crudely, born Jews require relatively complex structures to describe variations in their ethnicity (i.e. mental and behavioural dimension) but brigade together religious belief and demanding ritual practice. Converts generate a simple, unidimensional factor for ethnicity, but distinguish between religious belief and ritual practice. This is entirely consistent with the respective routes to Jewish identity of the two groups; born Jews are Jewish by reference to their genetic membership of a particular people whereas proselytes are Jewish by reference to a deliberate choice to change their religious identity.

It follows that, for born Jews, strength of ethnicity is the main driver of ritual practice, whilst for converts the strength of the growth factor is the main predictor.

8.2.8. The future?

This was not a demographic study, and in any case the sample size was too small to allow reliable estimates of key demographic parameters such as the out-marriage rate among the children of converts. Nonetheless, a number of findings lead to the tentative conclusion that the children and grandchildren of Reform converts are considerably less likely to identify as Jews than the descendents of born Jews (though even in the latter group, assimilation is a significant factor (JPR, 1995).

The key findings that support this prognosis are:-

(i) The evidence cited above that converts have considerably lower levels of concern about Jewish continuity than born Jews.

(ii) The finding that, in the present sample, of the 52 children of converts who were in a steady relationship 73% had a non-Jewish partner. This compares with the percentages given in the 2001 census that reveal that overall, 72% of married or co-habiting Jews had a Jewish partner. However, the analysis also shows that 68% of co-habiting Jews, who tend to be the younger members of the community and who therefore might be the best comparison for the children of the converts, had a non-Jewish partner.

(iii) Amongst the 208 grandchildren, 48% of those who had Jewish status (121 children) did or will celebrate their *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. Among the Jewish community generally, there is no reliable data, but my observation is that it is rare for a Jewish child not to celebrate their *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. The figure of 48% would seem to indicate that even though these grandchildren have Jewish status, the lifestyle choices of their parents are not centred in Jewish rituals.

These findings raise challenging issues for the Jewish community concerning the transmission of Jewish identity to the children and grandchildren of converts. The indices of assimilation – albeit based on very small numbers of cases – are approximately double those found in the

Jewish community as a whole (JPR, 1995). They suggest that Reform conversion may not, as currently organised, offer an effective way to retain conversionary families in the community in the longer term. Rather, the data suggest that, in the majority of cases, conversion may be part of a one or two generation interlude that is unlikely to have any impact on the prevailing demographic trend in the mainstream[20] Jewish population in Britain.

It is a matter of speculation whether the challenge to Jewish continuity suggested by these data can be addressed by modifications to the conversion process and/or to the ways in which converts are integrated into the community post-conversion. It is clear, however, that the stronger the intrinsic motivation for conversion, the stronger the engagement with Judaism and the greater the convert's satisfaction with their experience and Jewish identity. Conversely, the results indicate that conversion for instrumental reasons such as marriage and family cohesion is likely to be less effective in the transmission of Judaism to future generations.

The current system of education for converts, which is based largely on the provision of information about Judaism and/or the use of rather direct, paternalistic styles of teaching may not impact on the instrumental approach of many who present themselves for conversion..

It is, perhaps, worth noting (as indicated above) that the converts' strength of personal Jewish identity is significantly greater than that of Reform Jews in general and levels of ritual observance are also above the norm. Thus, if the high out-marriage rate of the converts' children is statistically reliable (and the current data are by no means conclusive), the explanation would seem to reside in something more subtle than the children's exposure to Jewish ritual practice or to the strength of their parents' ethnic identity.

These issues are in urgent need of discussion and further research in the context of Jewish communal policy and development, but they fall beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it would be wrong to assess the value of conversion solely in terms of its demographic impact. And in any event, the relevant control group in assessing 'demographic success' would be the rate of transmission of Jewish identity in partnerships in which the non-Jewish partner does not convert. Those data are not available in this country, but studies in the United States (NJPS 2001) indicate that, overall, 33% of children raised in intermarried families are raised fully or partially as Jews.

8.3. Summary

From this research it is evident that in the main, the process of conversion was successful, if you define 'success' as an outcome in which the majority of converts:

- Feel ethnically Jewish (in fact more so than born Jews);

[20] I.e. excluding the ultra-Orthodox (Charedi) section of the community which is expanding.

- Identify themselves with Reform Judaism;
- Feel content with the process they have undertaken to become Jewish; and are positive about their new identity;
- Engage in Jewish life (including ritual observance and personal Jewish development) at a higher level than born Progressive Jews;
- Develop a Jewish identity structure that resembles the pattern found in born Jews

Thus, in general, from the convert's point of view, the process of conversion is a positive and worthwhile element of their personal development. The majority reported that they were pleased that they had taken this step and that they felt comfortable in the Jewish world into which they had entered as proselytes.

In terms of the psychosocial processes that underlie the conversion process, the findings revealed a number of anomalous and counter-intuitive relationships for which tentative, post-hoc explanations have been given above. The key points of interest were that:-

- The motivation for conversion was multi-factorial, including a mix of intrinsic and instrumental motives. However, these did not include, as a common or potent factor, the recognition of Judaism as the authentic route to religious or spiritual fulfilment.
- Although the instrumental desire to create family unity was a powerful driver of the decision to convert, as a motivational variable it was negatively correlated with ritual observance post conversion and with satisfaction with the conversion process
- Intrinsic (rather than instrumental) motivation to convert to Judaism is associated with higher levels of identity and engagement. However, the intrinsic motive is grounded strongly in a desire to be part of the Jewish people rather than a desire to assimilate Jewish belief systems.
- The intensity of a convert's prior religious experience has no measurable impact on his or her subsequent ritual observance or ethnic engagement. This may reflect the stronger emphasis on practice than on spiritual belief in Jewish religious culture.
- There is, however, a significant and unexpected relationship between intensity of religious background and motivation for conversion, namely that those from non-religious backgrounds score more highly on intrinsic motivation, and those from religious backgrounds score more highly on instrumental motivation.
- With regard to the impact of specific religious backgrounds, converts from Catholic families acquired a significantly stronger sense of Jewish ethnicity than those from other backgrounds. This may demonstrate that the development of the cognitive constructs that underpin a (prior) sense of ethnicity are easily transferred to a new ethnic group,

but that such constructs are more difficult to acquire ab initio.

- Opposition to conversion from the putative convert's family was associated with stronger levels of Jewish identity post-conversion. This might be attributed to the effects of cognitive dissonance or to artefactual effects.

- The Jewish partners of converts, on a crude analysis, appear to come from typical, mainstream Jewish backgrounds. Paired with earlier findings on the emergence of a purely cognitive sense of Jewish identity, decoupled from Jewish identity behaviours, this raises the possibility that Jewish identity is becoming just one element in a set of multiple, equally salient, identities and that it no longer drive key life choices

- There is a U-shaped relationship between the religiosity of the convert's Jewish in-laws and her subsequent level of religious observance. This may be explained by the role of intolerance for ambiguity in the transmission of inconsistent norms.

- The converts report that 16% of the Jewish families do not regard their conversion to Judaism through the Reform Beit Din as valid. This attitude towards Reform conversion may reflect the historically fraught relationship between Jews and the prevailing majority cultures in which they lived. Alternatively, in some cases, it may be a specific opposition to Reform conversion that would not extend to Orthodox conversion. This issue could not be fully investigated through the data collected, but it is clear that delegitimisation of a conversion causes a deep hurt for some converts.

- The data linking instrumental motivation with poorer Jewish outcomes raises fundamental issues as to how applicants for conversion with purely instrumental motives should be managed. Radical choices include augmentation of the educational programme, screening out applicants with an instrumental motive and redefining the purpose of the conversion process.

- Notwithstanding the negative effect of instrumental motivation, it is clear that 'on average' converts have a somewhat more intense but less variegated Jewish identity than born (Reform) Jews. A fundamental issue for the Reform community is how this greater engagement can be exploited and generalised so as to impact on born Jews and on future generations (see below).

- The main driver for ritual behaviour in born Jews is the strength of ethnicity, for converts, it is the level of growth as an identity factor. This would seem to reflect a more cognitive or religious motivation for ritual practice among converts, and a more affective, group-based motivation among born Jews.

- Looking at the limited data from the survey on the Jewish status and life choices of the children and grandchildren of converts, there appears to be a strong possibility that the

conversion process (at least as currently organised), may only be delaying demographic decline in the Jewish community for just one or two generations. Against that, for the converts themselves, the conversion process has generally brought feelings of contentment, spiritual satisfaction and a more positive form of Jewish family life. The relative weight placed on Jewish continuity as opposed to the convert's individual self-fulfilment by the Jewish community can be seen as a measure of 'instrumental' versus 'intrinsic' motivation within the community itself.

- Whilst Jewish identity and Jewish consciousness is stronger among converts than born Jews, commitment to ensuring that Jewish identity is transmitted to future generations is significantly weaker. There is a need to understand how this paradoxical effect comes about – perhaps as a result of the convert's personal history of religious choice, or her more individualistic approach to religious identity or her reaction to the way converts are themselves construed by born Jews. This is arguably the most interesting question – both theoretically and practically – to emerge from this study.

8.4. Further research

There are obviously a number of issues that need further research and analysis so that theoretical data can be used both to improve our understanding of the process of conversion and the programme followed to achieve success both for the individual and the community. In particular:

(i) In examining the motivation for conversion, I have not been able to make direct comparisons between my own findings and those generated by American researchers (e.g. Mayer and Lerner, 1999) in which the motives and attitudes of both the converting and non-converting partners of Jews have been compared. Obviously, such a design allows a more reliable and nuanced understanding of the motivational process than a study restricted to converting partners alone. The comparative approach is an important goal for future British research on conversion to Judaism, although the difficulty in identifying and effectively sampling non-converting partners (in addition to those who are converting) should not be underestimated.

If such a sample could be obtained, then the comparison between the two groups would not only provide further data on the motivation for conversion. It would also provide insight into the interaction between the psychological characteristics of the potential convert, the psychological and Jewish characteristics of the Jewish partner (assuming this could be obtained) and the decision making process. The dynamics of that process are perhaps the most critical factors in understanding the decision to convert and developing a model for the outcomes of the process.

(ii) There is also considerable potential benefit to be derived from a longitudinal study of Jewish conversion that would examine a sample of converts of varying ages from the point of conversion through, say, twenty years of subsequent life. Such a study would be helpful in separating out the effects of age at conversion from trends associated with time since conversion. It would also be invaluable in examining the dynamics of adjustment to Jewish life, including the testing of a number of the post-hoc hypotheses set out in this chapter.

(iii) In the present study, the data show that the vast majority of conversions are not driven by sudden and life-changing revelations of 'the truth'. Most of those who appear before the Beit Din have been part of the effective Jewish community, sometimes part of a Jewish family, for some years before the decision to convert was made. Their expressed reasons are usually instrumental and, as described above (Section 8.2.1 (iii), p…), matters of belief did not emerge from the data as the most salient factor in the decision to convert.

The lack of sudden spiritually driven conversions was noted by Lerer and Mayer (2008). Quoting from an analysis of the literature carried out by James T. Richardson (1985) they note that until the mid 1960's, it was the Pauline experience that dominated much of the literature about conversion. This, Richardson suggested, was an example of a 'passive' conversion experience where conversion is the result of some form of cognitive or emotional breakthrough over which the convert has little if any control. Lerer and Meyer (2008) noted that the circumstances in which the majority of converts to Judaism find themselves is very different, in that their relationship to the larger faith community is both stimulated by, and reinforced by, more intimate, primary group ties, i.e. their partner's Jewish family.

It is at least questionable whether the social psychological processes underpinning 'instrumental' conversions of the kind occurring in this sample, have any relationship to the processes occurring in more obviously spiritual conversions studied by attachment theorists (e.g. Ganqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2004). For the majority of Reform converts the process might be more accurately construed as a change in the individual's identity structure (Breakwell, 2010) in which a new component (Jewish group membership) is assimilated and there are corresponding changes to the character of that person's social and personal identity.

The dynamic interaction between the assimilation of Jewishness and the overall structure of identity (a process which Breakwell calls accommodation) could not have been examined in the current study. It would require a detailed longitudinal analysis of the identity structures of individuals before, during and after the conversion process. But such a study would be a rich field for future research since

it would provide a basis for examining Identity Process Theory in relation to a change in one (arguably very salient) component of the content dimension of identity.

(iv) That said, one should not neglect the small, but apparently growing number of candidates who convert lishma and further research would be of immense benefit in understanding this phenomenon in a British Jewish context. (For example, in 2013, 23% of the candidates applying for conversion were lishma as opposed to 12% of the respondents to this survey).

Earlier research into general conversion (e.g. Malony, 1998 and Atran, 2002) has suggested that psychological issues concerning the meaning of life, perhaps brought about by a personal tragedy, or problems with self-esteem or other mental health issues, coupled with a sense of frustration with the capacity of their birth religion to address the issues, may be present in conversionary candidates. In addition, Malony suggested that their predilection to seek a religious response already suggests that they have a more spiritual approach to life and are thus open to other transempirical solutions to their crises.

Pyysiäinen (2005) quotes Kirkpatrick (1997, 1998, 1999), as arguing that people who have insecure, anxious or avoidant adult social attachment styles were more likely to seek a conversionary experience and a closer relationship with God than those who have a secure attachment style.

In addition, Granqvist et al's (2004) meta-analysis of the links between sudden religious conversion and the convert's psychological relationship with their parents provides an additional perspective of relevance to the design of future studies of motivation for conversion in this growing minority. The idea that such converts are seeking a relationship with God that can function as a surrogate attachment, assisting what James (1902) calls, 'sick souls' (quoted in Granquist et al, 2004, p.241) in the regulation of distress would require analysis by qualitative research techniques.

As noted above, a relatively small proportion of conversions to Reform Judaism have a significant spiritual component. And further research would have to be undertaken to identify those cases that involved a sudden decision arising from a preceding distressing episode. Hence there would be practical difficulties in obtaining a reliable sample of converts in this sub-group. In any case, given the theoretical positions set out above, the use of in-depth interview techniques would appear to be a more appropriate than further survey work.

Done in this way, a study of the social-psychology of spiritually driven conversions,

including an analysis of the converts' relationships with their parents, might help unravel motivational processes that were not detected in the present study. The outcome of such research would also have implications for the design of the conversion process and the process for longer-term (post-conversion) support of such individuals.

(v) This research gives a picture of conversion located in one particular niche of the changing demographics of family life and personal relationships. The statistics from the Ledgers show that the absolute majority of the converts to Reform Judaism were either married to or engaged to a Jewish partner (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.4, p.48) at the time of their conversion; they were, in effect, part of a nuclear family. Our converts represent a socio-demographic pattern that is becoming less common in general society and, on past trends, that pattern is likely to be replaced by a far more variegated distribution of family structures after a lag of a decade or so.

The general social trends are clear. Bumpass notes that: '*Marriage has become a discretionary adult role whereas it used to be compulsory if certain other things were to be achieved: a home of one's own and children'* (1990 in Lewis, 2001, p.23). And other writers (e.g. Woodward, 1997 and Self, 2008) have drawn attention to the massive changes in cohabitation, births out of wedlock and the growing divorce rate.

Whether these demographic changes have arisen from the greater emancipation of women in the economic sphere (e.g. Woodward, 2008) or changes in the law (Elias, 1991 in Lewis, 2001 p.25),[21] or greater emphasis on the rights of the individual (Elias, 1991 in Lewis, 2001, p.204; cf. Giddens, 1992 where he talks of an increasing search for a 'pure relationship'), the changes themselves are almost certain to have a profound effect on the make-up of the future Jewish community.

There are also more qualitative issues that are likely to affect the nature of Jewish communal life such as whether an intimate relationship outside of marriage is of a different nature to that occurring inside the marital bond. Some say that the relationship stays largely the same (Rindfuss and Vanden Heuvel,1990 in Lewis, 2001, p.37), especially if the couple has children (Brown and Booth, 1996 in Lewis, 2001, p.38) whereas others, such as Thery (1998) suggest that there are substantial differences in the level of commitment found in such relationships. More fundamentally, both within and outside marriage, the question arises as to whether the observable changes in family relationships reflect a shift in the focus of notions of commitment, obligation and loyalty – that is, a shift in which such high level goals are seen as being more appropriately directed to the individual him- or herself than

[21] though the question of whether the changes in the law brought about these changes in divorce law or they reflect the reality of what was already happening in society, seems, to me, a mute point.

to the family unit (Lewis, 2001)

There are at least two ways in which these social changes might impact on conversion to Judaism. One relates to the types of candidate who might present themselves for conversion and the circumstances in which they might do so. For example, if individual autonomy is in the ascendancy, are we likely to see a reduction in instrumentally motivated conversions (e.g. for 'the sake of the children') and a rise in cases of individuals seeking their own spiritual path. And are those choices likely to be exercised with increasing frequency in mixed faith families (i.e. where one member chooses to convert, but the other remains non-Jewish), and perhaps with decreasing frequency in a mixed faith partnership where (currently) the non-Jewish partner seeks to unify the family by conversion.

The second issue is how these changes in family/partnership dynamics should influence the nature of the conversion process and even the nature of the way Judaism construes itself both for converts and for born Jews? How will it be possible, for example, to resolve the tension between the concepts of family, continuity and community which are fundamental to Judaism and the notions of individualism, fluidity and multiple identity which may increasingly characterise prospective converts and born Jews?

These questions are partly theological, but future empirical research will be needed to characterise the changes in motivation, attitude and personal identity that the conversion process will have to accommodate.

(vi) In practical terms, greater use of the theoretical data around identity change (Breakwell, 2010 and Woodward, 1996) can help in the much needed re-structuring of the educational programmes designed to promote the learning, assimilating and accommodating of the new knowledge, rituals and social norms associated with being part of the Jewish community. This theoretical data illustrates that the teaching of facts alone will not affect the deep changes that are required to assume a new religious and ethnic identity. Woodward (1996) for example, suggests structured role play helps students activate a new role or identity. She talks about 'interpellation', by which she means a process, that may work consciously or unconsciously, whereby people recognise themselves in a particular identity and can think, 'that's me'. While Einstein et al (1999) talk of the need for the inclusion of psycho-social components to allow people to work through their individual journeys through engaging in the process of 'trying on' Judaism.

In particular, Breakwell et al (2010) and Grandquist's (2004) data is needed to inform the research on how those who come to conversion lishma, usually without Jewish family support networks, may need more intensive settings, such as

residential elements, included in the conversion process to provide opportunities to experience the communal and ethnic nature of Jewish identity and also what post conversion support networks might be required for the process to continue in a positive manner as these new Jews feel their way into their new identity.

(vii) And last, though by no means least, in an age where according to an American author, Sherman A Jackson, '*The greatest threat to religion in any society is not persecution, but rather apathy born of irrelevance*' again research is very much needed into how the growing secularisation of society (Taylor, 2007, Stark et al, 2002 and Bruce, 2002) will affect future interest in conversion to Judaism.

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