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INTERMARRIAGE AND JEWISH JOURNEYS

in the United States

Report of a study by **Arnold Dashefsky**
in collaboration with **Zachary I. Heller**

Preface by
David M. Gordis

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Intermarriage and Jewish Journeys in the United States is an in-depth study of intermarried couples in four diverse metropolitan areas, Boston, St. Louis, Atlanta, and the Bay areas of San Francisco. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, it seeks to probe the nature of their relationship to Judaism and the Jewish community giving voice to both the Jewish and Christian partners as it explores the development of their perceptions and their attitudes.

Recognizing the reality that living in an open society provides varied opportunities for choices and modes of personal identity, this study is non-judgmental. Since the phenomenon of intermarriage is a reality that cannot be ignored by the Jewish community, the end product of this study is a series of policy recommendations that focus upon the family, the community, rabbis, and other clergy and communal professionals.

The National Center for Jewish Policy Studies at Hebrew College (the successor to the former Wilstein Institute) is an independent research and policy planning resource for the Jewish community. It seeks to identify and critically analyze vital issues and stimulate effective response. The Center facilitates the collaboration of scholars, communal professionals, and lay leaders, bridging the gap between policy-making structures and academic resources. It disseminates its findings to the Jewish community and, as appropriate, to a wider audience as well. This study is one of a series of explorations of the issues of intermarriage that began in the wake of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS).

INTERMARRIAGE AND JEWISH JOURNEYS
IN THE UNITED STATES

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Preface
Dr. David M. Gordis

Intermarriage is not a new phenomenon in Jewish life; it is already an issue in Biblical sources. But in our lifetime, the issue has moved front and center with extraordinary prominence, emerging as one of the principal challenges to the sustainability of Jewish life. With Jews constituting a small minority in the Diaspora, a concern over the perceived demographic decline of the Jewish community comes as no surprise, and intermarriage is viewed as central to that demographic decline.

Intermarriage as an issue became a central focus of Jewish community policy with the appearance of the 1990 Jewish Population Survey, when particular alarm was generated by its famous “52 percent” figure, for the percentage of Jews marrying out. Not unexpectedly, the initial response was of panic, and recommendations on how to respond to the threat coalesced around two poles. On one side were those who advocated a strong rejectionist approach to intermarriage, suggesting that any move towards welcoming the intermarried or accommodating the institution of intermarriage communally, including sponsoring programs of outreach to intermarried couples and families and allowing rabbinic participation in interfaith weddings, provided validation to intermarriage from a Jewish communal perspective and implied an acceptance if not an outright encouragement of intermarriage. On the other side were those who for either pragmatic or other reasons advocated outreach programs to encourage intermarried families to maintain whatever level of Jewish connection they chose to maintain and to welcome them into the community. Advocates of the “outreach/welcome” approach argued that those considering interfaith marriage were neither seeking approval nor very much concerned about the disapproval of the Jewish community and that shunning this significant and growing population and failing to reach out to them in welcome would further reduce the likelihood that children would be raised as Jews and would alienate them further from the Jewish community.

At the respective ends of what constituted a continuum of approaches were those who on the one hand were Pollyannaish about the demographic implications of intermarriage, arguing that interfaith couples and their offspring would increase the numbers of Jews by becoming a reservoir of new Jews

entering the community and those on the other end of the spectrum who argued that there was no such thing as an interfaith marriage, only an “interfaithless” marriage, suggesting that Jews who married out had abandoned any sense of Jewishness or connection to Jewish life. Most contemporary observers would agree that neither those Pollyannaish projections nor the portrayal of intermarried Jews as having abandoned their Jewish identities have proven accurate. In many cases, new individuals were drawn to Jewish engagement through intermarriage, with or without conversion according to the *halakhah*, and not infrequently intermarriage has led to a strengthening of the Jewish engagement of the Jewish-born partner. But the dilution of Jewish engagement in intermarried families is also a reality. Not unexpectedly, a complex phenomenon has complex and often contradictory outcomes.

The present study and the policy recommendations which are appended to it reflect a far more nuanced perspective on intermarriage and suggest a maturing of attitudes on the part of the community generally and an evolution in approach since the original polar communal responses of the 1990s. I, myself, am a case in point. Well before 1990, I commonly offered the standard rabbinic take on intermarriage, speaking on the subject using a title like “The Tragedy of Intermarriage.” I lamented the losses to the Jewish community, the dilution of Jewish engagement even on the part of those intermarried Jews who did not dissociate themselves from Judaism entirely, the significant majority of children of intermarried couples who received no Jewish education, and the other familiar items in the traditional litany. My own thinking began to evolve when a dear friend who had attended one of my talks on the subject approached me and asked, “Why do you call it the *tragedy* of intermarriage?” I quite glibly reviewed the issues that intermarriage created for the Jewish community. “I understand that,” he said. “Intermarriage is a problem for the community which seeks to sustain itself demographically and substantively. But calling it a tragedy is both wrong and misguided. It is wrong because it debases the notion of tragedy. A tragedy occurs when a child becomes seriously ill or when a natural catastrophe brings suffering to an innocent population. When two people find each other, and in an open society it will frequently occur that they come from divergent religious communities, that is not a tragedy. It is a challenge to the community but not a tragedy.” Furthermore, he said, “calling it a tragedy is both misguided and will have consequences exactly opposite to what the community wishes to achieve if it is in fact concerned about Jewish demographics and the loss of Jewish connection of intermarried couples. At a moment of joy and fulfillment, hearing from the community that their relationship represents a tragedy, is most likely to distance the couple, both Jewish and gentile partner, from the community and discourage any inclination on the part of either to engage Judaism or the Jewish community seriously.” I believe that there was a great deal of truth in my friend’s comment. I have not given that speech in the last twenty years!

Intermarriage is clearly a Jewish community problem, but how best to

respond is a good deal more complex than an impulsive and polar response would suggest. Our understanding of intermarriage and intermarried families has expanded during the last decades. The present study seeks to advance that understanding and inform the range of communal approaches to the phenomenon. Most Jews, excluding, perhaps, some but not all of those in the Orthodox minority, believe that efforts should be made to bring intermarried families closer to Jewish life and Jewish institutions. Though quite profound differences in policy prevail in the Jewish community on such issues as a non-Jew's participation in the synagogue service, rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriage ceremonies, acceptance of the children of intermarrieds into Jewish schools and allowing them to have Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and, of course, the very Jewish status of the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, the objective of encouraging the Jewish engagement of intermarried families is widely embraced. The findings of Professor Dashefsky's study will usefully inform community deliberation on ways of nurturing the Jewish attachment of intermarried families. The "value-added" of the present study is to explore the experiences of intermarried families in their encounters with Jewish life and Jewish institutions. While the study does not present a random sample of intermarrieds, but rather focuses on those with a desire to engage Jewishly, their experiences are suggestive and important. They help us to understand what attracts and what repels, what policies and programs would appear to be promising in bringing these families closer to Jewish life and what experiences have discouraged them from Jewish engagement. Further, these families begin to share with us what they are seeking in their own lives from Jewish attachment for themselves and for their children. As Dashefsky suggests, our hope is to revisit these families over several years and follow their "Jewish progress" over time. We can then assess both the accuracy of our findings and the usefulness of the policy suggestions put forward here and others adopted in the community.

Without doubt the borders between religious and ethnic groups in this country have been softening. Lines of distinction have become more permeable, leading to a complex array of fused identities, religiously and ethnically. While communities face the challenge to sustain their continuity, for particular minorities like the Jewish community, the softening of these borders represents an advance in the human condition and a shield against the dehumanization of the other as that is often the unavoidable product of sharply drawn lines between "them" and "us." In any event, whether triumph or tragedy, even given significant investment in encouraging endogamous marriage, intermarriage will not disappear. As a community, we will continue to reflect and debate on alternative responses. My sense is that in the present study and the recommendations that it has elicited, useful and effective responses are proposed and advocated, based on both ethical/human and pragmatic considerations.

Executive Summary

Introduction to Study of Jewish-Gentile Inter-marriage in the United States

Jewish-Gentile intermarriage in the United States did not emerge as a dramatic departure from early twentieth century endogamy until the last third of that century. Quantitative research has documented the changes examining the increase in the overall rate as well as for recent marriages. Nevertheless, such quantitative analysis needs to be supplemented by qualitative analysis, which has revealed the role of “freedom of choice,” “negotiations,” and the “tenacity of Jewishness” in such research. Therefore, this study examines interfaith marriages, relying on both quantitative and qualitative methods in a research project designed as a longitudinal study, which examines the relationship of intermarried couples to Judaism and the Jewish community. The data in the first stage of this research were gathered from a sample of 149 couples or 298 individuals, in four metropolitan communities of the United States, representing regional differences: 1) Northeast (Boston), 2) Midwest (St. Louis), 3) West (San Francisco Bay Area), and 4) South (Atlanta).

Finally, it is important to note that this research, informed both substantively and methodologically by the recent literature, is a policy-oriented study. Therefore, we sought to respond to the following questions in the conduct of our research:

- 1) What are the factors that attract interfaith couples to Judaism and the Jewish community?
- 2) What are the factors that repel interfaith couples from Judaism and the Jewish community?
- 3) How do the needs of interfaith families and concerns in regard to the Jewish community change over time?
- 4) Given that we can answer the above questions, how should the Jewish community most effectively respond to interfaith marriage?

In Chapter Two, we describe the sample of interfaith respondents, compare them to a national sample of Jews (National Jewish Population Survey or NJPS 2000–01) and analyze some relationships among variables.

Characteristics of the Interfaith Couples: Religion, Marriage, and Child-Rearing

The profile of respondents of Jewish and largely Christian backgrounds uncovered a highly educated sample with about half of both groups holding graduate degrees. In regard to their childhood religious experiences, the Jewish respondents indicated on most measures a greater level of connection than the typical responses reported by all American Jews in the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000–01. With respect to dating and contemplating marriage, only about one-sixth of Jewish respondents dated only or mostly Jews in high school, but about one-half were concerned about their parents' reaction to interfaith marriage and whether there might be a problem later on that the children would not be raised as Jews.

The survey revealed some relatively rare insights into the wedding experience and the relationship to the clergy. Only about one-third had a “Jewish ceremony,” and about one-half or more reported including Jewish rituals in the ceremony. A number of statistically significant relationships were uncovered in regard to rabbinic officiation, including raising children as Jewish, synagogue attendance on the High Holidays and the absence of Christian observances. **We emphasized that these relationships indicate associations, but they are not proof of a causal path between rabbinic officiation at the marriage ceremony and Jewish lifestyle choices. Rather, they may indicate a probable association that reflects the partners' pre-disposition to Jewish engagement.**

With respect to spirituality and religious observance on a number of measures, the interfaith sample (IFM) exceeded the national sample (NJPS 2000–01), e.g., lighting Hanukkah candles and Shabbat candles, attending a Passover Seder and having visited Israel. In other areas, NJPS and our IFM sample resembled each other, e.g., fasting on Yom Kippur, belonging to a synagogue, having half or more close friends as Jewish, and contributing to the Jewish federation or another Jewish cause. In a few areas, the IFM sample was less connected than NJPS, e.g., keeping kosher at home, attending religious services at least monthly and responding that being Jewish was very important. Nevertheless more than half of the Jewish respondents reported that they had a Christmas tree and three-quarters exchanged Christmas presents.

With respect to child-rearing, the current sample was more likely than most surveys to report that children were being raised as Jews. More than three-fourths of the Jewish and non-Jewish parents revealed an involvement in Jewish upbringing of the children as illustrated by their being more likely to read Jewish stories rather than non-Jewish stories to their children. This proportion corresponds closely to the 72 percent who reported raising their children as Jews.

Thus, the big picture revealed by the quantitative survey data on religion, marriage, and child-rearing, shows a group of adults, both Jewish and non-Jewish, evincing more “Jewish” behaviors than the average pattern among all

American Jews while seeking to feel accepted by the Jewish community. What these challenges mean to our respondents will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three and what they think the Jewish community should do about this matter will be treated in Chapter Four.

Partners' Perceptions of Religion, Marriage, Family, Child-Rearing, and Anti-Semitism

The qualitative findings are based on interviews carried out separately with each spouse in the privacy of their homes. In examining the childhood religious experiences, both husbands and wives regarded the family bonding in childhood religious experiences as positive although the wives were more likely to view positively the bonding to both family and community. With respect to the time prior to the marriage, it appeared that Jewish respondents generally were more open to considering marriage if their spouse agreed to raise their future children as Jewish. The experience of the wedding and the role of the officiant were important topics addressed in this study. Husbands of both religions viewed the integration of religious components as positive, but all were “turned off” by the refusal of rabbis to marry interfaith couples and felt positive when rabbis accepted the role. Wives of both faiths focused more on the bonding aspect of religion that encouraged spending time with the family, and Jewish wives more often discussed maintaining Jewish tradition through wedding ceremonies.

In regard to religious observance and areas of interpersonal agreement and tension between the partners, three areas were noted, including values and spirituality, religious observances and holidays, and raising children. In regard to the last point, some parents stressed the similarities between the two religious traditions, but those who noted the inconsistencies and conflicts were concerned that practicing two religions would be confusing to the children. Indeed, Jewish parents reported wanting their children to experience only one religion, namely, Judaism. Nevertheless, most couples in this sample resolved the issue; and in this case, it was to raise the children as Jews.

The role of grandparents of the children of interfaith marriages was also addressed in this study. Respondents noted a positive role of grandparents was their acceptance of their grandchildren, irrespective of religious upbringing; and they noted especially when they actively participated in their grandchildren's lives. The lack of such involvement of the grandparents was observed to be negative by the respondents. Finally, the concern with anti-Semitism was probed in this study. Most respondents were not concerned for themselves as much as for their children or the Jewish spouses.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the respondents reported a variety of experiences and a diversity of responses. This suggests that multiple options need to be explored and developed from a communal perspective. There is no one approach alone in responding to interfaith marriage. Chapter Four offers the testimony of the respondents as a basis for suggesting directions in which the organized community may wish to consider its options.

Policy Implications

The respondents spoke frankly about the positive and negative experiences with the Jewish community. Among the negative experiences were the following: 1) perception of rejection, 2) negativism of rabbis, 3) expectation for conversion of the Christian partners, and 4) the questioning of the Jewish identity of the children. Among the positive points cited by respondents were: 1) perception of warmth of the community by some, 2) availability of classes, 3) acceptance of intermarriage without conversion, and 4) reduction in tensions for the interfaith couple with Jewish communal acceptance. Finally, the respondents shared many suggestions for the organized community from more classes for interfaith couples to greater tolerance for the interfaith couples.

Perhaps a subtext of the message which elements of the organized Jewish community have communicated to the non-Jewish partner in an interfaith marriage is as follows: “Now is the time to get on the bus” (traveling on the Jewish path). This message communicates a lack of sensitivity for the non-Jewish partner, who according to Jewish tradition, was created in the image of God like the Jewish partner. But many non-Jewish partners are not ready to decide whether they are “on the bus” or “off the bus.” They do know that they want to ride with their partner and will seek the most congenial conveyance available. Will the Jewish community provide that transportation option to facilitate the journey or will the potential riders vanish?

Policy Recommendations

On the basis of what we learned from the interviews and the diverse panel of consultants, we offered three sets of recommendations for the 1) family (both Jewish and non-Jewish), 2) community, and 3) clergy (both pre- and post-marriage). If one had to summarize the thrust of these recommendations, it would be as follows: The Jewish community must turn away from the prior outlook of rejecting the partners of interfaith marriage to the contemporary view of embracing a gentler, more nurturing environment for them in order to strengthen communal continuity and personal identity.

Acknowledgments

The purpose of this research is to shed the light of knowledge on the topic of mixed marriage and not to generate the heat of controversy. Thus neither the researchers nor the Institute seek to condemn or condone this phenomenon but merely to understand it as a fact of contemporary Jewish life in the United States. Indeed, the dramatic increase in the rate of Jewish-Gentile marriage in the last third of the twentieth century and into the current century begs for a greater understanding of the important aspects of the relationships of intermarried couples to the Jewish community. Hence, this study gives voice to those individuals and, on the basis of this knowledge, the organized community can draft policies to ensure its continuity.

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In conclusion, let it be noted that this report is being completed on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, with the hope that the New Year brings forth an opportunity for a new beginning.

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Chapter One

Introduction to Study of Jewish-Gentile Intermarriage in the United States

Quantitative research revealing an increase in mixed marriage in the Jewish community began to emerge in the third quarter of the twentieth century, but it appears that few policy planners in the Jewish community took much note of the phenomenon. In contrast, studies in the first half of the twentieth century found rather low rates. Nevertheless, the increase was already being recognized in the general periodical literature when, as some may recall, *Look* magazine published its famous article, “The Vanishing American Jew” (Morgan 1964). Perhaps most people did not take this observation very seriously since before American Jews showed many signs of disappearing, *Look* magazine vanished!

Overview

The pattern of endogamy which dominated the first half of the twentieth century began to break down in selected localities as measured in the 1960s and, on the national scene in the 1970s, with intensification in succeeding decades. Such quantitative research, like the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000–01 and NJPS 1990 can specify, with a reasonable degree of accuracy, the size and scope of intermarriage and variations based on age, gender, region of the country, general and Jewish education, parental religious heritage, as well as offer behavioral contrasts between the intermarried and in-married. A more complete picture is provided by including qualitative research in which one can delve more deeply into the dynamics of relationships preceding the mixed marriage and the consequential interactions of the spouses and their children after it.

Given this background, this study examined Jewish-Christian intermarriage in four regions of the United States—Northeast, Midwest, South, and West—including metropolitan Boston, St. Louis, the Bay Area of San Francisco, and Atlanta. Contingent on funding, its unique contribution may be its longitudinal objective. The aim of this study, which presents the first stage of this research, is to understand the relationship of the intermarried couples to Judaism and the Jewish community and to document any changes in attitudes and behaviors of the spouses by relying on both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Chapter One offers examples of previous research in the study of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage in the United States in terms of both quantitative and

qualitative approaches. This is followed by an overview of the data and methods utilized in this study. Chapter Two delineates the findings from the quantitative phase of the study and Chapter Three describes the results of the qualitative phase. Chapter Four lays out some policy implications of the findings based on the testimony of the respondents. Finally, Chapter Five provides a set of policy recommendations, based on the empirical findings of this research.

Quantitative Research on Mixed Marriage in the United States

One of the first studies on mixed marriage was carried out by Drachsler (1920), who reported that the rate of intermarriage for Jews in NYC between 1908 and 1912 was 1.2 percent, based on an examination of 100,000 marriage licenses. Another local study, frequently cited in the mid-twentieth century era, was carried out a generation later by Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy (1944), who found very high rates of Jewish endogamy and referred to this tendency as the “triple melting pot.” That is, assimilation across ethnic lines occurred within the three major religious groups of the mid-twentieth century in the United States, a theme around which Will Herberg developed his book entitled *Protestant—Catholic—Jew* (1955), which was frequently cited in its day.

Another widely quoted piece of research in mid-century was the work of Erich Rosenthal (1963, 1967) who examined intermarriage in Iowa (1953–59) and Indiana (1960–63), both states with very small Jewish populations, and with reported mixed marriage rates of 42 percent and 49 percent respectively. These studies led Rosenthal to conclude that, “in the absence of large-scale immigration and of a substantial rise in the birthrate, the current level of intermarriage formation is going to be of ever increasing significance in the future demographic balance of the Jewish population in the United States” (1967:264). In the 1960s, it might have seemed that Rosenthal’s prediction, based on research in Iowa and Indiana, was an overgeneralization. In retrospect, however, he was quite prescient! Despite the differences between life in Iowa and Indiana in the 1960s and twenty-first century metropolitan Jewish communities, the demographic factors to which Rosenthal alluded of reduced migration and lowered fertility remained important factors, along with the greater geographic dispersion and social penetration of Jews in the larger society.

All of these studies cited thus far were based on local data for cities or states because the only national data through the first two-thirds of the twentieth century was provided by the United States Bureau of the Census in *Current Population Reports* (March 1957). Based on a substantial sample of 35,000 households, the Bureau reported that 7.2 percent of the spouses of Jews were of a different religion, which might have been an undercount because some information on the respondents might not have been retained. (Perhaps, we should not be too hard on both private and academic researchers—who lose some data—when the federal government has done so as well!)

Aside from the Census Bureau report, no other data existed at a national

level throughout the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. To be sure, a number of local Jewish community studies were carried out and reported rates either lower or higher than the national average. In the latter category, were communities like Washington, DC (13.1 percent in 1956), and San Francisco, CA (18.5 percent in 1958), as reported by Sklare (1971). These local communities tended to be regarded as exceptional because of the higher levels of migration and residential mobility among residents of these cities, which were thought to weaken their communal ties. In retrospect, they represented the foretelling of emergent national trends.

More recently, Sheskin (2001) provided a useful compendium of findings with respect to Jewish-Gentile intermarriage for 40 communities in the United States in the last two decades of the twentieth century (2001:92–93). The rate of intermarriage for individuals ranged from 3 percent in Atlantic County, NJ (Atlantic City and environs) and South Palm Beach, FL (Boca Raton-Del Ray Beach), both containing substantial numbers of retirees, to a high of 30 percent for all individuals in Charlotte, NC, followed by 29 percent in York, PA.

The national picture changed with the emergence of the first National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of 1971, which reported that while the overall rate of intermarriage for all Jewish persons was only 9 percent, the rate among recent marriages was 32 percent (Massarik and Chenkin 1973). Nearly a generation later, the overall national figure for Jewish individuals who were intermarried had risen to 28 percent, which included “born Jews (160,000) who converted to another religion” (Kosmin et al. 1991:13) and recent intermarriage (1985–1991) had reached 52 percent of individuals (1991:14). This latter finding led many Jewish communities in the United States to initiate commissions on Jewish continuity to investigate how they could respond to this challenge (see Dashefsky and Bacon 1994).

The latest NJPS (2000–01) reported a 31 percent overall intermarriage rate for Jewish individuals in their first marriage. The authors also recalculated the “famous” 52 percent figure for 1990 to exclude the non-Jews who were once Jewish and arrived at a new figure for the recently married (through 1990) of 43 percent. In the most recent period reported (1996–2001), that figure rose slightly to 47 percent. A similar figure was reported by the American Jewish Identity Survey (AJIS) 2001 with 51 percent “married to a spouse who is not of Jewish origin” nor a convert (Mayer, Kosmin, and Keysar 2001:7). We might add that the national surveys calculated rates of intermarriage for individuals and the earlier studies usually calculated rates for marriages (which are higher).

If one examines available data from NJPS 2000–01, one notes that such quantitative research is very useful (depending on definitional consistency) in specifying the size and scope of intermarriage, including variations based on year of intermarriage, e.g., the more recent the year of marriage, the higher proportion intermarried (UJC 2003:16). NJPS reported differences based on age, gender, region of the country, general and Jewish education, and parental

religious heritage, e.g., those more likely to intermarry are younger men with less education, no Jewish education, living in the West, and having only one Jewish parent (UJC 2003:17). NJPS also described a portrait of contrasts between the intermarried and in-married, e.g., the intermarried had lower levels of Jewish religious practices and observances and less involvement with other Jews.

For data prior to the most recent NJPS 2000–01, we consulted the two previous NJPS surveys reported in Lazerwitz et al. (1998). The findings documented a dramatic increase in that 20-year period across all denominational categories, ranging from a tripling of the rate among those who prefer Orthodox to a quintupling among those who prefer Reform. In addition, the gap across the three denominations has widened substantially with the Conservative rate of intermarriage nearly twice that of the Orthodox and the Reform more than four times greater than the latter.

The authors compared “prior” (to adulthood) and “current” (adulthood) variables to assess their relative contribution to marriage outcomes. In regard to “prior” variables, in increasing order of strength, they found: “age,” “United States generation,” “childhood Jewish denomination,” “Jewish education” (consistent with the qualitative findings of Fishman [2004], and “number of marriages.” All told, the explanatory power of these variables explained only a small portion of the pie of marriage outcomes. In contrast, we find a much bigger slice of the pie explained in regard to “current” (adulthood) variables, totaling 37 percent of the pie and including “home religious practices,” the “Jewish community organizations index,” and “synagogue member.” While we cannot determine the temporal relationship between “current” variables and intermarriage, it is likely as Mayer reported that, “Jews with a weakly grounded sense of Jewish identity are especially likely to intermarry” (1995:419). An interesting additional finding is that the “association with childhood denomination . . . is greater than that of current denominational preference” in accounting for in-marriage (Lazerwitz et al. 1998:108).

Following the 1990 NJPS, the Wilstein Institute (the predecessor to the current National Center for Jewish Policy Studies) and the American Jewish Committee supported two follow-up studies. In 1993, 580 original respondents from NJPS 1990 were re-interviewed and questioned about intermarriage. These respondents were previously married and under the age of 50. In 1995, 256 of the non-Jewish spouses involved in intermarriage were also interviewed and the results were reported by Phillips (1998). His findings revealed that two important variables influencing intermarriage were generation, where the first and second generations were less likely to outmarry, and number of Jewish parents, where individuals with only one Jewish parent were more likely to outmarry. In addition, Phillips reported that those who were less likely to intermarry were individuals who had “Jewish observance in the home and parental involvement in Jewish communal affairs, formal and non-formal education, and the influence of adolescent peer groups” (Phillips 1998:11).

Furthermore, these four factors, “non-formal Jewish education, formal Jewish education, high school dating, as well as Jewishness of the family of origin were all independently associated with reduced rates of mixed marriage” (Phillips 1998:30). Nevertheless, the lowest rates of mixed marrying were found among respondents with the most intensive and longest continuing formal Jewish education who also participated in non-formal Jewish educational experiences (Phillips 1998:32). Even more importantly, Phillips stressed that, “Jews who dated non-Jews in high school married non-Jews as adults. While not all Jewish adolescents who expected to marry endogamously did so, only those who started in that direction would end up married endogamously” (1998:39). Phillips suggested that this is similar to the observation that adult smokers began as teens.

Phillips also created a typology of mixed marriage, which yielded six possible variants (1998:44). The most common was the “Dual Religion” (31 percent) followed by “Christian” (28 percent) and “Judaic” (14 percent). Thus the two categories where Judaism plays a role (“Dual Religion” and “Judaic”) yielded 45 percent of all couples and the three categories where Christianity dominated (“Christian,” “Judaic-Christian” and “Christo-Centric”) also added up to 45 percent with the remaining 10 percent “Interfaithless.”

Phillips found that the difference in practices between the “Judaic” and “Dual Religion” were much less than between these two categories and the “Interfaithless” and the more Christian categories. For example, in the first two groups, about four-fifths lit Hanukkah candles and three-fifths attended a Seder and read the Haggadah at the Seder. A little less than one-third of “Dual Religion” households attended High Holiday services while two-fifths of the “Judaic” families did. While four-fifths of the former had a Christmas tree, still three-fifths of the latter had one as well. The most striking difference was that in one-quarter of the “Dual Religion” homes, the Christian partner went to church on Easter and none did in the Judaic homes (Phillips 1998:45). Thus the pattern of behavior of the mixed married (“Judaic” and “Dual Religion”) with regard to such normative practices as Hanukkah candle lighting, Seder participation, and High Holiday attendance did not differ greatly from the behavior of the total Jewish population. These findings suggest that to the extent that the intermarried couples (both “Judaic” and “Dual Religion”) seek to participate in the normative patterns of Jewish living, opportunities need to be provided.

Qualitative Research on Mixed Marriage

Among the first important studies of intermarriage to include qualitative data was Egon Mayer’s *Between Love and Tradition* (1985). As Phillips argued, it:

is important beyond simply being the first major study found on American Jewish Inter-marriage. It introduces three new perspectives that have guided the sociological study of intermarriage: Freedom of love in the American context, the role of negotiations in intermarriage, and the tenacity of Jewish identity (2006:169).

The freedom of choice theme echoed Marshall Sklare's observation (1971:201) that **Jews don't intermarry; rather they just marry**. The role of negotiations was noted as part of all marriages. Finally, Mayer argued that there was a "tenacity of Jewishness" which endured. Perhaps it is "*dos pintele yid*," the jot of Jewishness, that needs to be cultivated and not lamented.

Qualitative research is especially effective as Fishman (2004) demonstrated by relying on personal in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, in delving into the memories that respondents have of their childhood and teenage years as it related to their family of orientation and their ethnoreligious (or religioethnic) connections. Only in a qualitative study would we learn about the negotiations surrounding the wedding and the symbolic meaning associated with the ceremony and the officiants selected. Likewise, such research can reveal that for the Jewish partners, Jewishness could become more important as the marriage loomed than it was when they were teens or college students. As one informant put it, "I never felt so Jewish until I married my Christian wife" (Fishman 2004:53).

This is similar to the experience of an American college student who was traveling abroad and arrived in a foreign capital on July 4 and exclaimed, "We have been traveling around Europe and Russia for almost a month now. I never thought I'd be saying this, but I never wanted to see and hear Americans so much in my life" (Dashefsky et al. 1992:v). It appears that the interactions with the "other" can lead to the intensification of one's own identity as well as a sensitivity to those of other religioethnic backgrounds.

Despite the methodological rigor, and even disregarding the methodological limitations that are inevitably associated with such research, quantitative studies cannot answer all the questions that we may have about intermarriage. One needs to seek a balance between the quantitative and qualitative approaches as suggested by Sieber (1973) many years ago and echoed by Sylvia Barack Fishman in the "Introduction" to her earlier research, *Jewish and Something Else: A Study of Mixed-Married Families*, published by the AJC (2001):

Current information about Jewish families in general and about mixed-married families in particular has come primarily from statistical surveys, such as the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) and population surveys of individual cities. Survey research is of critical importance in helping us see the big picture. However, although such statistical research excels in determining the broad parameters of behavior, it is not a refined enough instrument for understanding why people and societies behave as they do, or what might influence their future attitudes and behaviors. Qualitative research . . . based on systematic personal interviews and focus-group discussions, provides effective techniques for looking at specific, targeted types of individuals and societies. When designing qualitative research projects, researchers characteristically search for representative paradigms rather than for huge numbers of informants (Fishman 2001:1).

Furthermore, Fishman in her recent book (2004), based on personal in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, shed light on the intricate dynamics of interpersonal relationships of the interfaith couples that can only be carefully described and analyzed in a qualitative study. We learned from a teenage focus group participant that, “Christmas and Hanukkah are when all of my parents’ talk about whether we have a double or single religion in our household gets real” (2004:60). In addition, we learned that, in mixed households with an exclusive Jewish emphasis, Christian members of the extended family still regard the children as “half and half” and do not want the half-Christian children to miss out on Christian holidays even in their own homes. In sum, “holiday observances emerged as a process rather than a static condition in mixed-married households” (2004:73).

As Fishman noted, “The lack of passion Jewish spouses show for Judaism has an important impact on the ethnoreligious family dynamic. All the ‘not askings’ add up and teach non-Jewish spouses that Jewish things are ‘not that important’ ” (2004:84). Finally, only in a study like this can we learn of the salience of the ethnoreligious identities of the two teens, the Manischwitz sisters where the one, Cerise, assumes a dual identity, and the other, Sara, assumes a Jewish identity.

A Longitudinal Study of Inter-marriage: Data and Methods

The aim of our research as noted at the outset, is to understand the relationship of intermarried couples (including both the Jewish and non-Jewish partners) to Judaism and the Jewish community through a longitudinal study of married interfaith couples in four communities representing diverse regions of the country: 1) Northeast (Boston), 2) Midwest (St. Louis), 3) West (San Francisco Bay Area), and 4) South (Atlanta). In this report, we present our findings of the first phase of research, including 149 couple interviews, which were conducted in all four areas, yielding data on 298 individuals (see Table 1.1). The data were gathered and coded during the period 2001–2005.

Briefly, the procedures that we developed, which were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Connecticut, were as follows: Once we obtained the name of a potential interfaith couple through a variety of means, including those from Dovetail (an interfaith organization) as well as referrals from local communal resources and individual informants, we sent them a first contact letter describing the purpose of our study and gave them a variety of means by which they could contact us for a very brief telephone interview. After we received confirmation of the respondents’ potential interest in our study, we contacted them by telephone and conducted a short screening interview. We then concluded by trying to set an appointment for a more in-depth interview. If the potential respondents agreed to this, we then sent each spouse a separate questionnaire (one for the Jewish and one for the non-Jewish

Table 1.1 Number and Percent of Respondent Couples and Individuals by Community

	Number of Couples	Number of Individuals	Percent of Total
Boston, MA	48	96	32%
St. Louis, MO	41	82	28%
Atlanta, GA	32	64	21%
Bay Area, CA	28	56	19%
Total Respondents	149	298	100%

spouse) together with a cover letter, which assured them of their rights in the research process.

Given the possibility of unresolved tensions which might underlie a mixed marriage, it is likely that our respondents might represent those who are more likely to be favorably disposed to the Jewish community than not and were more likely to agree to be interviewed. **While this sample is not designed to be representative of all American Jewish intermarrieds, it constitutes a group of individuals who probably were more inclined toward sustaining Jewish identity. Therefore, suggested policy initiatives will likely have a better chance of success with this group.**

In this study, two versions of a questionnaire were administered: one to the Jewish spouse and one to the Christian spouse. Both schedules contained questions dealing with a variety of topics, including: 1) background questions; 2) religious education (ages 6–12); 3) religious education (ages 13–18); 4) religious experiences in childhood and adolescence; 5) dating and marriage; 6) wedding ceremony; 7) social relations; 8) attitudes and practices in regard to religion; 9) current religious affiliation; 10) acceptance; 11) marital relationship; and 12) raising children.

At the personal interview, which was conducted separately with each of the spouses in the privacy of their own home, a variety of issues were explored in-depth including the following:

- 1) religious identity dimensions, both in childhood and today;
- 2) social and communal dimensions, surrounding the wedding ceremony, the perception of the organized religious community and specific needs of the interfaith family;

- 3) family dimensions, including the raising of the children, role of grandparents, the challenges children face, if any, as a result of their interfaith background and the role of religion in their identity; and finally,
- 4) personal dimensions, including the role of inter marriage in discussion with friends, possible concern about anti-Semitism as well as areas of agreement or disagreement on religious matters.

Summary

Jewish-Gentile inter marriage in the United States did not emerge as a dramatic departure from early twentieth century endogamy until the last third of that century. Quantitative research has documented the changes examining the increase in the overall rate as well as for recent marriages. Nevertheless, such quantitative analysis needs to be supplemented by qualitative analysis, which has revealed the role of “freedom of choice,” “negotiations,” and the “tenacity of Jewishness” in such research. Therefore, this research seeks to examine interfaith marriages relying on both quantitative and qualitative methods in a research project designed as a longitudinal study, which examines the relationship of intermarried couples to Judaism and the Jewish community. The data were gathered in four metropolitan communities of the United States, representing regional differences: 1) Northeast (Boston), 2) Midwest (St. Louis), 3) West (San Francisco Bay Area), and 4) South (Atlanta).

Finally, it is important to note that this research, informed both substantively and methodologically by the recent literature, is a policy-oriented study. Therefore, we sought to respond to the following questions in the conduct of our research:

- 1) What are the factors that attract interfaith couples to Judaism and the Jewish community?
- 2) What are the factors that repel interfaith couples from Judaism and the Jewish community?
- 3) How do the needs of interfaith families and concerns in regard to the Jewish community change over time?
- 4) Given that we can answer the above questions, how should the Jewish community most effectively respond to interfaith marriage?

In the next chapter, we will describe the sample of interfaith respondents, compare them to a national sample of Jews and analyze some relationships among variables.

Chapter Two

Characteristics of the Interfaith Couples: Religion, Marriage, and Child-Rearing

Quantitative research allows for the presentation of the big picture and facilitates comparison to national studies which use comparable measures. For the current analysis, the focus will be on the following five dimensions for which we have quantitative data, which parallel the topics probed in-depth in the succeeding chapter:

- 1) childhood religious experiences;
- 2) dating and contemplating marriage;
- 3) wedding experiences and the clergy;
- 4) issues of spirituality and religious observance; and
- 5) child-rearing.

A Profile of Respondents

Prior to examining these issues, we present a brief profile of the respondents. The reader should bear in mind that the sample of respondents is not a probability sample and cannot be judged to be representative of all intermarried individuals. We did not have the benefit—or budget—to utilize the strategy that Phillips (1998) employed, in which he conducted follow-up interviews with the intermarried respondents to NJPS 1990. Therefore, the use of statistical methods is more limited in that inferences cannot be drawn to the total population. The statistics presented are for heuristic purposes alone.

The sample of interfaith respondents of Jewish and largely Christian backgrounds for which questionnaire data were available comprised 281 individuals representing 141 couples (with one spouse who did not complete the questionnaire). The interviewees ranged in age from 25–54 with the majority (57 percent) between the ages of 30–39. Nine out of ten (89 percent) of the non-Jewish respondents were Christian (compared to 54 percent in the National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01), fairly evenly divided between Protestants (42 percent) and Catholics (47 percent). Most of the rest had other (5 percent) or no (5 percent) religious backgrounds. Nearly 21 percent of non-Jewish spouses

considered conversion to Judaism and when asked for all possible reasons that they did not convert, the most frequent replies were: “I am not religious” (32 percent), “I am not committed to my religion” (which likely means that “I am not religious”) (31 percent) and “It did not seem to matter to my spouse” (30 percent). (Multiple reasons led to a sum greater than 100 percent.) In this sample, only 3 percent of Jewish spouses considered conversion to their spouse’s religion. In regard to formal education, the proportions of Jews and non-Jews who attained specific levels of education were fairly similar. Approximately half of the non-Jews (48 percent) had graduate degrees as did about half of the Jews (55 percent, compared to only 23 percent in the NJPS 2000–01). Only 6 percent of Jews and 10 percent of non-Jews were not college graduates (compared to 24 percent of non-Jews in NJPS 2000–01).

Table 2.1 shows the proportion of intermarrieds in the United States as documented by NJPS 2000–01. The 31 percent overall rate is most closely paralleled by Boston (29 percent), followed by St. Louis (37 percent), San Francisco (45 percent) and Atlanta (50 percent). Recent intermarriage data, which obviously reveals a higher percent, follows the same order of communities and also shows Boston to be lower than the national average. One interesting anomaly is the much greater proportion of children of intermarrieds reported as being raised Jewish in Boston (60 percent) and St. Louis (65 percent), about twice the national average (33 percent). These findings may reflect the unique characteristics of the local community, the investment in programming for interfaith partners, or variations in the wording of questions and the order in which they were asked. Indeed, Boston (18 percent growth since 1995) and St. Louis (no growth reported in past ten years) are older, more stable communities, compared to Atlanta (60 percent growth since 1996) and San Francisco (92 percent growth since 1986), which are growing in size (see Sheskin and Dashefsky [2006 and 2007]).

Childhood Religious Experiences

Nearly all of the Jewish spouses in this study (97 percent) considered themselves to be “born and raised” Jewish, with 94 percent reporting that both mother and father are/were Jewish. In regard to religious education (between ages 6–12), four-fifths (81 percent) of non-Jewish spouses received some, with most having attended Sunday school (52 percent) and about one-quarter having gone to parochial school. The remaining few were exposed to some other form of religious instruction and the majority (90 percent) regarded it positively. Among the non-Jewish respondents, 54 percent received some religious education between the ages of 13–18, mostly in Sunday school, and the great majority of them (87 percent) regarded it positively.

With respect to Jewish education (between ages 6–12), slightly more Jews (88 percent, compared to only 52 percent in NJPS 2000–01) than non-Jews received such an education, with 35 percent having attended one-day a week, 43 percent more than once a week of supplemental education, and 8 percent in day

school (compared to only 2 percent in NJPS 2000–01). About three-quarters (73 percent) regarded it positively. Between the ages of 13–18, 46 percent of Jewish respondents received a Jewish education, with most attending once per week although a small number attended day school (4 percent) and some attended supplemental school more than once per week (8 percent). Nearly nine of ten (89 percent) received this education under Reform or Conservative auspices although 8 percent acquired it under Orthodox aegis. Most in this age group (86 percent) regarded it positively. Beyond formal Jewish education, a substantial minority attended a Jewish overnight camp (44 percent), a Jewish day camp (39 percent), participated in a Jewish youth program at a Jewish Community Center (34 percent), and traveled to Israel on a teenage youth group program

Table 2.1 Proportion of Jewish Intermarrieds and Their Children in NJPS 2000–01 and the Four Communities

	Intermarrieds	Recent Intermarrieds	Jewish Children in Intermarried Households	Children of Intermarrieds Reported Being Raised Jewish
NJPS ^a	31%	47%	**	33%
Boston, MA ^b	29%	37%	**	60%
Atlanta, GA ^c	50%	67%	41%	39%
San Francisco, CA ^d	45%	55%	50%	38%
St. Louis, MO ^e	37%	47%	65%	65%

Notes on Sources

a. National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01, United Jewish Communities and Mandell

L. Berman Institute—North American Jewish Data Bank

b. 2005 CJP Community Survey

c. The Jewish Community Centennial Study of Greater Atlanta: 2006

d. 2004 San Francisco Jewish Community Study

e. 1995 Jewish Identity Report

**Data not available

(18 percent). In fact, a majority of respondents (52 percent) belonged to a Jewish youth group. Do these data contradict the findings of Phillips (1998) as reported in Chapter One about the association of non-formal and formal Jewish education with reduced rates of intermarriage? Perhaps, but not necessarily. More analysis is needed to examine the usefulness of not one factor alone in shaping behavior but to examine the “challenge in the field of Jewish education to link the silos to build cooperation across institutional lines” (Wertheimer 2005:2).

In regard to Jewish socialization experiences in childhood and adolescence, 91 percent lit Hanukkah candles, 33 percent lit Shabbat candles. 92 percent attended a Passover Seder, and 87 percent attended High Holiday services “always” or “usually” (with the former responses much more numerous than the latter). (In fact, nearly one-quarter [24 percent] reported that they observed Sukkot and 35 percent celebrated Purim in their youth.) In addition, 70 percent had a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Clearly this group of Jewish intermarried were raised in families which exceeded the current normative pattern of all American Jews in terms of religious observance. When asked about a Christmas tree at home while growing up, 15 percent reported affirmatively as did 9 percent to celebrating Easter. When questioned about their parents, the respondents reported that 90 percent belonged to a synagogue, 62 percent to a Jewish organization, 85 percent contributed to Jewish causes, and 50 percent did volunteer work for Jewish organizations. In sum, nearly three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) reported “very positive” or “mostly positive” Jewish memories of growing up. This group derived mostly from Reform (44 percent) or Conservative (38 percent) backgrounds, with 2 percent Orthodox and 14 percent just Jewish.

Respondents were asked about the neighborhoods in which they grew up and 40 percent reported growing up in one where half or more of the residents were Jewish. A majority reported that half or more of their father’s friends (80 percent) were Jewish as were those of the mother (81 percent). While the respondents were in college, they claimed that nearly half (47 percent) of their friends were Jewish. While at college, 20 percent took Jewish studies or Hebrew language courses, and 17 percent participated in Hillel.

The non-Jewish partners experienced less of the informal religious youth programming than the Jewish respondents, with only 27 percent having attended a religious overnight camp, 26 percent a religious day camp, and 42 percent belonged to a religious youth group. In regard to religious observance, 98 percent celebrated Christmas at home, 94 percent Easter, and 73 percent reported attending religious services usually or always every year. The respondents reported that all of their parents belonged to a church, a religious organization, and did volunteer work for a religious organization. Most respondents were formally initiated into religion, with 89 percent baptized, 66 percent had first communion, and 67 percent had a confirmation. Not surprisingly nearly nine of ten (88 percent) claimed an awareness of their religion, which is not surprising since their households were uniformly involved

in their religion. Interestingly, 34 percent also reported being very aware or somewhat aware of Judaism while growing up.

Dating and Contemplating Marriage

Jewish respondents were asked “When you were growing up, did you ever think you might marry a non-Jew?” While about one-quarter of the Jewish sample (23 percent) did not think so, nearly one-half (46 percent) did not think about it; and almost one-third (31 percent) thought they might. After high school, the proportion who regarded marrying someone who was Jewish as “very important” was only 14 percent with equal percentages (43 percent) stating it to be “somewhat important” or “not important.”

In addition, respondents were asked about their dating practices in high school and in the Jewish sample, one-sixth (17 percent) dated only or mostly Jews, about one-third (31 percent) both Jews and non-Jews, and slightly more than one-third (35 percent) dated mostly or only non-Jews. Study participants were also asked to respond to a series of statements relating to concerns about intermarriage. About one-half expressed “major” or “medium concern” in regard to the following issues dealing with interfaith marriage: how their parents would react (48 percent), whether “differences in . . . backgrounds might be a problem later” (52 percent) and “that . . . children would not be raised as Jews” (52 percent).

Respondents were also queried about their parents’ reaction to the prospect of intermarriage. The most frequent response for the Jewish respondents was “not opposed, and was happy that I was happy” (39 percent of fathers and 45 percent of mothers). A minority of fathers (14 percent) and mothers (8 percent) “tried to talk [the respondent] out of it.” Similar proportions of fathers (14 percent) and mothers (6 percent) were opposed to intermarriage but did not offer objections or were happy to see their offspring getting married.

Among the non-Jewish respondents, most (68 percent) did not think about intermarriage while growing up. Additionally, most (70 percent) did not know any intermarried families, and less than one-third (28 percent) thought it “very important” or “somewhat important” to marry someone of the same religion after high school. A majority reported that both their fathers (58 percent) and mothers (56 percent) were “not opposed, and . . . happy that [the respondent] was happy” with the news of the prospective intermarriage.

Although 57 percent of Jewish respondents felt that it was at least somewhat important to marry someone Jewish, over 75 percent had at least some concern with how their parents would react to their marrying a non-Jew. Over half (55 percent) of the participants knew intermarried couples before getting married and a clear majority (85 percent) were not concerned with their friends’ reactions to their intermarriage plans.

While 77 percent of Jewish survey participants had concerns that religious differences with their spouse could be the source of problems later and more than 75 percent expressed concerns that their children would not be raised as

Jews, less than half (45 percent) expressed some guilt over their decision, which was about the same proportion (43 percent) as those who felt that it was not at all important to marry someone Jewish. Clearly, the issue of intermarriage and its consequence for the Jewish upbringing of the children weighed heavily on the minds of the Jewish respondents.

Wedding Experiences and the Clergy

One of the mitigating circumstances to the unbridled joy that a wedding may elicit for the couple and the family is the kind of ceremony that the interfaith couple might experience. In our sample, about three-fifths (61 percent) reported that they were married in “a ceremony that included a rabbi, with 36 percent having just a rabbi and 25 percent both Jewish and non-Jewish clergy. A total of about one-third (34 percent) were married in a ceremony that included a non-Jewish clergy member. While about one-fifth of Jewish spouses reported that pleasing their parents was a contributing factor for including a rabbi, nearly one-third (30 percent) of the non-Jewish spouses believed that including a rabbi was important for their Jewish in-laws. Even though only about one-third of Jewish respondents reported being married in a “Jewish ceremony,” about one-half or more reported including Jewish rituals at the wedding, the most popular of which were breaking the glass (66 percent), traditional blessings recited (53 percent), and a *huppa* or wedding canopy (48 percent).

What happened when the couple turned to a rabbi who declined participation? More than two-thirds (69 percent) found another rabbi and exactly one-tenth were married by a non-Jewish clergy member. How did the couple respond to the rabbinic rejection? More than nine of ten (91 percent) Jewish spouses were “somewhat upset” or “very upset” and four-fifths (80 percent) of non-Jewish spouses felt the same. About one-third (33 percent) of Jewish spouses and nearly two-fifths of non-Jewish spouses (39 percent) claimed that the rabbi was not sensitive in explaining the reasoning for the refusal to participate.

What perceived impact did rabbinic refusal have on the couple? In the minority of cases where a couple approached a rabbi who refused to officiate, about one-third (30 percent) of Jewish spouses and non-Jewish spouses (36 percent) claimed that rabbinic refusal to participate in their wedding ceremony distanced them from any form of institutionalized Judaism. What influence did rabbinic officiation have on the couple? Nearly half (46 percent) of Jewish spouses married by a rabbi claimed that rabbinic participation had some influence on their lives while nearly three-fifths (58 percent) of non-Jewish spouses replied that having a rabbi participate had no influence on their lives.

One of the most challenging responses to interfaith marriage from the point of view of the organized Jewish community, the couple and the family, is the issue of the wedding ceremony. We asked our respondents, “in which kind of marriage ceremony were you married?” In our analysis of the Jewish respondents, we sought to determine whether there were any statistically

significant outcomes when the “ceremony [was] performed by a rabbi” as opposed to all other possibilities examined: “ceremony performed by a non-Jewish clergy,” “. . . both a Jewish and a non-Jewish clergy,” “civil ceremony,” or “some combination of the above.” We found a number of statistically significant relationships in the expected direction, using rabbinic officiation as the independent variable and a set of items indicating Jewish or Christian behavioral and attitudinal connections as dependent variables. (We decided to emphasize this line of analysis because little research has been published on this theme and we have the data.)

In testing for these associations between rabbinic officiation and specific behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, we found eight which were statistically significant (see Table 2.2). In response to the question, 1) “how each child is being raised in terms of religion,” we compared “Jewish only” to all other possibilities and found a significant relationship with 87 percent (who experienced sole rabbinic officiation) raising Jewish children, compared to 63 percent doing so who had other forms of officiation. However, we must point out that this is not proof that the officiation by a rabbi at an interfaith ceremony is a cause of having Jewish children. All we can say is that the two are associated. Having a rabbi officiate at an interfaith ceremony may represent a symbolic milestone on the path of the couple to commence a Jewish journey for their children. We only tested this relationship for the first child as the situation of raising two or more children in different religions was a rare occurrence in our sample.

We also tested for the association between rabbinic officiation and other variables. For the question, 2) “how important is it to you that your grandchildren . . . be raised Jewish,” we also found a statistically significant relationship, with 50 percent (who had sole rabbinic officiation) indicating that it was very important that their grandchildren be Jewish, compared to only 18 percent indicating so who had other forms of officiation. We found as well similar results for 3) “attendance at synagogue or temple during the High Holidays,” with 88 percent (who experienced sole rabbinic officiation) attending services on the High Holidays, compared to 72 percent who did so among those using other forms of officiation. In regard to the association between rabbinic officiation and the presence of Christian observance and/ or practices, we found statistically significant results for the absence of a 4) “Christmas tree in your home” and 5) “exchange [of] Christmas presents within your household”, with 54 percent not having a Christmas tree and 35 percent (who had sole rabbinic officiation) not exchanging presents, compared to only 35 percent and 19 percent respectively not engaging in such holiday practices if they experienced other officiation. Likewise, we found significant relationships when examining rabbinic officiation and not 6) “celebrat[ing] Easter in any way” and not attending 7) “church on Easter Sunday,” with 58 percent not celebrating Easter and 98 percent not attending church on Easter Sunday (who had sole rabbinic officiation), compared to 36 percent and 79 percent respectively who used other

Table 2.2 Percentage Differences on Selected Variables for Jewish Respondents Comparing Those Married by Sole Rabbinic Officiation to Those with Other Officiation*

Behavioral and Attitudinal Variables Associated with Sole Rabbinic Officiation*	Sole Rabbinic Officiation ^a	Other Officiation
1. Child's Religious Upbringing (n=105): Jewish Only	87%	63%
2. Grandchildren . . . be . . . Jewish (n=81): Very Important	50%	18%
3. High Holiday Attendance (n=141): Yes	88%	72%
4. Xmas Tree at Home (n=141): No ^b	54%	35%
5. Exchange Xmas presents at Home (n=140): No ^b	38%	19%
6. Celebrate Easter (n=140): No	58%	36%
7. Attend Church on Easter Sunday (n=141): No	98%	79%
8. Belong to a Church (n=140): No	98%	74%

* All were significant with probability (p) equal to .03 or less. That means that if we tested this relationship 100 times, the probability (p) that we would not get the same results was only 3 of 100 chances (well within the accepted limits of 5 of 100 chances); or alternatively, we would get the same results 97 out of 100 times.

^a Significant findings were also found for the association between "the rabbi's refusal [was] a reason . . . to distance yourself from any form of institutional Judaism" and not feeling "accepted by the Jewish community" as well as that "non-Jews are more accepting of interfaith couples than Jews (with p=.05 or less). We also found that "having a Jewish ceremony only" was significantly associated with the likelihood that respondents would participate in "a class or program where . . . [they] could learn more about Jewish history or culture" (p=.05). Finally, when we looked at the evidence in regard to the presence of the wedding ritual of the breaking of the glass, we found significant relationships in the expected direction for the likelihood of participation in classes or programs to "assist parents in deciding about religious observance in the home," "provide support for interfaith couples," "learn more about Jewish history or culture," and also "help parents who want to raise kids in both religions" (with p=.05 or less).

^b Similar significant findings were found for these variables and the "fact that you were married by a rabbi" (with p=.04).

officiation. Finally, we sought to probe the association between rabbinic officiation and the absence of membership in 8) “a church or other non-Jewish religious groups.” The relationship was significant, with 98 percent (who had sole rabbinic officiation), not belonging to a church, compared to 74 percent who did not belong if having other officiants.

All eight of these relationships proved to be statistically significant, but we must emphasize again that these relationships indicate associations. **They are not proof of a causal path between rabbinic officiation at the marriage ceremony of the interfaith couple and the Jewish outcomes described above. Rather, they may indicate a probable association that reflects the partners’ pre-disposition to Jewish engagement.** In conclusion, we note that when we collapsed the independent variable to include sole rabbinic officiation (examined above) and mixed officiation “by both a rabbi and non-Jewish clergy,” against all other possibilities, we generated no significant findings. That means that only cases where there was “sole rabbinic officiation” produced statistically significant results as opposed to the variable “rabbinic officiation,” which may have included non-Jewish clergy, and that revealed no significant Jewish outcomes. Nevertheless, all we can say is that sole rabbinic officiation at an interfaith ceremony may symbolize for the couple an initiation of a Jewish journey and that the occasion of intermarriage may not lead to the frequently cited image of the “vanishing American Jew.”

As a footnote to the findings on rabbinic officiation, we discovered in the course of our research an innovative response by one rabbi, who was not comfortable conducting an interfaith wedding. The rabbi trained “Jewish justices of the peace to conduct interfaith marriage ceremonies in the synagogue for couples the rabbi approved” (Taylor 2005:D1).

Spirituality and Religious Observance

A number of questions were asked of the respondents in regard to their attitudes and practices with respect to religion. While more than nine of ten Jewish spouses (91 percent) stated that their religion was very important in their lives, only three-fifths (60 percent) of non-Jewish spouses said the same. Virtually all Jewish respondents were positive (59 percent) or somewhat positive (39 percent) about their religion whereas for the non-Jewish spouses, only one-quarter (25 percent) were very positive and about one-half (54 percent) somewhat positive about their religion.

Table 2.3 presents a summary comparison of the proportion of respondents exhibiting Jewish connections, comparing data from the sample utilized in the National Jewish Population Survey 2001–01 (NJPS, n=4,523) to our sample of just the Jewish spouses in the Interfaith Marriage sample (labeled IFM for brevity, n=141) drawn from the four metropolitan communities located in the four regions of the United States. On a majority of dimensions, the interfaith sample of the Jewish spouses matches or exceeds the national sample of all American Jews in Jewish connections. For example, the IFM sample is more

Table 2.3 Percent Exhibiting Jewish Connections for National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS 2000–01) Respondents and Respondents to this Study of Interfaith Marriages (IFM)

Jewish Connections	NJPS 2000–01**	IFM***
Half or more of close friends are Jewish	52%	52%
Hold/attend Passover Seder	67%	92%
Light Hanukkah candles	72%	94%
Fast on Yom Kippur*	59%	60%
Light Shabbat candles*	28%	42%
Keep kosher at home*	21%	2%
Attend Jewish religious services monthly or more*	27%	20%
Belong to a synagogue*	46%	45%
Visited Israel	35%	45%
Contribute to federation campaign*	30%	29%
Contribute to Jewish cause (not federation)	41%	42%
Regard being Jewish as very important*	52%	38%

* “Topics with asterisks refer to respondents who answered the survey’s long form, representing a population of 4.3 million Jewish adults and children” (United Jewish Communities 2003:7).

** National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01

*** Interfaith Marriage Sample (this study)

likely to light Hanukkah candles than the NJPS or national sample (94 percent vs. 72 percent) and Shabbat candles (42 percent vs. 28 percent), attend a Passover Seder (92 percent vs. 67 percent), and have visited Israel (45 percent vs. 35 percent). Along a number of dimensions, the groups were very similar, e.g., half or more close friends are Jewish (52 percent identical), fast on Yom Kippur (60 percent for the IFM sample and 59 percent for NJPS), belong to a synagogue (45 percent vs. 46 percent), contribute to the Jewish Federation (29 percent vs. 30 percent), contribute to another Jewish cause (42 percent vs. 41 percent). In the following three areas, the NJPS sample exceeded the IFM sample: keep Kosher at home, 2 percent of IFM vs. 21 percent of NJPS; respond that being Jewish was very important, 28 percent vs. 52 percent; and attend Jewish religious services monthly or more (20 percent vs. 27 percent).

In sum, the picture portrayed of Jewish connections of the sample of Jewish spouses in interfaith marriages is in many respects similar to the normative patterns of all American Jews as depicted in NJPS 2000–01. These findings describe a segment of the Jewish population in interfaith marriages, who are more enmeshed in the Jewish community than is likely for all interfaith couples (e.g., 52 percent of the IFM sample have half or more close friends who are Jewish compared to 24 percent of the Jewish interfaith partners reported in NJPS 2000–01). Still for many of these Jewish spouses, a gap exists between their relatively normative Jewish connections (compared to all American Jews) and their perception of acceptance within the larger Jewish community (a topic to be discussed later).

While these normative patterns are quite evident among the Jewish partners in interfaith marriages, some practices deviated from the norms of American Jewry. More than half (58 percent) reported that they had a Christmas tree and three-quarters (74 percent) exchanged Christmas presents at home. In addition, more than half (56 percent) reported celebrating Easter in some way, but only 14 percent of Jewish spouses and 28 percent of non-Jewish spouses reported attending church on Easter Sunday. A substantial minority of Jewish spouses reported observing Sukkot (21 percent) and Purim (36 percent), both Jewish festivals for which there are no comparable NJPS data. Respondents were also asked whether their ethnic identification had “become stronger” since being married. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of Jewish spouses agreed while only 28 percent of non-Jewish spouses agreed. More than nine of ten of both groups claimed familiarity with Jewish customs and beliefs and virtually all in both groups stated that “Jews have a rich culture that ought to be preserved.”

As noted in Table 2.2, nearly half (45 percent) of the couples belonged to a synagogue or temple and most (73 percent) identified with Reform Judaism. Among the non-Jewish spouses, nearly one-quarter (22 percent) are current members of a church or other non-Jewish religious group. Among the majority who did not belong to a synagogue (n=80), respondents were asked to rate a series of reasons as to why they had not joined. Responses included: “not a factor,” “somewhat a factor,” and a “major factor.” The most frequent responses

to which respondents replied “somewhat” or “major factor” were: “too expensive” (65 percent), lack of “spiritual fulfillment out of the synagogue” (51 percent), “none or only a few friends belong” (40 percent). Respondents were then asked to evaluate a series of items that would lead them to join a synagogue. Possible responses included: a “major factor,” “somewhat of a factor,” and “not a factor.” The most frequent responses to which respondents replied that it was a “major factor” included:

- “If I find a synagogue in which my spouse feels comfortable” (67 percent);
- “If I find a synagogue/temple where mixed faith couples like us would feel comfortable” (49 percent);
- “If I find a synagogue which I find spirituality fulfilling” (45 percent);
- “If I have a child” (40 percent).

Items that were strongly seen as “not a factor” included:

- “If I find a synagogue with a rabbi who performs intermarriages” (62 percent);
- “If anti-Semitism becomes a problem in my community” (56 percent).

While less than 1 percent of Jewish partners considered themselves “very religious,” almost 55 percent of survey participants identified themselves as at least somewhat religious, compared to 18 percent and 44 percent in NJPS 2000–01. In other areas, however, this group of intermarried respondents seemed to be “more Jewish” than found to be true of the Jewish population at large. Regarding Jewish education, although the NJPS asked about education between ages 6–17, both age ranges in our current sample responded with higher rates of formal Jewish education: 91 percent for 6–12 year-olds and 47 percent of 13–18 year-olds in this study compared to 31 percent overall in the NJPS. Two-thirds of the intermarried respondents attended camp at least once and twice as many of the IFM sample compared to NJPS belonged to a Jewish youth group. Regarding Jewish holidays, 94 percent lit Hanukkah candles compared to 72 percent of the NJPS respondents and 42 percent lit Shabbat candles weekly, compared to 28 percent nationally.

In only two areas did the study of the general population demonstrate a higher proportion of respondents to have significantly greater Jewish leanings than the intermarried survey participants: the marriage ceremony and religious self-identification. Of those surveyed in NJPS, 89 percent had only a rabbi officiate at their wedding (compared to 36 percent in the current sample) and only 35 percent felt that it is not at all important to marry someone Jewish (compared to 43 percent for this intermarried group). Finally, 18 percent of

those surveyed in NJPS 2000–01 classified themselves as very religious, 44 percent somewhat religious and 28 percent not very or not at all religious compared to 1 percent, 55 percent and 45 percent respectively for those in the sample of the intermarried.

What emerges from this comparison is the observation that the Jewish spouses of the interfaith couple resemble in many ways the typical patterns embodied by all American Jews and the respondents even exceeded the norms in formal and informal Jewish education attained as well as in the observance of rituals like lighting Hanukkah and Shabbat candles. Note, however, that these interviewees were much more likely to have children at home than all American Jews. In addition, this sample of the intermarried couples had twice the proportion participating in Jewish life by raising their children in Jewish only or dual households (i.e., nine of ten) compared to the national average for these two types of households of 45 percent reported by Phillips (1998).

Child-Rearing

The families in our study collectively have 192 children. In this sample, 72 percent are being raised as Jewish and 20 percent as both Jewish and Christian. The remainder (8 percent) are being raised as Christians, another religion or with no religion. Clearly our sample, consisting of those who consented to be interviewed, is more connected to the Jewish community than the national sample studied by Phillips (1998).

The majority (59 percent) of families share the religious upbringing of their children. In 26 percent of families, the Jewish spouse is primarily responsible for the children's religious upbringing and in 6 percent of households, the non-Jewish spouse holds the responsibility. The great majority (88 percent) of families discussed their children's religious upbringing either before marriage or before the birth of their first child and 68 percent of Jewish spouses and 69 percent of non-Jewish spouses agreed about their children's religious upbringing all or most of the time.

Participants were also asked to respond to a number of philosophical statements about raising children in a family where parents come from different religious backgrounds. The following indicates the responses to which half or more Jewish respondents stated "strongly agree":

- "I would decide on one religion for my child" (50 percent);
- "I wouldn't ask my children to choose between their parents' religions" (64 percent);
- "It is important for me that my children know something about Jewish culture and history" (90 percent).

The following items elicited a "strongly disagree" response by about one-half or more of Jewish respondents:

- “I would not discuss religion with my children” (89 percent);
- “It doesn’t matter to me whether or not my children think of themselves as Jews” (75 percent);
- “I am concerned that being Jewish will cause my child to feel stigmatized” (48 percent).

In several areas, both Jewish and non-Jewish spouses were involved similarly in respect to raising children:

- 79 percent of Jewish parents and 76 percent of non-Jewish parents reported reading or telling Jewish stories to their children;
- 46 percent of non-Jewish parents and 39 percent of Jewish parents reported reading or telling stories from the non-Jewish parent’s religion;
- 71 percent of Jewish parents and 56 percent of non-Jewish parents reported talking to their children about what Judaism teaches; and
- 46 percent of non-Jewish parents and 36 percent of Jewish parents reported talking to their children about what the non-Jewish parent’s religion teaches.

There was, however, less socialization to the non-Jewish religion.

In one area, there was a great discrepancy between that reported by the Jewish and non-Jewish parents: 48 percent of Jewish spouses reported that their parents tried to influence them in raising their children as Jews whereas only 20 percent of non-Jewish spouses reported that their parent’s tried to influence them to raise the children as non-Jews.

Summary

The profile of respondents, representing 141 couples, of Jewish and largely Christian backgrounds, were highly educated with about half of both groups holding graduate degrees. In regard to their childhood religious experiences, the Jewish respondents indicated on most measures a greater level of connection than the typical responses reported by all American Jews in NJPS 2000–01. With respect to dating and contemplating marriage, only about one-sixth of Jewish respondents dated only or mostly Jews in high school, but about one-half were concerned about their parents’ reaction to interfaith marriage and whether there might be a problem later on that the children would not be raised as Jews.

The survey revealed some relatively rare insights into the wedding experience and the relationship to the clergy. Only about one-third had a “Jewish ceremony,” and about one-half or more reported including Jewish rituals in the ceremony. A number of statistically significant relationships were

uncovered in regard to rabbinic officiation, including raising children as Jewish, synagogue attendance on the High Holidays and the absence of Christian observances. **We emphasized that these relationships indicate associations, but they are not proof of a causal path between rabbinic officiation at the marriage ceremony and Jewish lifestyle choices. Rather, they may indicate a probable association that reflects the partners' pre-disposition to Jewish engagement.**

With respect to spirituality and religious observance on a number of measures, the interfaith sample (IFM) exceeded the national sample (NJPS 2000–01), e.g., lighting Hanukkah candles and Shabbat candles, attending a Passover Seder and having visited Israel. In other areas, NJPS and our IFM sample resembled each other, e.g., fasting on Yom Kippur, belonging to a synagogue, having half or more close friends as Jewish, and contributing to the Jewish federation or another Jewish cause. In a few areas, the IFM sample was less connected than NJPS, e.g., keeping kosher at home, attending religious services at least monthly, and responding that being Jewish was very important. Still more than half of the Jewish respondents reported that they had a Christmas tree and three-quarters exchanged Christmas presents.

With respect to child-rearing, the current sample was more likely than most surveys to report that children were being raised as Jews. More than three-fourths of the Jewish and non-Jewish parents revealed an involvement in Jewish upbringing of the children as illustrated by their being more likely to read Jewish stories rather than non-Jewish stories to their children. This proportion corresponds closely to the 72 percent who reported raising their children as Jews.

Thus, the big picture revealed by the quantitative survey data on religion, marriage, and child-rearing, shows a group of adults, both Jewish and non-Jewish, evincing more “Jewish” behaviors than the average pattern among all American Jews while seeking to feel accepted by the Jewish community. What these challenges mean to our respondents will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three and what they think the Jewish community should do about this matter will be treated in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three

Partners' Perceptions of Religion, Marriage, Family, Child-Rearing, and Anti-Semitism

Qualitative research, as Fishman suggested, can inform us as to “why people . . . behave as they do, or what might influence their future attitudes and behaviors” (2001:1). Likewise, our study of mixed married couples sought to probe through personal in-depth interviews, conducted in the privacy of the respondents’ homes, the answer to a series of questions. Such questions focused on various dimensions of their lives, including religious socialization experiences, social and communal issues, the role of the family and children as well as interpersonal concerns.

The findings reported in this chapter are drawn from a comparison of the three completed sets of available qualitative interviews with 192 individuals and constituting 96 couples. The quantitative analysis in Chapter Two was based on completed questionnaires and the qualitative analysis in this chapter was based on personal interviews carried out at different times. Hence, the number of respondents producing usable data was not the same in every base. The interviews were conducted with each of the partners separately in the privacy of their own home. More than 30 questions were asked of each respondent during the course of the interview, which generally lasted from three-quarters of an hour to one hour.

Childhood Religious Experiences: Positive or Negative?

Respondents were asked about the “most positive” and “most negative features of . . . childhood religious experiences.” Both Jewish and Christian respondents identified religious holidays, rituals, and traditions as some of the most positive aspects of their childhood religious experiences. Many respondents stated that they enjoyed these occasions because they involved spending time with family. Jewish respondents often mentioned their Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah as being particularly enjoyable. Female respondents were more likely to comment that the experience of a close community was one of the most positive aspects of their childhood religious experiences. For example, one Jewish wife stated that she enjoyed “being a part of a small congregation where people demonstrated their commitment to faith by [their] commitment to each other. [It was] a very nurturing community.” Both Christian and Jewish respondents from the Bay Area often mentioned youth group activities as positive experiences.

Both Jewish and Christian respondents recalled attending weekly religious services as a negative experience. Some respondents reported having to wake up early and being “forced to go” to services or religious school as particularly negative. One Christian wife stated that she disliked “feeling like you had to go to church every Sunday or you were going to Hell.” Christian respondents often described the rigidity and guilt they experienced as children. One Christian husband commented that he disliked “the heavy emphasis in ‘sinning;’ so in the end, what should have been a positive approach was actually pretty heavy on the negative side.” One Christian wife stated that she did not enjoy her confirmation. She said, “It was very disheartening because I felt a lot of limitations about how to pray. It was too structured.” In sum, both husbands and wives viewed the bonding to the family as the positive aspects of childhood religious experience, but wives were more likely to view positively the bonding to both family and community.

Contemplating Marriage: Love and Differences

One of the questions asked was, “What were some of your considerations or thoughts when you decided to marry someone with a different religious background?” The findings demonstrated similarities among particular groups of people regarding their decisions for marrying someone of a different religion. For example, males in general cited that love was their primary reason for marrying, regardless of their religious background. A Christian male stated that he was more focused on love for his wife, and that the couple could get over their religious differences because of their love for each other. Another Jewish male also said that since he was so madly in love, the rest simply didn’t matter. A third Jewish male also stated that he was not thinking about religion, just the person. His Judaism then and now did not play a big enough role in his life and his love for his wife was more important.

Women in general did not seem to cite love as a primary issue in contemplating marriage although it may be tied to other concepts that these women did address. For example, a Christian woman said that she and her Jewish husband had dated for a long time before they got married. They were friends before that and so she felt very comfortable with him. Another Christian woman stated that she thinks Judaism has something to do with the good upbringing of her husband, and so she wanted the same for their children. A Jewish woman suggested the importance of her religion as a positive aspect of her contemplation of marriage: “And he was very accepting of my family. And I needed him to agree that we’d raise the kids as Jewish, which he agreed to before.” In many instances, Jewish people in general voiced more positive aspects about considering marriage if their spouse agreed to raise their future children as Jewish. This trend does not seem to hold for Christian spouses, in general, meaning that Christians seemed more likely to respect the wishes of their Jewish spouses by converting to Judaism, celebrating Jewish holidays, or by raising their children as Jewish. However, another Jewish woman explained.

that by the time she considered marriage, her philosophy was already shaped. Therefore, she thought that the religious differences could be resolved. If it was the choice of her happiness or her children being 100 percent Jewish, she stated that her happiness was more important.

There were also a number of negative concerns surrounding people's contemplations of marriage. For example, a Jewish male stated that neither his parents nor his extended family would be supportive, and that he considered the issue of child-rearing to be a difficult issue to face after marriage. A Jewish woman also expressed similar concerns in that she stated that she felt very unsure about how to celebrate holidays and how to raise her children, and that she knew she would not receive support from her friends or the rest of her family. A Christian wife also had difficulty "giving up" her religion: "[I was] naïve about how difficult it would be to not celebrate my Christianity even though I'm not religious. The tradition meant more to me than they [her family] did." Furthermore, a Jewish female also thought that she would be hurting her parents' and grandparents' feelings by not marrying a Jewish man. Similarly, a Jewish male stated that he had experienced guilt and a fear of hurting his parents and betraying his own "sacred directive to sustain Judaism" and maintain the Jewish lineage of his children. He was also very troubled that some members of the Jewish community would not regard his children as Jews because their mother was not Jewish: "It's a travesty," he concluded.

The Experience of the Wedding and the Role of the Officiant

Several questions were asked about the wedding ceremony in which the interfaith partners participated, including the "religious components" if any and the officiants. Specifically, we asked: "If a rabbi officiated at your wedding, do you think this had any impact on your feelings about Judaism?" Comparisons among the different localities included in the study demonstrated overwhelming similarities in participant responses on a number of issues pertaining to both the preparation of the wedding and the actual ceremony itself between the partners.

Christian husbands all stated that their wedding ceremonies were inclusive, not only in a religious sense but in a familial and cultural sense as well. Christian husbands also used the term "comfort" to describe positive aspects of their wedding ceremonies. Christian husbands also wanted their parents and other family members to feel comfortable about the interfaith service. In their recollection of positive experiences about their weddings, Christian husbands all discussed the ways in which the official (priest, rabbi, minister, and/or justice of the peace) eased any apparent tension among members at the ceremony and created a memorable experience for everyone. However, it should be noted that in instances where Christian husbands did not feel obligated toward their Christian backgrounds, many agreed to hold a Jewish wedding ceremony without any Christian influences.

Christian husbands also discussed a number of negative aspects concerning their wedding ceremonies. Overwhelming consensus among these husbands

demonstrated their negative attitude toward rabbis who would not perform a marriage ceremony between interfaith persons. This negative attitude also applied to rabbis who would only do so for a large sum of money. For example, one respondent stated: “It was definitely an eye opening experience for me about the Jewish community. I hadn’t realized how unaccepting the Jewish community is of intermarriage—and how widespread [lack of acceptance] is.” Another respondent stated that he found rabbinic refusal to marry interfaith couples both “antique and archaic,” and that the experience doesn’t create a favorable impression of the Jewish faith to non-Jews.

The problem of finding a rabbi who would agree to perform an interfaith wedding service is not unique to Christian men looking to marry Jewish women. Jewish men also encountered the same situation when looking to rabbis—even close friends or family members—who would still refuse to perform the service. As one Jewish husband stated: “It was difficult finding a rabbi or at least one who didn’t seem like he was doing a gig.” Other Jewish husbands noted that their families were also not supportive of their decisions to marry a non-Jewish woman, making the entire experience itself more difficult.

Jewish husbands, however, also noted very positive experiences surrounding their wedding ceremonies. Much like their Christian counterparts, Jewish husbands tended to seek integration. In many instances, both Christian and Jewish clergy performed the ceremony jointly, or a justice of the peace performed a civil ceremony with numerous Jewish references, customs, and traditions. Many Jewish husbands cited the breaking of the glass at the end of the ceremony as one of the key components of a Jewish ceremony. Also, one Jewish husband noted that he felt comfortable about integrating different religious aspects into the ceremony because he had seen other interfaith couples hold wedding ceremonies that worked out well. This prior experience helped strengthen the decision of the couple to have an interfaith ceremony and gave them the added confidence that the service would be a wonderful experience.

Many of the experiences described by both Christian and Jewish husbands closely resembled those discussed by their female counterparts. Christian wives noted that integration of religious affiliations was a key component to a successful wedding ceremony. In many instances, Christian wives noted the ways in which the official (priest, minister, rabbi, and/or justice of the peace) looked for common ground between Judaism and Christianity, and also how warm and accepting the official made both the couple and their families feel during the ceremony.

Many Christian wives, feeling that a rabbi should officiate at their wedding ceremonies, were relieved to find a rabbi who would perform an interfaith service. While having an agreeable rabbi was remembered as a positive aspect of their wedding ceremony, numerous Christian wives discussed the stress and tension caused by their inability to find a rabbi, or, in the case of one Christian wife, her experience with some rabbis led her to believe that if one could be paid enough, then he would perform the service. She found this first encounter with

the Jewish faith to be “a huge turnoff.”

Jewish wives also noted a number of positive experiences surrounding the wedding ceremony. Many women were “relieved to have found a rabbi” who would perform an interfaith service while some Jewish women noted that their ceremonies were still in keeping with the Jewish faith and with the appropriate traditions and customs. One Jewish wife was pleased with the level of acceptance displayed by the Reform rabbi who performed the ceremony.

Virtually all Jewish wives discussed the same or similar negative experiences surrounding their weddings. Not only did Jewish wives say that they were dismayed by their inability to find a rabbi to marry them, but others also noted that they were “turned off” by the number of rabbis who were openly against interfaith marriage. One Jewish wife noted: “It seemed like the rabbis we met would have done anything for a certain amount of money. It was really uncomfortable.” The difficulty in finding a rabbi to perform an interfaith service not only negatively impacted nearly all parties involved in interfaith relationships; it also caused tensions between interfaith spouses. At a time when Jewish women were turning toward their faith as a representative aspect of their identities during a wedding ceremony, it was sobering to discover that many rabbis were turning their backs on them. This was a difficult and divisive issue that both people in the relationship had to face.

To summarize, the major findings were:

- 1) Husbands of both faiths positively noted successful integration of religious components as positive aspects.
- 2) People of all faiths were “turned off” by the fact that many rabbis would not marry interfaith couples; however, people noted positive experiences when religious traditions were integrated and accepted by rabbis.
- 3) Wives of both faiths focused more on the bonding aspect of religion that encouraged spending time with family.
- 4) Jewish wives more often discussed maintaining the Jewish tradition through wedding ceremonies.
- 5) Both Jewish and Christian spouses were repelled by the fees charged by the minority of rabbis and other Jewish clergy for officiating at mixed marriages.

Interpersonal Agreement and Tensions: Spirituality and Religious Observance

Another area that was probed in the interviews reflected the potential for “main areas of agreement” on religious matters as well as “areas of tension or discomfort” occasioned by the interfaith marriage. Agreement and tensions

between interfaith couples were primarily centered around three themes: values and spirituality, religious observances and holidays, and raising children. Many respondents stated that they felt that they agreed with their partners about the importance of spirituality and the values upon which both Christianity and Judaism are based. Several respondents stated that a belief in God was an important area of agreement in their marriages. Another common point of agreement was the importance of particular values, such as the importance of doing good deeds (colloquially referred to in the Jewish tradition as *mitzvot* or *mitzvos* although literally the term theologically refers to the commandments to live a righteous life and thereby carry out good deeds).

A basic point of contention for some respondents was that they felt that their partners did not understand their religion. One Jewish wife stated that a tension in her marriage was “understanding one another’s religious point of view.” A Christian husband felt that his wife didn’t understand the Christian symbols, such as the cross.

Some couples experienced conflict over religious practices. One Jewish husband said he never felt comfortable when his wife went to church on Sundays. He stated, “It’s a reminder that we don’t have a united Jewish family identity.” Another Jewish husband asserted, “It would be nice to have the whole family go to the same place on holidays.” Decisions about how to celebrate holidays were problematic for many couples. One issue consistently brought up by both Christian and Jewish partners was the decision to have a Christmas tree. One Christian wife said that “my husband gets upset if I put up too many Christmas decorations; so I put up more Hanukkah decorations.” For this wife, it was clear that having a Christmas tree was very important to her. Several respondents stated that their in-laws applied pressure regarding how the family should celebrate the holidays.

Other couples were able to agree about how to observe religious traditions and holidays. One Christian husband remarked that he and his wife “had agreed to become more observant in both religions. We are looking forward to finding a place in a church and a synagogue to be comfortable.” Another Jewish husband stated that he and his wife had decided to compromise about the things that were most important. For example, his wife agreed to go with him to church if it was important to him; and he agreed to wear a yarmulke at meals if she asked him to do so. For other couples, they agreed to practice just one religion. One Jewish wife said, “Having one religion can give someone that deep sense of connection and faith.”

Clearly, there is a diversity of practices followed by interfaith couples and this fact will need to inform programmatic responses of the community and its constituent organizations. Surely, there is no single solution to the challenges posed to both the couples and the community in regard to interfaith marriage.

Jewish or Christian? Challenges in Raising Children

Parents reported a wide variety of experiences in raising children as an interfaith

couple. Some parents reported that they had not yet experienced any challenges with raising their children as interfaith partners. Other parents stated that they did not think it was a problem for their children to be both Christian and Jewish. One Christian husband stated, "I think the kids like being both." A Jewish husband said, "I don't think it will be a huge deal. I think parents make way too much out of being interfaith." Another Christian wife asserted that "there is a lot of interfaith marriage around and I don't think it will be a problem for our daughter." Some parents commented that there were similarities between the religions, particularly in the values they wished to teach their children. Parents who reported positive experiences in raising children were more likely to note that they agreed with their spouses on how to raise their children and were satisfied with the decision.

However, many parents did report experiencing challenges in raising children. For example, some parents noted the inconsistencies and conflicts between Judaism and Christianity and the problems this may create for children's identities. Other parents were concerned that practicing two religions would be confusing for children. Finally, several parents noted that deciding how to celebrate holidays was particularly challenging.

Some parents suggested that it was better for children to be raised with only one religion. As one Christian husband offered, "I think it's easier for them to have been all Jewish or all Christian. You want them to identify with something." Jewish parents more than Christian parents reported wanting their children to be only of one religion, Jewish. As one Jewish husband stated, "I'm not sure if my daughter will be able to associate herself with any one religion. I want to be sensitive to my wife, but at times I do want my daughter to be 100 percent Jewish since we practice that."

Parents seemed particularly concerned when discussing their children in relationship to developing a Jewish identity. Several Christian fathers and Jewish mothers noted concerns that their children would have a difficult time identifying as Jewish because their fathers were not Jewish. One Christian mother also expressed concern about her ability to help her children develop a Jewish identity. She said, "It's hard for the kids to know what being a Jew is since there is really only one role model, their father. How can I teach what Jews believe in if I don't know enough about the religion?"

Some parents were particularly apprehensive as to how their children would negotiate a dual faith identity when interacting with their peers. One Christian husband asserted, "The kids don't have an issue with being interfaith; it is other people's misperceptions. One Christian wife reported that her children described themselves not as Unitarian but as half Christian and half Jewish. The reaction of other children was, "then you're nothing." She worried that "the children don't have a simple self-identity and are trying to figure out where they would fit in terms of other Jews and the Jewish community."

Most couples stated that they had come to an agreement about how to raise the children; for many of the couples, the agreement was to raise the children as

Jews. Others reported tension over how to raise the children, for example, the decision to circumcise. One Jewish wife stated that she was more settled on what she wanted. Every time her husband thought about the situation, he found it hard to accept that his kids would not be raised in the way he was raised. On the other hand, one Jewish husband said, “there is tension about how to raise the kids, but I don’t view it as negative.”

In sum, with respect to religious observance and areas of interpersonal agreement and tension between the partners, three areas were noted 1) values and spirituality, 2) religious observances and holidays, and 3) raising children. In regard to the last point, some parents stressed the similarities between the two religious traditions, but those who noted inconsistencies and conflicts were concerned that practicing two religions would be confusing to the children. Indeed, Jewish parents reported wanting their children to experience only one religion, i.e., Judaism. Nevertheless, most couples in this sample resolved the issue by agreeing to raise the children as Jews.

“What Will Your Parents Say?” The Role of Grandparents

The diversity of responses alluded to above also applies to the grandparents. It may seem incongruous, but occasionally the children of interfaith parents who raise their offspring as Christian may refer to their Jewish grandparents as “Bubbe and Zaidie” (grandma and grandpa in Yiddish); and in another case, the children of interfaith parents may refer to their Jewish grandparents as “Saba and Savta” (grandpa and grandma in Hebrew), or in the case of one clever child who elided the two words: “BaTa.”

Data from all the communities suggested great similarities among members of both the Jewish and Christian faiths when discussing positive and negative aspects of the role of grandparents. Virtually all people responded that a positive role of grandparents was their acceptance of their grandchildren regardless of their religious upbringing as well as their supportiveness of parents’ decisions regarding their children. For example, one Jewish wife stated that one positive aspect of the role of grandparents was their “. . . sensitivity to the fact the children are being raised Jewish,” as well as the fact that they were “. . . supportive of all decisions we [as parents] make regarding child-rearing.” People of both faiths also noted that a positive role of grandparents was their accepting of their grandchildren even if they were not being raised in the same religion as the grandparents were. One Christian wife said “[my] parents have been fine with the kids being raised Jewish—they participate in Shabbat dinners when they see them, and [my] mother has even learned how to say the *Sh’ma* (Hebrew prayer)!” Furthermore, a Christian husband also discussed a positive aspect of the role of grandparents by stating that his mother has tried to become more familiar with Judaism. He further remarked that his wife’s parents were very involved and that his mother-in-law had already sent books about raising kids as Jews.

Jewish husbands and wives also discussed other positive aspects of the role of grandparents, specifically noting the ways in which they have actively participated in their grandchildren's lives. A Jewish husband noted that his parents buy religious gifts for their child and offer guidance as well. A Jewish wife asserted that both sets of grandparents "... are a part of the family holiday celebrations. Her dad makes latkes and a Seder for Passover, and [they go to] dinner at her parents' house for Rosh Hashanah." Importantly, another Jewish wife noted that "grandparents help the children to feel as they are being raised with two religions, and they feel lucky."

Most of the parents also discussed similar negative aspects of the role of grandparents. Most of the negative aspects involved the fact that grandparents in general were not active enough in the upbringing of their grandchildren even when the grandparents lived nearby. A Jewish husband noted that his parents were too persuasive. While a Christian husband stated that although he was happy with his mother's role religiously, he still wished that she would not be so judgmental about their choice to raise their children a certain way. Notably, one Christian wife, who appeared unaware of the religious and cultural norms surrounding the generous gifts given at bar and bat mitzvah, asserted that her children's Jewish cousins were favored by their Jewish grandparents because they were given large monetary gifts at their bar and bat mitzvah. Finally, a Jewish husband remarked that his parents tried to push as much Judaism as possible. This set of grandparents seemed to reflect a sense that being Jewish is better and this is not a value that the father wanted to impart to his children. He thought that his children felt that their grandparents treated their other grandchildren, the father's Jewish niece and nephew, much better.

Overall, husbands and wives from both faiths and all geographic areas related similar positive and negative aspects about the role of grandparents. Acceptance is something that all parents look for from their own parents and in-laws, particularly concerning their children and the decisions they make regarding their religious upbringing. Treating their grandchildren equally and making them feel important were also other positive aspects that parents looked for from their own parents; and when the grandparents were not actively involved in the lives of their grandchildren, these parents cited this inactivity as a negative aspect. In sum, it appears that grandparents (including even the occasional "Bubbie and Zaidie" and "Saba and Savta") can have a constructive and active role to play in the raising of interfaith children within the parameters specified by the children.

Anti-Semitism: Is It a Concern?

Some Jewish respondents reported explicit anti-Semitism while growing up; however, a more common experience was that of "subtle anti-Semitism" and a feeling of being different or not belonging. One Jewish husband reported that "there was a subtle feeling of being the only Jew growing up." How would the issue of anti-Semitism affect the interfaith partners in raising their children?

Specifically, respondents were asked, “Are you at all concerned about anti-Semitism for you, your spouse and/or your children?” Overall, respondents did not report a great deal of concern about anti-Semitism. Both Christian and Jewish respondents reported a “low level of concern” or that they were “a little bit concerned.” As one Jewish wife stated, “I’m not overly concerned, but it’s something we think about.” As previously discussed, a common response from both Jewish and Christian parents was the worry they had that their children might experience anti-Semitism, but many of these same parents did not express concern about experiencing anti-Semitism themselves. One Christian father stated that he was a little worried about anti-Semitism. He stated, “It is hard not to think about it: the past transgressions against the Jewish people.” In a similar vein, a Christian mother worried that her children will experience anti-Semitism because they have a Jewish last name.

Some Christian husbands and wives reported being concerned about their partners’ experiencing anti-Semitism. One Christian husband noted that his concern was “more for my wife and children, not so much for me.” A Christian wife said, “I don’t like it when a group is treated poorly because of who they are and I am extra sensitive to it because of anti-Semitism. I am more aware of it because I am married to a Jew.” Another Christian wife remarked, “I imagine when I really experience it, it will be a concern.”

In regard to anti-Semitism, 45 percent of Jewish respondents expressed some concern that their non-Jewish in-laws might harbor anti-Semitic feelings against them. Interestingly, 45 percent who were not currently synagogue members would consider joining one if anti-Semitism became a factor in their neighborhood. (This proportion conforms quite closely to the obverse, wherein 56 percent stated that anti-Semitism was **not** a factor in joining a synagogue.)

Respondents who reported being concerned about anti-Semitism generally did not mention their own experiences with anti-Semitism, but rather made more general comments. One Jewish husband asserted, “Unfortunately, anti-Semitism has been an historical reality throughout time. . . .” In general, the responses might be likened to the findings cited in NJPS 1990 where only 5 percent of those interviewed reported experiencing anti-Semitism, but about four-fifths acknowledged it as a problem.

Summary

The qualitative findings are based on interviews carried out separately with each spouse in the privacy of their homes. In examining the childhood religious experiences, both husbands and wives regarded the family bonding in childhood religious experiences as positive although the wives were more likely to view positively the bonding to both family and community. With respect to the time prior to the marriage, it appeared that Jewish respondents generally were more open to considering marriage if their spouse agreed to raise their future children as Jewish. The experience of the wedding and the role of the officiant were

important topics addressed in this study. Husbands of both religions viewed the integration of religious components as positive, but all were “turned off” by the refusal of rabbis to marry interfaith couples and felt positive when rabbis accepted the role. Wives of both faiths focused more on the bonding aspect of religion that encouraged spending time with the family, and Jewish wives more often discussed maintaining Jewish tradition through wedding ceremonies.

In regard to religious observance and areas of interpersonal agreement and tension between the partners, three areas were noted, including values and spirituality, religious observances and holidays, and raising children. With respect to the last point, some parents stressed the similarities between the two religious traditions; but those who noted the inconsistencies and conflicts were concerned that practicing two religions would be confusing to the children. Indeed, Jewish parents reported wanting their children to experience only one religion, namely, Judaism. Nevertheless, most couples in this sample resolved the issue; and in this case, it was to raise the children as Jews.

The role of grandparents of the children of interfaith marriages was also addressed in this study. Respondents noted the positive role of grandparents was their acceptance of their grandchildren irrespective of religious upbringing and they noted especially when they actively participated in their grandchildren's lives. The lack of such involvement of the grandparents was observed to be negative by the respondents. Finally, the concern with anti-Semitism was probed in this study. Most respondents were not concerned for themselves as much as for their children or the Jewish spouses.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the respondents reported a variety of experiences and a diversity of responses. This suggests that multiple options need to be explored and developed from a communal perspective. There is no one approach alone in responding to interfaith marriage. The next chapter will offer the testimony of the respondents as a basis for suggesting directions in which the organized community may wish to consider its options.

Chapter Four Policy Implications

A “Dry Bones” cartoon shows two members of the Jewish community in conversation about interfaith marriage. One says: “Optimism on Jewish continuity requires a small change in prepositions.” The second inquires incredulously: “Prepositions?!” To which the first replies: “Yes. Instead of us [Jews] marrying *out*, just think of it as them [Gentiles] marrying *in*!” The cartoon highlights the significance of the importance of the communal perspective on the matter of mixed marriage. Consider the findings of the most recent National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of 2000–01, which reported that 5.2 million Americans were Jewish. That represented less than 2 percent of the total population and the lowest percentage since the early twentieth century before World War One. On the other hand, 5.2 million Jews reside in 2.9 million households, constituting 6.7 million people, including both the Jewish and non-Jewish members. This record number of individuals may help to explain why Jewish festivals, including even the minor holiday of Purim, are featured more in the media, in card and gift shops, and department stores, all of which may help to legitimate Jewish observance.

In discussing the contemporary Jewish communal response to intermarriage, it is important to note the historically based religious and cultural context from which this response derives. For the great majority of American Jews alive today, their origins are in Eastern European societies, which had rigid barriers separating the Jewish and Gentile populations. Such barriers intensified an insular approach among Jews and allowed for the establishment of the normative Jewish code rooted in *halakhah*, or Jewish religious law, which defined the proper way to live an ethical and ritually correct way of life. The Jewish folk response to the outmarriage of a child, transmitted as a tradition, was for the parents to recite the Kaddish, a memorial prayer for the dead, and to observe the customary period of mourning as if the child were indeed dead. While this practice is **not** sanctioned by Jewish religious law, this folk custom suggests quite dramatically that intermarriage was traditionally regarded as a serious taboo.

This example raises the question of what role the Jewish communal response should be in facilitating or hindering the affirmation of one’s Jewish identity for the Jewish partner and his or her children. As Goldscheider has observed that “by broadening Jewish life in America, Jewish institutions and families have

ensured its continuity” (2003:18). Earlier, “until the 1970s, the rates of intermarriage were low. . . . Those who intermarried effectively repudiated their religion, families, and communities. And in turn, their religion, families, and communities rejected them” (2003:19). Nevertheless since the 1970s, both the incidence of intermarriage and its acceptance have increased. Goldscheider suggests that if the organized community can accept intermarried couples and their children through the institutions of the synagogue, school, daycare, and other community-oriented programs, then there is a greater likelihood that many will choose to be Jewish. Thus Goldscheider suggests that “the issue is not intermarriage but the Jewishness in the family” (2003:23). From our research, we see that many interfaith families embody Jewish practices in their family life.

Fortunately, our current research effort permitted the partners in interfaith marriages to give voice to their views on the Jewish community and offer suggestions for dealing with mixed marriage. The following section will provide an answer in the words of the respondents to the first two research questions posed in Chapter One: the factors that repel and attract interfaith couples to the Jewish community.

Experiences with Jewish Community

There were several key issues that shaped the respondents’ experiences with the Jewish community. The first was a feeling of acceptance from the Jewish community. As the American poet, Maya Angelou, has said: “People may forget what you said, but they’ll never forget how you made them feel.”* Some Christian and Jewish respondents stated that they found the Jewish community accepting and warm. Many people with positive experiences mentioned that the Reform Movement was a critical component of their feelings about the Jewish community. However, many Christian husbands and wives stated that they felt rejection or a lack of acceptance from the community. One Christian wife stated that the Orthodox movement failed to acknowledge her. Both Christian and Jewish respondents reported feeling at times that the Jewish community was “cliquish” and stuck up. More than three-quarters (77 percent) of Jews and about two-thirds (64 percent) of Gentiles agreed or strongly agreed that they “would like to feel more a part of the Jewish community.” About four-fifths (79 percent) of Jewish partners and nearly three-quarters of Gentiles (73 percent) stated they “resent it when Jews see interfaith marriage as a problem.” (Here is a major disagreement in perception between the attitudes of interfaith couples and the mainstream leadership of the Jewish community: The former believe they are affirming their Jewish heritage by specific practices and the latter are concerned about the precarious demography of the community.) One Jewish wife asserted, “Jews don’t reach out to other people.” A Christian husband said that he felt like an outsider and a “sore thumb.” One Jewish wife felt that things were changing and that the “prevalence of interfaith marriage is helping the Jewish community

**We thank Rabbi Carl Perkins for bringing this quotation to our attention.*

to accept it more.” A few couples expressed concern that the situation where the mother is not Jewish was more difficult than where the father was not Jewish because the children of the non-Jewish mother would not be considered Jewish by all members of the community.

A second issue was support of interfaith couples. Some of the respondents with positive experiences noted that they found interfaith resources or classes very helpful. More than two-fifths of the partners reported attending a program or class for interfaith couples. Others related the acceptance they felt as an interfaith couple. One Jewish husband noted “At the Reform temple on the first time we went, other couples saw us as new and were very friendly and open and excited to find that my wife and I were an intermarried couple.” Others noted that some rabbis supported them. Respondents who felt that they were not supported as part of an interfaith couple had a much more negative experience with the Jewish community. The difficulty in finding a rabbi to officiate at an interfaith wedding was very upsetting. Some Jewish partners expressed a concern that it was difficult for them to be excited about Judaism and/or to encourage their partner to embrace Judaism while rabbis did not agree to officiate at their wedding. One Christian wife observed that early in her marriage, she attended a High Holiday sermon on “the pitfalls of interfaith marriage.”

A third issue was the perception that the Christian spouse was expected to convert to Judaism. Primarily the Jewish spouse commented on this experience. One Jewish husband said, “These people are looking for conversion instead of acceptance of intermarriage.” A Christian wife asserted, “People ask me point blank about conversion.”

Finally, several respondents commented on experiences regarding responses from the Jewish community to raising their children. One Christian husband remarked, “The biggest thing the community cares about is how we are raising our children. Since we are raising ours Jewish, it isn’t a big deal.” However, several other respondents reported tension with the Jewish community regarding raising their children as Jewish. Several people commented that people in the community asked them if their children were “really Jewish.” Couples expressed a concern about how to incorporate the religious heritage of the non-Jewish partner even if they were raising their children Jewish.

In summary, on the negative side of experiences with the Jewish community that repelled individuals or couples from the Jewish community, there were the following:

- 1) Perception of cliquishness, rejection, and lack of acceptance of the interfaith couple were regarded as a turn-off.
- 2) Negative experiences, like the rabbi’s sermon on “the pitfalls of interfaith marriage,” were repellent.

- 3) The expectation that the Christian spouse should convert was noted as quite negative.
- 4) The questioning of the Jewish identity of the children in an interfaith marriage was viewed as tension-producing for the interfaith couple.

On the positive side, the following were issues that attracted individuals and couples to the Jewish community:

- 1) Perceptions of the community as accepting and warm were welcomed by interfaith couples and this might have resulted from a recognition of the proliferation of intermarriage.
- 2) Interfaith resources in the form of classes were very helpful.
- 3) Acceptance of the intermarriage, in contrast to conversion, led to positive responses from the interfaith partner.
- 4) The affirmation by the interfaith couple that they were raising their children as Jews received a positive response from the community and reduced tensions for the interfaith couple.

Suggestions for the Community

The respondents offered many similar suggestions for ways in which the Jewish community could facilitate integration for interfaith couples:

- 1) Husbands and wives of all faiths unanimously suggested that classes, discussion groups, and support services be offered for interfaith couples in regard to the following issues:
 - a) integrating of different traditions in the wedding services;
 - b) entering into Jewish families for brides-to-be;
 - c) child-rearing;
 - d) blending religious customs and holidays;
 - e) making an interfaith marriage work generally throughout the life cycle; and
 - f) dealing with the couple's parents.

One Christian wife also suggested that there be classes on understanding how to participate in "day-to-day Judaism."
- 2) Having resources to help interfaith couples decide on ways to integrate holidays, religious services, and customs for their children were extremely important to all members. Specifically, one Christian wife noted that she wanted "more knowledge of how to get her child involved [in the Jewish community] and options on how to do so that aren't necessarily geared only toward religious activities."

- 3) Other activities included family and cultural events within Jewish communities as a whole, e.g., special Shabbat programs, after-school activities, or a *havurah*.
- 4) It was also important for Christians in general to feel accepted in the Jewish community. As one Christian husband stated: “Bring us in.” These same respondents also had suggestions for representatives of the Jewish community.
- 5) Jewish husbands and wives in one community, for example, noted that they wished that rabbis would be more open to the idea of marrying interfaith couples.
- 6) Similarly, a Christian wife from another community remarked, “Instead of trying to punish Jews that intermarry or force non-Jews to convert, let people have room to grow into the idea.”
- 7) Furthermore, all of the respondents suggested that representatives from the Jewish community should hold regular classes/discussion groups at churches and synagogues for education on the Jewish faith and the Jewish community as well as for teaching Jewish philosophy.
- 8) One Christian husband suggested that Christian clergy and rabbis should meet on a regular basis to discuss interfaith couples and figure out ways to combine classes at churches and synagogues for integration and education so that the message does not only emanate from the Jewish community.
- 9) A Jewish husband also noted that temples should partner with churches in order to create further integration not only for interfaith couples, but also for their children and for the community as a whole. Helpful literature should also be given by both churches and synagogues on interfaith marriage and childbearing.
- 10) Finally, Jewish wives asserted that services should be easy for non-Jews to understand and that Hebrew should be mixed with English as much as possible. There was also a suggestion that a service be held once a month for interfaith couples with an emphasis on explaining the parts of the service, to the non-Jewish partner, i.e., a “learners” *minyan*.

These ten suggestions are best viewed as “ten comments” and not “ten commandments.” In other words, these insights from our interviewees should be viewed as a jumping-off point for communal discussion rather than a final prescription. They should be understood in the context of the “tenacity of Jewish identity” (Phillips 2006:169) first noted by Mayer (1985). As we stated in

Chapter One, evidence of “*dos pintele yid*,” the jot of Jewishness that needs to be cultivated and not lamented, ought to be the springboard for communal responses to the challenges posed by interfaith marriage.

Summary

The respondents spoke frankly about the positive and negative experiences with the Jewish community. Among the negative experiences were the following: 1) perception of rejection; 2) negativism of rabbis, 3) expectation for conversion of the Christian partners, and 4) the questioning of the Jewish identity of the children. Among the positive points cited by respondents were: 1) perception of warmth of the community by some, 2) availability of classes, 3) acceptance of intermarriage without conversion, and 4) reduction in tensions for the interfaith couple with Jewish communal acceptance. Finally, the respondents shared many suggestions for the organized community from more classes for interfaith couples to greater tolerance for the interfaith couples.

Perhaps a subtext of the message which elements of the organized Jewish community have communicated to the non-Jewish partner in an interfaith marriage is as follows: “Now is the time to get on the bus” (traveling on the Jewish path). This message communicates a lack of sensitivity for the non-Jewish partner, who according to Jewish tradition, was created in the image of God like the Jewish partner. But many non-Jewish partners are not ready to decide whether they are “on the bus” or “off the bus.” They do know that they want to ride with their partner and will seek the most congenial conveyance available. Will the Jewish community provide that transportation option to facilitate the journey or will the potential riders vanish?

Chapter Five

Policy Recommendations

Much ongoing public discussion of intermarriage, punctuated periodically by specific cases and the issues that they raise for the community and rabbis, suggests that neither turning a blind eye nor decrying the situation is a solution for the broad Jewish community or its rabbinic leadership. The reality is that, as we have seen in this study and elsewhere, there are many factors involved in intermarriage, including the couple, their families, and the extended Jewish community. A historic response to exogamy viewed it as a tragedy; the most extreme reaction even called for the severing of ties with the intermarried family member and the observance of mourning rituals. Nevertheless, while some relatives, rabbis, and members of the community may speak of the tragedy of intermarriage, the reality is that the couple may face challenges; but as they perceive it, they are at a point of great personal happiness in their own lives and are generally not going to be dissuaded from this marriage by the considerations and arguments expressed by others. The freedom to marry whomever one wishes is one of the prerogatives of living both in an open society as well as in an era in which individual definitions of personal identity often take primacy over the communal modes of defining religious or social identity.

Whatever statistical assessment of the rate of intermarriage in the United States one accepts as the current reality, it is certainly a phenomenon that cannot be ignored or just deplored by any sector of the Jewish community from most traditional to most liberal. This study assumes that while there may be factors that will strengthen endogamy, we have learned that some of those who enter into exogamous relationships do so despite strong formal and/or informal Jewish educational experiences as well as home and family backgrounds. This reality should not be the basis for a harsh critique of Jewish education as an instrument of communal policy but rather a recognition of the fluidity of boundaries in a multi-cultural society in the twenty-first century.

The creation of this set of policy recommendations was accomplished after consultation with a panel of readers of the draft text of the study whose insights stimulated our thinking and whose names are included in the acknowledgments that are found elsewhere in this report and to whom we are exceedingly grateful. We present these practical public policy recommendations in three categories that in reality are not mutually exclusive and often overlap but do give us a framework for our analysis. They are: 1) *Family*, 2) *Community*, and 3) *Rabbis and Clergy*.

Family

The Jewish family of the Jewish spouse must, in tandem with the community and the synagogue, be the linchpin of support for the Jewish identity and involvement of the Jewish partner in an interfaith marriage. By extension, that also applies to the Jewish interests of the non-Jewish spouse and the Jewish religious identity of grandchildren. We therefore urge the following for the Jewish family:

- Develop opportunities for grandparents to connect with their Jewish grandchildren in a Jewish setting. Encourage all Jewish institutions to provide opportunities for grandparents and grandchildren to be involved in Jewish life as refracted through the activities of that institution.
- Create Jewish educational materials (books, periodicals, DVD's, video games) for parents (and grandparents) to share and give to their children (and grandchildren) on special occasions.
- Offer programs, workshops, and materials that will help Jewish relatives (e.g., aunts and uncles) be supportive of the Jewish identity of the children of their sibling who is intermarried.
- Produce targeted marketing campaigns for interfaith families regarding Jewish pre-schools, religious schools, and day schools; and offer incentives for Jewish grandparents to pay for their grandchildren's education where cost is a barrier.

For the Non-Jewish Family, we suggest the following:

- Offer experiences and materials for non-Jewish family members—especially grandparents, uncles, and aunts—to learn about Judaism, including holiday celebrations and life-cycle events. Literature should be created and available that will help non-Jewish relatives understand the differences between Judaism and other religions presented clearly in a non-judgmental manner.
- Urge Jewish institutions, including synagogues, to welcome and encourage non-Jewish grandparents to attend Jewish calendar and life cycle events and make explanations of the rituals and their symbolism available to them either personally or by providing appropriate literature suitably in advance.

Community

There is much that the community and those within it can do to reach out

positively to interfaith couples and their family:

- Encourage every Jewish organization to convey an explicit message that it welcomes interfaith couples and families.
- Make every Jew aware of the opportunity to invite, encourage, and support interfaith couples to make Jewish choices and draw closer to the Jewish community by:
 - a) Avoiding off-putting expressions (e.g., “*goyim*,” “*shiksa*”);
 - b) Emphasizing the positive aspects of involvement in Jewish life that are available to interfaith couples and encouraging their active participation;
 - c) Being respectful of a couple and its choices, notwithstanding one’s personal orientation which may differ.
- Construct community programs with multiple elements:
 - a) sensitivity training for Jewish organizations on how to be welcoming;
 - b) discussion groups around common issues for people in similar situations (e.g., dating couples or newly marrieds, young parents, grandparents, adult children of intermarried parents);
 - c) educational/experiential programs that are multi-session (e.g., “A Taste of Judaism,” “Introduction to Judaism,” “And Baby Makes Three,” and “Stepping Stones” programs); or single session programs on particular topics.
 - d) Shabbat and holiday dinners and shared observances for interfaith couples.
 - e) Information and referral for individuals (responding to individuals’ questions, making referrals to welcoming Jewish organizations and professionals), making use of Internet presence, email communications, and downloadable resources.
- Train Jewish professionals at both the pre-service and continuing in-service levels for the complexities of interfaith relationships. While some training will need to be customized for specific institutional settings, other kinds of training can be generic in nature and available for individuals who occupy similar positions across institutions.
- Integrate Jewish Family Educators in synagogue and JCC settings to be key players in these efforts and inform them that it be part of their professional and continuing education.

- Provide leadership training for lay leaders at all Jewish institutions which should include methods for creating opportunities for the involvement of interfaith couples and families as well as sensitivity to them. In this way, a strong partnership between lay leadership and professional staff will be encouraged.
- Encourage Federations to support programs for interfaith families as well as to engage a trained, dedicated, local staff person in each community to provide ongoing education to Jewish organizations about how to develop user-friendly Jewish institutional approaches. This individual can also serve as a “one-stop-shopping” resource or “conciierge” for interfaith couples and families, providing information on services available for them. (Indeed, such an individual could work with all newcomers to the community.)
- Urge national agencies and organizations to create easily accessible program resources for Jewish communities with suggestions of what they should have available locally in order to have a core program of outreach to interfaith families.
- Offer incentives for interfaith families to encourage participation in Jewish institutions and limit (or more preferably remove) perceived and real barriers to participation and membership.
- Develop a communal strategy that will transcend the organizational boundaries of synagogues, JCC’s, and Jewish Family services having rabbis, educators, and social workers from Jewish Family Services co-teach workshops in a variety of settings, encouraging interfaith families to visit and experience different Jewish institutions.
- Organize *havurot* for interfaith couples (and separately for their parents) to be run by social workers at both the congregational and communal levels.
- Convene conferences at the national and regional levels for practitioners and policy makers to promote best practices regarding interfaith couples.

Rabbis and Clergy

The role of Rabbis, Cantors and other professionals is crucial. The issue considered in this section is how shall rabbis and others whose ideological stance is opposed to intermarriage and rabbinic officiation at marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew relate to such couples both prior to such weddings and after the fact? There are those who posit that rabbinic officiation at such weddings is the best approach to retaining Jews who marry non-Jews within the community.

This is the attitude of only one segment even of the “liberal” rabbinate. For many rabbis who span the spectrum of ideological and denominational affiliations, such officiating runs counter to their definitions of the nature of Jewish practice and law as well as their understanding of the issues of Jewish continuity and communal interest.

For methodological reasons, we would like to distinguish here between those rabbis and the segment of the community that they represent who do officiate at interfaith wedding ceremonies and those who do not. While some respondents to this study suggested that such rabbinic officiating or participation in the wedding of a Jew and a non-Jew gave the couple, or at least the Jewish partner, a positive feeling that encouraged their continued Jewish identity and desire to express that in some positive manner, there were also those who indicated that the services of a rabbi were desired in order to placate the Jewish parents or grandparents. In the balance, it is difficult to make a definitive assessment that would present clear-cut support of the effectiveness of such a policy. Yet for the larger multi-denominational corpus of the rabbinate and their cantorial colleagues who do not officiate at such marriages, what have we learned that may suggest policies and practices that may be effective both pre-nuptially and after the couple is already married?

First and foremost, there is the need for training at the various seminaries in regard to how rabbis and cantors of each movement can meet the Jewish needs of interfaith couples both pre- and post-nuptials and respond to them with sensitivity. Opportunities must be created for seminary students and rabbis after ordination to listen to the narratives that chronicle the struggles of interfaith couples. Therefore, we suggest the following strategies:

Pre-marriage: The rabbi, cantor, and educator ought to be solicitous of the needs of the couple by undertaking the following initiatives:

- Offer to meet with the couple to discuss marriage and Jewish life and invite the couple to participate in the synagogue community before and after the wedding.
- Make sure that the couple does not view the rabbi’s inability and unwillingness to officiate as a personal rejection.
- Convey to the couple why the Jewish community views intermarriage as a challenge to its continuity.
- Explain why the Jewish wedding ceremony is a ritual of Jewish commitment with legal (*halakhic*) implications between two Jews.
- Explore the couple’s religious orientation(s) so that they understand the implications for their own marriage.
- Encourage participation in “Introduction to Judaism” classes that do not necessarily demand a commitment to conversion.

- Keep an open door to a future relationship that will be welcoming.

Base this upon approaches and strategies learned as part of professional education included in seminary studies and expanded in-service education provided by rabbinical associations and movement organizations.

Post-marriage: We also suggest that the rabbi, cantor, and educator must take an activist role, seeking out such couples in order to do the following:

- Encourage the participation of the Jewish spouse in the synagogue and other community institutions.
- Include the children of such marriages in Jewish educational efforts.
- Encourage non-Jewish spouses to learn about Judaism so that they can actively support the Jewish partner in raising their children as Jews.
- Understand that syncretistic practices in the home which combine elements of the faith and practice of the non-Jewish spouse or spouse's family with Judaism (e.g., Christmas trees and other holiday symbols however culturally interpreted) may occur. This phenomenon requires the greatest degree of sensitivity even as syncretistic practices should be discouraged.
- Encourage the involvement of both partners in such a marriage in Jewish educational activities.
- Explore ways, within the parameters of the ritual approaches of the various movements, to encourage the non-Jewish spouse to visit the synagogue for services and other celebratory activities.
- Create a "learner's religious service," within the frame of reference of the denominational affiliation of their congregations, as well as educational programs that are geared to the needs of interfaith families.
- Encourage the lay leadership to be involved in developing outreach programs with budgets that will make them attractive and then assessing such programs and continually developing new ones.

Summary

On the basis of what we learned from the interviews and the diverse panel of consultants, we offered three sets of recommendations for the 1) family (both Jewish and non-Jewish), 2) community, and 3) clergy (both pre- and post-marriage). If one had to summarize the thrust of these recommendations, it would be as follows: The Jewish community must turn away from the prior outlook of rejecting the partner of interfaith marriage to the contemporary view of embracing a gentler, more nurturing environment for them in order to strengthen communal continuity and personal identity.

Postscript

Traditionally, Jewish life followed the straight path as defined in the *halakhah*. This was facilitated by the notion enunciated at the outset of that rabbinic work of wisdom in the Mishnah entitled *Pirkei Avot*, or *Sayings of the Sages*. We read in the first statement of the first chapter about the transmittal of Jewish teaching in the Torah across the generations, and that those charged with such a responsibility should “create a fence around the Torah” (“*v’asu s’yag latorah*”) to protect Jewish practice from encroachment of external forces.

Later in Jewish history when Jews came to live in the Diaspora, some of their neighbors built a physical wall to contain them in the form of a ghetto. Thus both by internal and external pressures, Jews remained separate in many societies that did not countenance greater pluralism, tolerance, democracy, and equality before the law. Nevertheless in the twenty-first century, in many cultures in the United States and Europe, responding to globalization and attendant pluralism, the fences and walls which once contained Jews no longer do so to the same extent. Therefore, the Jewish community in the United States and other developed countries must face the challenges of residing in “wall-less” contexts, namely how to reaffirm the personal identity of Jews who all do not follow the “straight way” but choose the “roundabout path” (see Dashefsky et al. 2003). These challenges are posed by our respondents, the interfaith partners, to the organized Jewish community. Perhaps the findings of this study may provide a trigger for addressing these issues and the community may find inspiration in the words of Maimonides who wrote in *Mishneh Torah*: “If a court of law deems it right, for the time being, to cancel or infringe a religious commandment, so as to bring many back to Judaism or to keep many from sinning, it should so proceed. . . .”

Four questions were posed in Chapter One. The first two, addressing the pull and push factors in regard to Judaism and the Jewish community experienced by the interfaith couples, were answered in Chapters Two through Four. The third question will be addressed in a subsequent phase of this longitudinal research project: “How do the needs of interfaith families and concerns in regard to the Jewish community change over time?”

The last question raised the issue of the responses of the organized Jewish community to interfaith marriage and was examined in Chapters Four and Five. In answering this question, we thought it most useful to let the respondents speak for themselves and to gather insights from a panel of eight individuals representing both more and less traditional perspectives. Now that our report is

complete, we hope that it will serve as a springboard for serious discussion and consultation by various Jewish interest groups across the spectrum of Jewish life. In this way, a broader conversation would ensue which may promote a variety of actions appropriate to each denominational and non-denominational agency. While this approach seems consistent with the pluralist ideology of the twenty-first century, it seems also to be consistent with the Talmudic tradition of presenting multiple views, e.g., of Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai. As the Talmud indeed states, “*Yafeh koah p’sharah mikoah hadin.*” “Better the force of a compromise than the force of the judgment of the law.”

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