

## **Intermarriage in South Africa**

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### **Preamble**

What do we mean by “intermarriage”? Certainly for the Orthodox, intermarriage has a biological base in that ‘Who is a Jew’ is defined by the religion of the mother. However, even the most *haredi* (Orthodox) affiliated Jews would presumably not want a world of halakhically Jewish Jews who were ignorant of commandments, laws, and history, and whose practices, behaviors and values reflected nothing of the rich store of Jewish traditions, however defined or contested. Equally, for Reform and any other branch of Judaism, practices and values matter, in addition to affiliation and identification with the Jewish collective. Thus at this time, for most of the Jewish world, the major concern about intermarriage is surely not biological but cultural. It is about Jewish cultural continuity and Jewish creativity.

If that is so, are numbers the major goal for those who care about continuity? As Liebman and many others have noted, physical survival is indeed a prerequisite for cultural endeavors to occur and endure; but physical survival per se will not and cannot ensure continuity. The minimum requirements for cultural continuity are: the existence of a group of people who share distinctive (relative to non-members) ways of doing and ways of being, who know what those ways are, who value and therefore live by them, and who, through example and conscious effort, transmit those ways to the next generation. These minima thus require the existence of effective socialization agents - a community and communal institutions, or at the very least, adults, whether relatives or others, who interact with the young and serve as role-models and/or tutors. With increased mobility

and dispersion, individuals have to make more deliberate and concerted efforts if they wish to acquire culturally distinctive attributes and practices.

Conflict and transformation over time are inevitably built into the transmission process by virtue of the nature of human interaction, but are often visible only in hindsight. The Jewish cultural heritage in its entirety is surely sufficiently broad and diverse to allow different groups to select from it and nevertheless retain Jewish distinctiveness. This, however, requires knowing, valuing, and having the will and ability to transmit the selected content.

This view of continuity puts an additional gloss on the interpretation of the recently published statistics regarding intermarriage. Jonathan Sacks, in his excellent 1994 book, *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?*, suggests that by marrying out and therefore having non-Jewish children, increasing numbers of young Jews are choosing to discontinue Judaism and Jewishness. While this is probably true for the majority of the intermarried, this focus masks two additional, less obvious and therefore more invidious phenomena, at least in South Africa.

First, it implies that the marriage of two Jews somehow guarantees the Jewishness of their children. As indicated above, this cannot and does not happen without appropriate lived experience, knowledge of the Jewish traditions, and the ability and desire to transmit them. The grounds for such an assumption seem slim at best, when viewed against declining synagogue affiliation, growing ignorance about matters Jewish, and increasingly secular and consumer-oriented lifestyles. Even the relatively recent phenomenon of a new interest in *shiurim* and/or lectures on Jewish topics (beyond the Shoah) in some parts of the Jewish world seem to be restricted to secularly well-educated Jews, often never-married, in their thirties and forties. This phenomenon does not seem to translate into higher rates of affiliation to Jewish institutions or greater communal involvement or increased Jewish 'lived experience'.

Second, it ignores the fact that many intermarrying Jews stridently assert the validity and legitimacy of their own Jewishness and indicate a desire to transmit that identity, or label, to their children. A significant proportion of those marrying out do, in fact, identify as Jews and wish to continue to do so, while at the same time expressing respect for their partner's decision not to convert and for his/her identity, whether religious or secular. When asked about the socialization of future children—in a sense cultural continuity—it becomes clear that while these Jews, perhaps with individual exceptions, identify emotionally or sentimentally with Jewry and/or Jewishness, they really have little, if any, understanding of the content of Judaism. Following Nathan Glazer's 1990 distinction between Jewry, Judaism, and Jewishness, one might say that their identification as Jews vests much more in Jewry and a highly personal (and often ignorant) understanding of Jewishness than it does in any form of the Jewish religion, a relationship with God, source texts or *mitzvot*. In most such cases, then, the claim rests on an empty ethnic consciousness, devoid of knowledge, substance and practice. In other words, while positive sentiment—and perhaps even will—is present, the content is conspicuously absent. Unless there is recognition that not only positive sentiment, but also knowledge and practical lived experience are all necessary, such projects are doomed to fail.

Furthermore, if our goal in being concerned about intermarriage is to counter it in order to foster Jewish cultural continuity that will include Jewish knowledge and/or Jewish practices and/or Jewish values (first prize, of course, being all of these), then we are not at all sure that surveys that tell us little, if anything, about individual choices, feelings, attitudes to those very things are helpful. We are also not convinced that large surveys, even if carefully nuanced, can yield the kinds of data that inform programs that could make a difference to particular categories or segments of

the population. We do believe, however, that good surveys can provide the kinds of data that would inform qualitative research.

Finally, it seems that selecting target segments of a population for in-depth qualitative research would be a more efficient route (than additional large-scale surveys) in trying to plan effective interventions. From the South African context—and probably elsewhere too—there is evidence that many people contemplating out-marriage do not undertake such a process lightly. In fact, they agonize over the decision and are deeply torn by their own conflicting emotions and by the possible effects of intermarriage on family and friendship relationships. It would be valuable, and we believe instructive, to conduct qualitative research with those individuals—both those contemplating intermarriage and those already intermarried (or cross-dating)—in order to better understand and appreciate the elements that influence their decision-making in the various specific contexts of their particular lives.

## **Introduction**

This paper first presents an historical background for the South African Jewish community. It then contextualizes the data sources used to identify and analyze intermarriage and conversion among South African Jews. Finally, it suggests possible future marriage trends for South African Jewry.

## **Historical Background**

The South African Jewish community is a highly organized, relatively affluent community that numbered between 80,000 and 90,000 in 1998. At this time, it made up less than 2% of the total white population and 0.5% of the total population. At its zenith in 1970, the community numbered 118,200, or 0.6% of the country's total population of 21.4 million and 3.1 % of the 3.7 million whites. The two largest cities, Cape Town and Johannesburg, are home to 85% of all Jews,

with small and diminishing populations in Durban and Port Elizabeth, and tiny smatterings elsewhere. Despite these small numbers and continuing emigration, the South African community remains one of the 12 largest Jewish communities in the world (DellaPergola, 2000).

The community resembles other (especially Western) Diaspora Jewish communities in many respects—in its relatively recent immigrant origins, its pro-Israel stance, its vigilance against antisemitism, and its concerns about promoting Jewish cultural continuity and countering assimilation. It differs from other Diaspora communities in several respects, for the most part in degree rather than substance. In addition to the particularities of the apartheid context, it differs with regard to its relatively homogeneous origins—overwhelmingly shaped by the turn-of-20th century immigration from Lithuania. Other notable differences are South African Jewry’s relative internal cohesion and harmony, and its particularly high level of its Zionist—or pro-Israel—commitment on all measures.

Anglo-German Jews established the first congregation in Cape Town in 1841 and Jews were prominent among those who responded to the mineral discoveries of the 1860s and 1880s. However, it was the arrival of some 40,000 Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the three decades between the 1880s and the outbreak of World War I that consolidated the community. This wave of immigrants was certainly not monolithic—it contained the familiar array of socialists, pietists, Zionists, and Bundists to be found in many east European societies of the period. Despite this considerable internal diversity, the disproportionate numbers from Lithuania gave the community an unusual degree of homogeneity relative to other Diaspora communities. This was reflected in the virtual absence of Hasidism (until the 1970s), in the particular form of Yiddish spoken, and in the variety of foods and customs particular to Lithuanian Jewry. In addition, the

Eastern Europeans' lack of exposure to Reform Judaism meant that Reform or Progressive Judaism was established only in 1933 in South Africa, far later than in most Diaspora communities.

Since 1970, escalating political change in South Africa has led to a rise in Jewish emigration. Statistics show increased emigration in response to the events of the Sharpeville shootings of 1960, the Soweto uprising of 1976, and the turbulence of the 1980s, including the States of Emergency of 1985-86. Destinations include Israel, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Most recently, migrating South Africans have added considerably to the Australian Jewish community (see Eckstein, this volume). Recent indications suggest that although emigration continues, it has slowed considerably since the change to full democracy in South Africa in 1994.

### **Contextualization of Data Sources**

Each of the three national socio-demographic surveys from which the data for this paper are drawn had broad aims and was not focused specifically on the issues of intermarriage or cross-dating. The 1974 survey, conducted under the auspices of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the umbrella body that represents the interests of Jews qua Jews to the authorities, was conducted in a period of relative quiet and stability for the Jewish community in South Africa. The 1991 study<sup>1</sup>, under the auspices of the Kaplan Center for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, was carried out during South Africa's watershed political transition from apartheid to democracy, a period of considerable uncertainty for everyone in the country. The 1998 survey, conducted by the Kaplan Center in collaboration with England's JPR (Institute for Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> The 1991 survey was an update and extension of the 1974 study, but with one important difference: the earlier research was designed to augment census results which, in both 1970 and 1980, could still have been assumed to be reasonably reliable. In the 1991 census, however, one in five whites exercised their right not to answer the question on religion, which therefore bears directly on the enumeration of the Jewish population. (see Dubb, 1994: 132/33)

Policy Research) is the first post-apartheid study of the community, and pays more attention than the earlier works to the specifically South African aspects of the respondents' lives.

For the 1998 study, 1,000 individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with Jewish males and females, age 18 and older in the four major centers of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban. The most recent national census data of 1996 became available only after the study had been completed. However, once available, the census data seemed to validate the geographical distribution and sex ratios of the 1998 sample (Kosmin et al 1999, p. 30). Since the 1998 survey, there has been no study of Jews in South Africa although there was a further census in 2001.

Working with these three surveys raises some particular problems. The raw data for the 1974 survey are not available and the published data are not always comparable with either the 1991 or the 1998 studies. In addition, as mentioned earlier, none of the surveys focused specifically on intermarriage or cross dating. Some of the data presented below will therefore not be comparable across all three surveys.

### **Religious Identification of South African Jewry, 1974, 1991, 1998**

**Table 1: Jewish Identity of Households, 1974, 1991, 1998 (%)**

	<b>1974</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1998</b>
Born Jewish	97.6	97.3	96.8
Converted	1.1	1.5	1.0
Not Jewish	1.3	1.2	2.2

As Table 1 shows, in 1974 97.6% of the members of the households surveyed were born Jewish, 1.1 % were converts and 1.3% were not Jewish. In 1991, 97.3% were born Jewish, 1.5% were converts and 1.2% were not Jewish. The 1998 survey showed that 3% of the respondents and 1% of all household members were converted. Although it was no surprise that neither of the parents of the majority of the converts was Jewish, about a third had Jewish fathers. What is notable is that in 1998 2.2% of all household members were neither born Jewish nor converted, an almost 100% increase over seven years, indicating either increased out-marriage or an increase in the number of non-Jewish children because of out-marriage.

While the figures for the non-Jewish members of households remain low overall, the almost doubling from 1974 to 1998 represents a significant rise. It appears therefore—again comparing the surveys over time—that fewer non-Jewish respondents married to or living with Jews are choosing to convert (see “Conversion,” below). This may be linked to the greater number of South African Jews living together than previously notably in the 1998 female 18–25 age category (Table 2).

### **Profile of Marital Status of South African Jews**

This section presents a profile of marital status of South African Jewry from the three surveys, by age and gender, as necessary background to the intermarriage data to follow.

**Table 2: Marital Status of South African Jews by Age and Gender (%)**

#### **2a. 1980**

Males




## Females

<b>Age Groups</b>	15—29	30—44	45—64	65+
Married	34.2	82.5	75.5	34.4
Divorced	1.8	7	5.7	3.7
Widowed	--	1.6	13.7	55.2
Living Together	1.7	1.6	0.7	0.4
Never Married	78.3	7.3	4.4	6.3
Separated	No data	No data	No data	No data

**2b. 1991**

## Males

<b>Age Groups</b>	15—29	30—44	45—64	65+
Married	6.7	85.9	93.6	85.8
Divorced	--	3	2.8	2.7
Widowed	--	0.4	1.7	10.1
Living Together	No data	No data	--	--
Never Married	93.3	10.7	1.9	1.4
Separated	No data	No data	No data	No data

## Females

<b>Age Groups</b>	15—29	30—44	45—64	65+
Married	15.1	88	88.8	52.3
Divorced	0.6	4	4.3	4.1
Widowed	0.3	2.1	5.6	42.5
Living Together	No data	4	--	--
Never Married	84	5.9	1.3	1.1
Separated	No data	No data	No data	No data

**2c. 1998**

## Males

Age Groups	18—24	25—34	35—44	45—54	55—64	65+
Married	2.6	37.1	70.4	67.4	70.0	71.4
Divorced	--	--	7.0	16.3	16.0	6.0
Widowed	--	--	--	1.1	6.0	17.9
Living Together	--	--	2.9	2.2	--	--
Never Married	97.4	56.2	16.9	9.8	8.0	2.4
Separated	--	--	2.9	2.2	--	1.2

## Females

Age Groups	18—24	25—34	35—44	45—54	55—64	65+
Married	4	67.1	78.5	64.7	64.4	36.0
Divorced	--	5.3	9.9	20.7	15.1	6.0
Widowed	--	--	1.7	3.5	8.2	54.0
Living Together	5.3	0.8	--	0.9	--	--
Never Married	92	21.1	6.1	8.6	6.9	4.0
Separated	--	1.3	0.8	0.9	2.7	--

It is unfortunate that the age categories are not strictly comparable across the three surveys, especially so for the youngest cohort, since 25–29 is a common marrying age range. Notably, but not surprisingly, significantly more women than men were married in the youngest age category reported here. Of those aged 15–29 in 1980, 34.2% of women and 19.2% of men were married, whereas 61.8% of women compared with 78.3% of men were never married. This gender discrepancy regarding marital status levels off in the 30–44 year age category. However, while there is still a gender discrepancy regarding marital status of those aged 15–29 in 1991, the proportion of married women in this age category has halved compared with 1980. This figure

corresponds with the increasing trend among the women of middle classes everywhere to marry later, if at all.

The table shows a significant drop in both male and female marriages from 1980 to 1991 in the youngest cohort, while the proportion of never-marrieds rises. For both men and women divorce rates between 1980 and 1991 drop for all age groups. This may be attributed to the high levels of instability in the country during this period, together with couples possibly preparing for emigration.

The 1998 survey shows a similar gender discrepancy in marriage patterns in the younger age groups. Here the significant age category is 25–34 where only 37.1% of men are married compared with 67.1% of females while 56.2% of males were never married and only 21.1% of women were never married. It is notable that no men in the 18–34 age categories were living with partners whereas 5.3% of women aged 18-24 and 0.8% aged 25–34 were living with partners. In the 35–44 year category, 2.8% of men but no women were living with partners. This suggests that South African Jewish women enter intimate relationships at an earlier age than men. It is also interesting to note that whereas no men aged 25–34 were divorced, 5.3% of women in this age category were divorced. For the category 25–44, 15.2% of women were divorced against the proportion of only 7% for men. Furthermore, if we compare the three surveys, it is clear that the divorce rates for the over-45 age group have risen substantially for both South African Jewish men and women.

### **Attitudes Toward Inter-marriage among South African Jews**

Over time the attitudes of South African Jews to their unmarried children's marriage choices has changed considerably. In 1974, 75.8% of parents were opposed to their unmarried children intermarrying, with slightly more being against the intermarriage of a daughter (57.5%)

than that of a son (54.6%). The gender difference here is interesting since according to *halacha* (Jewish law), the children of a daughter would remain Jewish. It seems therefore that parental opposition to a daughter's intermarriage has had little to do with Jewish continuity but rather, perhaps, with prejudices about non-Jewish husbands. By 1991 the gender distinction had virtually vanished, but there was a clear reduction of strong opposition—to 40%—for sons and daughters.

**Table 3: Attitudes of Respondents to Unmarried Children's Possible Out-Marriage, 1974, 1991, 1998 (%)**

	1974	1991	1998
Strongly Opposed	56.2	39.9	30.2
Opposed	19.6	28.3	28.8
Indifferent/Neutral	23.8	26.5	14
Approve/Would Support	0.5	5.5	27

The proportion of parents opposed to their children's intermarriage drops to 68.2% in 1991 and continues to fall to 59% in 1998. The most significant drop occurred in the "Strongly Opposed" category, indicating that attitudes of South African Jews are not being held with as much vehemence as in previous years. South African Jewish parents of the late 1990s, therefore, show far higher support and/or approval for intermarriage for their children than those in previous generations. Although 59% of parents still opposed their children's intermarriage—almost double the 27% that approved of or would support their children's intermarriage—the attitudes are softening, and most significantly, shifting from "Indifferent/Neutral" to "Approve/Would Support".

This drop in the parents' vehemence may be due to a sense of resignation, an acceptance of "reality" (in other words, current trends), or be due to their acceptance of the multi-cultural "New South African" society. The change in "Indifferent/Neutral" responses, from 23.8% in 1974 to

14% in 1998, suggests that attitudes towards intermarriage are changing in a *conscious* manner in South Africa, where attitudes towards identity politics are almost always painstakingly constructed. Finally, it is to be noted that South Africans are becoming increasingly “politically correct” in the post-apartheid era, which may explain respondents’ reticence to voice their opposition to intermarriage. Whatever the explanation (which, again, would require qualitative research), there is a clear rise in acceptance of and support for children’s intermarriage amongst South African Jewish parents of unmarried children, which could allow for increased rates of intermarriage in the future.

The tiny 0.6% that had voiced approval or said they would support such a marriage in 1974 had grown to almost 6% in 1991. This more accepting attitude was further reflected in the almost 80% of respondents who took either a neutral or positive stance if the intended spouse were to undergo conversion. It would seem, therefore, that the promise of the conversion of the intended spouse affects Jewish parental acceptance of intermarriage positively. Yet, overall opposition to intermarriage among South African Jewish parents persists. In 1998, 62% of men and 57% of women respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "If my son or daughter wished to marry a non-Jew I would do everything possible to prevent it." We note, however, that about a quarter of both the male and female respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement, while 13% and 15%, respectively, neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

In 1998 related questions were also addressed to the respondents’ own attitudes. 6.4% of unmarried respondents were actively looking for a partner and a further 16% were "not really looking, but wouldn't mind." 73.6% of these unmarried persons claimed it was 'very important' or 'important' that the partner should be Jewish, with no significant difference between men and women. Although about the same proportion claimed to have difficulty meeting Jewish partners, with a slightly higher number of men claiming 'no difficulty', 42% of the unmarried said it was

difficult to meet Jewish partners. Thirty-five percent of the unmarried respondents had been in steady relationships with non-Jews at some point, which seems to indicate a growing openness to cross-dating. Although the responses to this question are the only available data on cross-dating, they clearly support our conviction that cross-dating needs to be taken into account in studies of the processes leading to intermarriage.

**Table 4: Importance of Partner Being Jewish, Unmarried Respondents by Gender, 1998 (%)**

	Male	Female	Totals
Very important	26.3	22.2	24.1
Important	12.5	6.3	9.2
Of minor importance	5.4	5.6	5.5
Completely unimportant	1.9	3.5	2.8
Not interested	1.7	5.2	3.6
Missing	52.1	57.1	54.8
All groups	46.4	53.6	100.0

Table Four shows that only 38.8% of unmarried women felt it is of some importance that their partner be Jewish, while 44.2% of men felt it is important to find a Jewish partner. Similarly, a greater percent of women than men (3.5% versus 1.9%) felt that it is completely unimportant to meet a Jewish partner. As mentioned above, this may be explained by the halachic interpretations of children's acceptance as Jews being passed through the mother, and not the father. It is also a commonly held perception among South African Jews of marrying age that there is a dearth of Jewish males, which may explain a certain fatalism on the part of women about intermarriage.

**Table 5: “A Jew Should Marry a Jew”, Respondents Married to Jewish Partners versus Unmarried Respondents, 1998 (%)**

A Jew Should Marry a Jew	Respondents Married to Jewish Partners	Unmarried Respondents
Strongly Agree	46.2	39.4
Agree	40.2	34.5
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	8.7	17.0
Disagree	3.5	8.0
Strongly Disagree	1.5	1.1

Table 5 shows that 86.4% of respondents married to Jewish partners agree that Jews should marry other Jews, whereas 73.9% of unmarried respondents agree that Jews should marry other Jews. This may correlate with change in attitudes towards intermarriage over time becoming less severe, or may merely indicate that those who did choose to marry interfaith are cognizant of and defensive about their choices. Notwithstanding the above, the higher percentage of “disagrees” among the unmarried respondents indicates that they are not as intent on marrying interfaith as are those respondents already-married, or that intermarriage is less of a concern for them.

**Table 6: Importance of Partner Being Jewish: Unmarried and “Not Looking” Respondents, 1998 (%)**

Very important	57.9
Important	22.1
Of minor importance	13.2
Completely unimportant	6.7

At least 80.0% of respondents “not looking” or unmarried considered the Jewishness of a potential partner as being important or very important, slightly higher than the stronger statement evinced in Table 5. We note that the wording of the question (as always in sociological surveys) is essential; the question merely asks of the importance of the partner being Jewish, which is not an “either/or” scenario, as in the statement in Table Five. This may explain the higher percentage of affirmation. However, it is evident that a vast majority of young, single South African Jews consider it important to find a Jewish partner, while only 6.7% feel that marrying someone of the same faith is not important. This figure is somewhat close to the actual proportion (5.3%) of non-Jewish spouses (Table 1).

Finally, the “not looking” respondents skew the data in that they may not consider marriage itself to be important at all. Further, as they are “not looking” they may not have given the question of the of a future partner’s religion much thought. Therefore, it is at least possible that the percentage of respondents that consider the importance of their partner being Jewish may be higher than shown.

## **7. Intermarriage and Conversion among South African Jews**

Civil marriages in South Africa are fully legal. Under apartheid, the civil marriage of two individuals from different categories as defined by the Population Registration Act was forbidden by law. For individuals within those categories, marriages were conducted by magistrates but the religion of the spouses was not recorded, suggesting a probable underestimate of mixed marriages in all South African Jewish community studies. Marriages are now conducted by marriage officers in the Department of Home Affairs and are, of course, possible for all who qualify on the usual criteria. Religion, however, is still not recorded. Ministers of various religions, but mainly of the Unitarian Church, have long been available to conduct mixed marriages of all kinds, including



between Jews and Gentiles, and if the ministers were also marriage officers, and the couple of the same Population Group, the marriage was legal.

Currently, some Jews, qualified as marriage officers but not as rabbis, also conduct mixed marriages, including those between Jews and Gentiles. Such marriages are described by the participants as 'interdenominational', not as 'inter-faith' or 'mixed'. In Cape Town, it is estimated that between eighty and one hundred such marriages have taken place over the past four years—at least one between a Jewish woman and a black non-Jew.<sup>2</sup> Most, but not all of the non-Jewish partners are women. To date, the couples have been in their late twenties at least, and were usually in their thirties. The ceremony usually includes a *chupah* and the breaking of a glass, and an historical interpretation of the meaning of these symbols is presented. According to this informant, the parents of the Jewish partner are usually reluctant participants; but only one set of parents in this period refused to attend. (No figures are available for marriage or intermarriage of Jews identified with either Jews for Jesus or Messianic Judaism, although they are known to have taken place).

The following data refer to three categories of couples: (a) where one spouse has converted; (b) where the born non-Jewish spouse has not converted; (c) where both partners are “living together” where the born non-Jew has not converted. Because it seems that most conversions occur for the purpose of marriage, the dating that preceded the decision to convert was between a born-Jew and a Gentile. We believe, therefore, that this process needs to be taken into account in discussions about intermarriage in general.

**Table 7: Jewish Identity of Spouses of Jewish Respondents (%)**

	1974	1991	1998
Converts	2.2	4.4	5.3
Not Jewish	2.6	1.9	5.3
Totals	4.8	6.3	10.6

Table 7 shows clear evidence of change over time although it is probable that all three surveys under-represent mixed marriages<sup>3</sup>. In 1974, 2.2% of married couples included one partner who had converted and in 2.6% of marriages one spouse was neither born Jewish nor converted. In 1991 there were only 1.9% mixed marriages but the proportion in which one partner was a convert had doubled to 4.4%. In 1998, of the 54.8% married couples, 5.3% included one partner who had converted and a further 5.3% included one partner who was neither born Jewish nor had converted. In both cases, the majority born non-Jewish were women (see “Gender,” below). While only 2.4% of the 1998 respondents were unmarried and living with a partner, 42% of their partners were neither born Jewish nor converted. It is clear, however, that the proportion of marriages that include converts is increasing, and, most notably for this paper, the percentage of partners remaining non-Jewish has doubled in South Africa since 1974.

## Gender

**Table 8: Respondents Born Jewish Married to or Living with non-Jews by Gender, 1998.**

	Living with non-Jew	Married to non-Jew	Total
Males	6	16	22
Females	4	10	14

<sup>2</sup> Pers. Comm., Dr. T. Reisenberger, Cape Town Marriage Officer

<sup>3</sup> The justification for this statement rests on the fact that all three surveys drew their samples from communal registers in the main.

Total	10	22	36
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The majority of partners not born-Jewish were women. This would seem to be contradictory to *halacha*, which confers Jewish identity according to the religion of the mother (Jewish women having children with non-Jews, then, would not need to be concerned about their children's acceptance as full Jews, but born-Jewish fathers having children with non-Jewish women may feel concern for their children's acceptance as Jews). It should be noted, however, that recently, South African Reform Jews have become conscious of the international Progressive movement's acceptance of so-called 'patrilineal' transmission of Jewish identity, although the South African Progressive Movement has not officially endorsed this position. This may explain an increased number of Jewish men intermarrying.

### **Conversion**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that, of intermarried couples in the Cape Town area, the number of marriages taking place where the non-Jewish partner is undergoing conversion versus the number of marriages taking place in which one of the spouses-to-be is remaining non-Jewish is roughly 50%, mirroring the survey data for 1998 (Table 7). In Cape Town, 60 women converted to Judaism through the Orthodox process between 1988 and 2003<sup>4</sup>. For the same period, 431 Orthodox marriages (72.6% first and 16.7% second marriages) were consecrated in Cape Town, of which 46 (10.7%) included a convert<sup>5</sup>. However, seven engaged couples—in each case the men were born Jewish—were in December 2003 studying for conversion through the Reform movement in Cape Town. The class also contained a married Christian couple, both of whom were undergoing conversion.

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication

<sup>5</sup> Comparable figures for other centers and for Reform were not available at the time of writing.

In response to a question put to just one never-married 31-year old Jewish woman in Cape Town, we learned of four married couples where there had been no conversions. One of those couples has two very young children, and another unmarried couple where the woman is Jewish also has two children. Our informant also knew of two married couples where the wives had converted—one Orthodox, one Reform—as well as two mixed couples where neither woman was Jewish and one was pregnant. This was a surprisingly high 'yield' from just one informant, and confirms our impression that marriage or partnerships that include a convert or Gentile are under-represented in the survey samples.

It is clear, however, that the majority of conversions were most probably in response to marriage: all of the 24 respondents in the 1998 survey who did convert were at one point married. This has implications for intermarriage in that it is evident that while the rate of born Jews marrying out in South Africa is increasing steadily, many of the non-Jewish spouses are converting, and thus the nature and definitions of intermarriage needs to be revisited. Again, as noted above, individual decision-making on the parts of converts and born-Jewish spouses of converts also requires further exploration through qualitative research in order to better understand the elements and dilemmas that influence these decisions.

## Profile of born-Jews Married to or Living With non-Jews

### a. Religious Orientation and Affiliation:

**Table 9: “Which Type of Synagogue did you Belong to Growing Up?” (counts)**

	Respondents Born Jewish And Married to non-Jews	Respondents Born Jewish and Living with Non-Jews
Orthodox	17	8
Sephardi	1	0
Lubavitch	0	0
Conservative	1	1
Reform	5	1
None	2	0
Total Belonging	26	10

**Table 10: “Which Type of Synagogue Do You Belong to Now?” (counts)**

	Respondents Born Jewish And Married to non-Jews	Respondents Born Jewish and Living with Non-Jews
Orthodox	11	4
Sephardi	0	0
Lubavitch	1	0
Conservative	0	0
Reform	8	3
None	6	3
Total Belonging	20	7

**Table 11: “Which Type of Synagogue do You Attend?” (counts)**

	Respondents Born Jewish And Married to non-Jews	Respondents Born Jewish and Living with Non-Jews
Orthodox	11	4
Sephardi	0	0
Lubavitch	1	0
Conservative	0	0
Reform	10	3
None	3	2
Total Attending	22	7

Of the 26 born-Jews married to non-Jews and the 10 born-Jews living with non-Jews in the 1998 survey, the majority (15) belong to an Orthodox synagogue, eleven to Reform, and nine do not belong to any synagogue. Attendance by type of synagogue closely mirrors this orientation. What is noteworthy is the change in orientation, as seen when comparing Tables 9 and 10. Whereas 17 of the parents of the born-Jews married to non-Jews belonged to an Orthodox synagogue, only 11 of the respondents themselves belong to an Orthodox synagogue. Furthermore, an increased number of born-Jews married to or living with non-Jews belong to Reform synagogues in comparison with their parents. Thus, it may be that born-Jews who intermarry also undergo a change in religious orientation or affiliation, seen in a shift from Orthodox to Reform. This may be explained by a greater acceptance of the respondents' choice (of intermarriage) in the Reform synagogues than in the Orthodox ones.

As noted below, the younger South African Jewish generation is becoming simultaneously more and less religious in orientation. However, the respondents born-Jewish and married to or living with non-Jews reflect only those reducing their religious orientation.

## Jewish Education and Youth Movement Involvement

**Table 12: Did you receive any kind of Jewish education growing up?**

	Respondents Born Jewish And Married to Jews or Living with Jews	Respondents Born Jewish and Married to or Living With Non-Jews
Yes	84.5	75.0
No	15.5	25.0

While only 15.5% of respondents born Jewish and married to, or living with, Jews did not receive any kind of Jewish education growing up, one quarter of respondents born Jewish married to or living with non-Jews did not receive any kind of Jewish education growing up. Although there may be a correlation between Jewish education and increased religious/ethnic orientation, our sample size of 36 respondents born Jewish and living with or married to non-Jews is too small to draw this conclusion.

Of those respondents born Jewish and living with or married to non-Jews, only six of the 36 received Jewish secondary school education, a more telling sign, as it implies that the other 30 respondents' exposure to non-Jews at the dating stages of adolescence may have influenced their choice of partner. Further, their parents' decision to send them to non-Jewish secondary schools may also be indicative of the parents' openness towards cross-religion dating and, hence, possibly, intermarriage.

**Table 13: Did you Ever Attend a Jewish/Zionist youth club or movement when you were a teenager?**

	Respondents Born Jewish And Married to Jews or Living with Jews	Respondents Born Jewish and Married to or Living With Non-Jews
Yes	75.0	72.2
No	25.0	22.8

The percentages of respondents' attendance of a Jewish or Zionist youth club or movement as a teenager closely mirror that of Jewish school attendance. Again, the small sample size is problematic, as a change in one respondent's answer can greatly skew the percentages. It is clear, however, that, for the most part, those respondents who did not attend Jewish schooling also did not attend Jewish or Zionist youth clubs or movements as a teenager. There is no significant difference between those respondents born Jewish and married to or living with Jews, and respondents born Jewish and married to or living with non-Jews in terms of teenage attendance of a Jewish or Zionist youth club or movement.

#### **b. Practices**



**Table 14: Which of the following practices do you keep?, 1998 (%)**

Practice	Respondents Born Jewish And Married to Jews or Living with Jews	Respondents Born Jewish and Married to or Living With Non-Jews
Shul Attendance-- most Shabbatot or more/not at all	44.1 5.8	13.9 11.1
Kashrut--use kosher butcher only/no pork only	46.1 30.9	13.9 16.7
Candles— always/never	84.7 1.9	36.1 41.7
Passover seder meal— always/some or most years/never	96.1 3.3 0.6	77.8 19.4 2.8

The data clearly demonstrate that those respondents born-Jewish and married to or living with non-Jews have significantly lower synagogue and *seder* attendance, *kashrut* adherence, and candle lighting practice than do those born-Jews married to Jews. Among respondents born Jewish and married to or living with non-Jews, even the seemingly simple candle lighting practice seems to be split about evenly. Presumably the 15 Orthodox and one Lubavitch respondents of this category are those that comprise the 13.9% that both keep kosher and attend synagogue most Shabbatot or

more frequently (Tables 10,11). Thus, it may be correct to say that while there is certainly a definitive decrease in all aspects of religious practice among born-Jews married to or living with non-Jews, when compared with those born-Jews married to Jews, this is not the case for born-Jews married to or living with non-Jews who themselves are religiously observant.<sup>6</sup>

#### **b. Friendship Circles**

The data indicate that those respondents born-Jewish and married to or living with non-Jews have a significantly lower proportion of close friends that are Jewish than those respondents born-Jewish and married to Jews (38.9% versus 87.0%). This may indicate a sharing of friendship circles between both partners of the intermarried couple, or perceptions (on the part of those respondents that are intermarried) of lack of acceptance by other Jews. However, there may also be a chronological factor at work in this regard: those respondents who have married out or who are living with non-Jews may have had a higher proportion of non-Jewish close friends *prior* to this relationship (from which, presumably, their partner was chosen). This, again, points to the need for qualitative research that would probe this complexity.

#### **e. Education of children**

Ten out of 32 (31.3%) of the oldest children of the 1998 survey's born-Jewish respondents married to or living with non-Jews attended Jewish day schools, compared with a national average of close to 60%. This would suggest that those children of mixed marriages are less likely to receive Jewish instruction and interact with peers of Jewish identity than are those children born to two Jewish parents. Increasingly, however, South African parents of means are choosing to send their children to private (independent) schools, the number and nature of these schools multiplying as trust in the public system wavers. For example, nine out of the 32 oldest children of the survey's

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<sup>6</sup> This seemingly anomalous situation begs further investigation.

born-Jewish respondents married to or living with non-Jews are attending private non-Jewish schools, which may explain some of the low Jewish school attendance figures.

### **Intermarriage and South African Jewry**

All three of the surveys agree that the rate of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles in South Africa is low, especially in comparison with other Diaspora communities, for example, the US and the UK, and even Australia. However, with South Africa's recent emergence from the relative isolation caused by apartheid<sup>7</sup> concern has been expressed that the new, more open, society with its emphasis on making up for the decades (indeed centuries) of forced separation, may affect the Jewish community precisely in the spheres of dating and marriage. Indeed, writing shortly after the 1994 elections about the challenges likely to confront Jewish education in the 'New South Africa', Isadore Rubenstein cited a 1989 statement by Bernard Steinberg which, Rubenstein suggested, remained entirely relevant:

Despite all its achievements, the fact remains that the educational system of South African Jewry can, to a significant extent, be regarded as the product of its host society. In other words, if the unique social structure and social institutions did not exist, then the problems of assimilation would increase.

(1995, p.58)

According to Rubenstein, Jews would "increasingly be called upon to defend and justify their choices and identification with the Jewish sub-group" and would "increasingly [be] judged in terms of their contribution to the welfare and development of a new sense of 'South African collectivity'" (ibid).

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<sup>7</sup> The first democratic elections in South Africa were held in 1994.

Despite the “unique social structure” and the implied insulation of the community, South African Jews always interacted with non-Jews—at school (if they were among the minority who did not attend a Jewish day-school), at university, at work, in business, in their neighborhoods, and at leisure. Nevertheless, although residential clustering may be less dense for Jews than it was two or three decades ago, both the 1991 and 1998 surveys still show very clear suburban concentrations of Jews. And in 1998, 56% reported that all or nearly all of their close friends were Jewish, and a further 23% that more than half their close friends were Jewish. However, in the past, racial separation was legally enforced and ethnic boundaries were taken for granted as ‘natural’ and thus a larger proportion of South African Jews tended to have Jews as a greater proportion of the members of their social and work networks than is the case in most other countries. The changes in the wider society since the beginning of liberalization have led to two contradictory trends in this regard, reflecting in part Rubenstein's predictions. On the one hand, some previously oppressed and discriminated against minorities are now (re)claiming their ethnic/cultural heritage with pride and therefore creating new social boundaries. On the other hand, the democratization and liberalization of the country has led to an intensification of inter-ethnic, inter-racial and inter-class interaction—that is, the breakdown, or crossing, of ethnic and other boundaries. And both processes are generally approved—in terms of ‘politically correct’ multiculturalism in the first case, and a desire to create an overarching South African identity in the second. For some young Jews, particularly those at university, and especially those attracted to the *ba'al teshuva* movement, the heterogeneity of the campus and/or the workplace is to be avoided. But for many others, after twelve years of Jewish day-school, and the relative homogeneity of their neighborhoods and their parents' social networks, this heterogeneity is both fascinating and appealing.

Similar processes are manifest within the Jewish community: Johannesburg, the city with the largest concentration of Jews, has shown a significant increase in the number of observant Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox in the last three decades, with Cape Town beginning to manifest similar tendencies more recently. Thus, while 61 % of the total population still defined themselves as 'traditional' in 1998, the past striking homogeneity of the community in religious terms has changed dramatically.

The high levels of Jewish day school attendance (57.7%), pro-Israelism, synagogue affiliation (in 1998: 77% various Orthodox, 8% Reform, 15% none), and self-definition in terms of religion (in 1998: 14% strictly Orthodox, 61% 'traditional', 7% Reform, 12% 'Just Jewish' and only 6% 'secular') all indicate a highly identified and identifiable Jewish community. But many commentators (Ascheirn, 1970; Hellig 1984; Rubenstein, 1995) concur that religion in South Africa is a symbol of ethnic identification, in conformity with the wider society's notions of ethnic groups as bounded and fixed, rather than being an indication of a belief system or of religious observance. In other words, in Glazer's terms (1990), South African Jews' identification has little to do with Judaism but much to do with South African Jewry and South African forms of Jewishness.

Thus South African Jewishness is largely based on deeply inculcated positive sentiment toward Jewry in general and Israel in particular. Many educators would agree that it is more difficult to inculcate positive identity and identification, positive sentiment, and loyalty, than to import or successfully transmit factual knowledge. In these more difficult areas, South African Jewish educational and other institutions have been extremely successful; but many commentators and observers also agree that Jewish knowledge—the content of the adjective—is shallow indeed. However, when uncritical sentiment is met with ideological opposition (whether to ethnic solidarity as a value, or to Israel/Zionism) or is challenged by intellectual vigor or informed analysis,

sentiment, however positive, emerges as frail and fragile. These are the challenges increasingly facing South Africa's Jews on campuses and through the media as the country strengthens its international connections and engages more and more with the global community. In these circumstances of change and challenge, the strong internal structures of the past, and the conservative consensus model of decision-making, become increasingly irrelevant—or worse, are construed as coercive and unattractive and belonging to the past.

### **Conclusion**

Our data show that the proportion of marriages and partnerships between born-Jews and non-Jews in South Africa is increasing. Possible causes may include increased emigration, the opening of South African society post-apartheid, more liberal attitudes towards intermarriage, and increasing religious polarization within the community. In the highly politicized South African society of today, debates around Zionism have also increased the discomfort of some sections of the Jewish community with their own Jewishness. In addition, the increase in popularity of non-Jewish private schools has attracted Jewish students out of the Jewish day schools, which may, in due course, affect the strong Jewish identity of the community. In our view, any study of intermarriage should include consideration of cross-dating and conversion as part of a process that may or may not lead to intermarriage. Most importantly, there is a definite need to interrogate our expectations and definitions of “intermarriage”, our purposes in studying the phenomenon, and the methods we use to do so.

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