

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

EXPLORING PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR INTERFAITH MARRIAGE  
(JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN) AND THE TRANSMISSION OF RELIGIOUS  
ACTIVITIES TO THEIR CHILDREN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Science in Counseling,  
Marriage and Family Therapy.

By

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family and to the interfaith spouses who inspired me to explore this area in particular. To my parents, thank you for supporting me in all of my endeavors, encouraging me to follow my passions, and displaying true joy and excitement over the directions that I have chosen to take in my life thus far. To my brother, your hard work, achievements, and drive for success continue to motivate me each day. To my sister, thank you for always believing in me, loving me, and for our mutual understanding of one another. To the Jewish and Christian individuals amongst my family and close friends that chose to marry one another, know that you have encouraged me to learn more about your successes, your challenges, and your lives together. Your choices and your experiences have inspired me.

*Everyone's got their own path. Some are only just beginning, while others end all too soon. However you do it, the fact is, the path you're on, the choices you make, define who you are. Choices. They're the building blocks of our lives, they shape our past, present and future. And despite all the mistakes I've made, every new day brings with it new choices and their whole new world of possibilities.*

*-Being Erica*

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## ABSTRACT

# EXPLORING PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR INTERFAITH MARRIAGE (JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN) AND THE TRANSMISSION OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES TO THEIR CHILDREN

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The purpose of this study was to examine the practices, traditions, and religious beliefs that Jewish and Christian spouses are passing onto their children. To further examine the strategies and approaches used in integrating religion into their children's lives, a total of 16 interfaith spouses were recruited to take part in the study. Subjects responded to a series of audio-recorded questions covering areas related to religion and childrearing. In addition, participants were presented with a demographic questionnaire that assessed basic, measurable attributes such as ethnicity and gender.

Comparisons amongst responses indicate that a variety of religious approaches are utilized amongst couples. The religious strategies found in this study ranged from instilling one main religion, combining both religions, to incorporating very little religion at all into the religious upbringing of the child or children. The sample size was too small to draw any definitive conclusions. However, these findings do have implications for future research on the experiences of Jewish and Christian interfaith couples, particularly with regards to raising children together.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **Introduction**

### **Overview**

The role of religion in society has begun to shift in recent years. McCarthy (2007) indicated that Americans as a whole have become increasingly religiously unaffiliated as well as progressively more religiously diverse. For Americans today, religion not only appears to be decreasing in centrality, but there are also a greater variety of religious groups across the population.

McCarthy (2007) and several other scholars have also suggested that Americans are gradually becoming more secular and less reliant on religious constructs. Sander (1993) speculated several reasons for why this pattern of secularization may have emerged, one of which is that school and other socioeconomic background variables, such as parents' schooling, may weaken religious attachments and increase contact with members of religious groups.

As a result of secularization and a diversely religious society, a growing number of Americans each year are marrying outside of their faith. Scholars are calling this type of marriage an 'interfaith marriage' or 'religious intermarriage.' According to Yinger (1968), "religious intermarriage occurs when individuals who belong to different major religious groups of society choose to marry one another" (p.104).

Gleckman and Streicher (1990) explained the relationship between secularization and interfaith marriages by asserting that the secularization of religion permits religious identification to be viewed as irrelevant to the choice of one's mate in modern society and love tends to be the driving force behind most marriages. More individuals are



choosing to exclude religion as a criterion for choosing a potential partner, and are therefore less likely to seek out individuals of the same faith. According to Roof (1999), another reason for the growing number of religiously mixed spouses is increased individualism and the lack of a perceived need to establish religious homogeneity at the time of marriage. Individuals who choose to marry outside of their faith are autonomous and, often, have not been encouraged to marry within their own religious groups (1999).

The amount of interfaith marriages is increasing. McCarthy (2007) noted that the 2001 national data provided by the American Religious Identification Survey showed that 22% of Americans marry outside of their own religious traditions. In addition, studies by Kalmijn (1991) and Lieberman and Waters (1988), which focused on marriage choice, have indicated that most forms of ethnic and religious intermarriage have become more common over time.

Adler (1997) asserts that, specifically, more individuals of Jewish and Christian background are marrying outside of their own faith. According to this researcher, the proportion of Jews who married Gentiles, around one in ten for the first half of the century, according to the American Jewish Committee, doubled by 1960, doubled again by the early 1970s, and in this decade has leveled off at just over fifty percent. By several estimates, one out of three American Jews lives in an interfaith household (p.48).

For decades, the rate of intermarriage between Jews and Christians has gradually been rising (1997). These trends are significant to warrant further investigation.

Those Jews and Christians that choose to intermarry often face specific challenges, including how to raise their children. As these couples discuss what to do

about each of their religious backgrounds, Greenstein, Carlson, and Howell (1993) state that it often becomes apparent that partners want to remain in contact with aspects of their own birth culture, while transmitting something of it to the next generation. Jewish and Christian spouses face the difficult task of passing on each of their respective religious traditions and values to their children, while also having to negotiate religious differences. Horowitz (1999) summarized, “the different religious backgrounds might force couples to struggle with the significance of their heritage, how each person would or would not practice his or her birth religion, how to raise the children, and what they want for their own families” (p.11). Children of interfaith spouses represent the negotiation of religious traditions and values, and how these traditions and values are integrated into forming an interfaith family.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore which religious traditions and practices Jewish and Christian/Catholic spouses are currently passing onto their children, through a collection and analysis of data from interviews, in order to answer the following research questions: How are interfaith spouses negotiating their religious differences in order to make decisions regarding the religious orientation of their children? Does the gender of the Christian or Jewish parent play a role in choosing a child’s religious orientation? Do more couples instill both respective religious practices into the child, or is there a clearly dominant religion, which shapes the child’s religious orientation? Which religious traditions from Judaism and Christianity are frequently instilled for children of interfaith marriages?

## **Significance**

Past studies have examined trends in interfaith marriages, many of which have included Jewish and Christian or Catholic spouses. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been gathered and analyzed, and research has examined religious conversions, outcomes of children, negotiating religious differences as a couple, amongst a number of related topics. However, most of the literature, which will be presented in the following chapter, has not looked at the particular religious practices and traditions that have been passed onto the children of interfaith marriages, as well as the role of each spouse in shaping a child's religious orientation. The purpose of this study is to capture the religious practices, beliefs, and traditions that are being transferred to children of interfaith marriages between Jews and Christians/Catholics.

The research is of particular interest for counselors; particularly those who choose to specialize in working with cross-cultural couples. School counselors and other professionals who work with children, as well as various religious groups, will also find it useful to learn about the impact that cross-cultural, interfaith marriages have on families and children. Alexander and Sussman (1999) confirm that counselors need to be aware of how husbands and wives experience ethnicity and religiosity in their relationship with one another. Specifically, counselors need to be sensitive to the role that ethnicity and religiosity play for Jewish and Christian/Catholic interfaith spouses who are raising children together.

## **Definition of Terms**

### *Interfaith Marriage::*

When individuals who belong to or are identified with different major religious groups of society marry (Yinger, 1968).

### *Judaism:*

Judaism is the name for the traditional monotheistic religion of the Jewish people (Zaretsky, 2004). According to Chinitz and Brown (2001), it is the religion that follows the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible, including the first five books of the Torah, and the Talmud, which consists of rabbinical teachings (Bubis, 1994).

### *Jewish:*

The cultural and ethnic affiliation with Judaism (Adler, 1997).

### *Christianity:*

The religion of those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and follow the way of life inaugurated by him (McClymond, 2006). Ward (2003) explained that normally Christians believe in one creator God, threefold in being (Father, Son, and Spirit). There are well over a thousand Christian denominations including Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican (2003). The cross is one of the most widely known symbols of the Christian faith (McClymond, 2006).

### *Spirituality:*

According to Armstrong, (1996), a relationship with a higher power that directs the way in which an individual operates in the world.

*Religion:*

A system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and the practices of worship or other rituals that individuals direct toward that power (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975).

*Shabbat/Sabbath:*

A weekly day of rest and spiritual renewal. Sabbath begins on the previous evening with sunset. Certain prayers and practices are common including the lighting of the Sabbath candles (Ickis, 1966).

*Rosh Hashanah:*

Marks the start of the Jewish New Year. It is a time to commemorate God, to wish others a good coming year, to blow the *shofar* (trumpet), and to begin a process of repentance (Gordon, 2011).

*Yom Kippur:*

The Day of Atonement. It is a time, in addition to seeking forgiveness from God, to also seek reconciliation with anyone whom an individual has wronged in the past. Jews believe that during the period known as the Days of Awe and the Ten Days of Repentance in the Jewish calendar, God determines their fate for the coming year, deciding who shall live and who shall die. On Rosh Hashanah, God opens the book of judgment, and on Yom Kippur, the book is closed and sealed. It is a time of fasting and intense personal activity (Gordon, 2011).

*Hannukah:*

The Festival of Lights. It is an eight-day holiday that celebrates the re-consecration of the Temple and the miracle that occurred. The miracle was that although the olive oil needed to keep the lamp in the Temple lit was only enough for one day, the lamp in the

Temple was kept burning for eight days (Gordon, 2011). Menorahs (eight-branched candelabras) are lit, latkes (potato pancakes) are served, and gifts are exchanged (Ickis, 1966).

*Passover:*

Commemorates the Jewish ancestors' exodus from Egypt (Krieger, 2010). On Passover eve, the entire family gathers at the dinner table for the traditional *seder*, which is both a meal and a service of worship (Ickis, 1966. P.25)

*Purim:*

A joyful occasion that celebrates Queen Esther, who risked her life to save the Jews who were still in captivity in Persia in the fifth century BCE (Gordon, 2011).

*Bar Mitzvah:*

A ceremonial rite of passage that marks the male child's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. In Jewish Law, a Bar Mitzvah is a person who is now able to perform those commandments appropriate to his age and capacity (Imber-Black, Roberts, and Whiting, 2003).

*Bat Mitzvah:*

The female equivalent of bar mitzvah, which is also a modern invention. It was first instituted in the early 1920's and has become widely practiced only since the 1970's (Imber-Black, Roberts, and Whiting, 2003).

*Circumcision/B'rit Milah:*

Represents the covenant made between God and Abraham, and is a *mitzvah* (commandment from the Torah). The procedure, which removes the foreskin of the penis, is performed by a *mohel* eight days after the birth of the neonate (Glass, 1999).

*Kosher:*

A set of dietary laws from the Torah that are followed in order to advance health, holiness, and purity (Katz, 1976).

*Sunday Worship:*

The general day of rest and worship for Christians, and a day for spirituality and prayer (Ickis, 1966).

*Baptism:*

A Christian ritual, typically performed on infants. The ritual involves a water bath symbolizing the washing away of original sin. It is the gateway through which the child passes into Christianity, and therefore baptism is about initiation and religious membership. An official name is conferred onto the child, and so baptism is also about religious identity (Gwynne, 2009).

*Confirmation:*

An extension of baptism, it is a second anointing ceremony that is held later in life, when the person is mature enough to ratify the original decision of their parents to have their child baptized (Gwynne, 2009).

*Communion:*

Refers to the spiritual union established between the individual and Christ via the act of consuming the sacred bread and wine that are now understood to be his body and blood in some manner (Gwynne, 2009, p.423-424).

*Easter:*

Celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The “Easter Vigil” serves as the core of the event’s worship activities. Easter has accumulated many traditions including modern

symbols of eggs and rabbits, which are ancient pagan symbols for fertility (Gordon, 2009).

#### *Christmas:*

Celebrates the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God. In Western culture, Santa Claus is one of the most celebrated symbols of the Christmas season. Santa Claus is the mythical figure that brings gifts to the homes of the good children during the late evening and overnight hours of Christmas Eve, on December twenty-fourth (Gordon, 2011). The Christmas tree is looked upon as a symbol of joy and good will to others and is the most beloved feature of the holiday season (Ickis, 1966). Most Catholic churches hold a Midnight Mass because it is believed that Christ was born at that hour (Ickis, 1966).

#### **Organization of the Study**

The first chapter of this thesis was presented in order to introduce the statement of the problem and its significance. In order to understand the aforementioned issues, chapter two will present a review of literature regarding interfaith marriages, religious intermarriage between Jews and Christians, and raising children in Jewish and Christian interfaith families. Chapter three will focus on the methodology of the study followed by the study's findings in chapter four. Chapter five will provide future implications for research and a final discussion of why this study is important for counselors in working with interfaith couples and spouses.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter will explore the previous research on interfaith marriage and the role of religion in marriage, as well as the experiences of raising children in these marriages. The review begins with an examination of the trends and patterns amongst interfaith spouses in the United States, leading into the experiences of Jewish and Christian interfaith marriages in particular. Next, the marital impact of cultural and religious constructs of Judaism and Christianity are described and explored. The chapter ends with a discussion of children raised in interfaith marriages between Jews and Christians.

#### **Interfaith Marriage in the United States**

Studies by Kalmijn (1991) and Lieberman and Waters (1988) on marriage choice revealed that most forms of ethnic and religious intermarriage have become more common over time. Yinger (1968) defined religious intermarriage as when persons who belong to or are identified with different religious faiths, as each partner is affiliated with one of the major religious groups, but not the same one, marry. Grossman (2010) conducted a study, which found that the rates of interfaith marriages have been increasing over the past few decades. Two decades ago, 25% of U.S. couples didn't share the same faith. That was up to 31% by 2006-08, according to the General Social Survey by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Using the 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Grossman indicated that 37% of U.S. couples did not share the same faith (2010).

Several researchers have examined incidences of interfaith marriages in smaller religious groups. According to Grossman (2010), in 2001, the American Religious Identification Survey showed that the intermarriage rate was 39% for Muslims, 27% for Jews, 23% for Catholics and 12% for Mormons. McCarthy (2007) noted that the survey also revealed that Jews, Episcopalians, and Buddhists had very high rates of intermarriage, while Mormons were least likely to marry out of their religion.

Researchers have proposed several explanations for why interfaith marriage occurs amongst religious groups. Lieberman and Waters (1988) provided one useful model for conceptualizing the determinants of intermarriage explaining,

first, opportunity affects the odds of intermarriage (for example, Jews are more likely to intermarry in areas where they are less concentrated). The second and third determinants of interfaith marriage are the disposition of others toward one's group and the disposition of members of one's own group toward other groups. Finally, socioeconomic background affects the probability of intermarriage (p.1038).

Sherkat (2003) also postulated that educational attainment increases the likelihood of intermarriage, and marriages in which the woman has more education are more likely to be heterogamous.

Factors related to family background may determine whether an individual will marry within his or her own religious group. Kalmijin (1998) and Lieberman and Waters (1988) asserted that the more strongly parents are orientated toward their ethno-religious identity, the greater the chances are that their children will marry endogamously. In

addition, the more homogenous the context is in which the parents are embedded, the higher the chances are that their children will marry endogamously.

An individual's level of attachment to his or her religion of origin plays an important role in predicting intermarriage. A number of researchers agree that the love of religious customs and the desire to pass faith on to one's children may influence choice of marital partner (Bisin, Topa & Verdier, 2004; Chinitz & Brown, 2001; Sherkat, 2003). Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) also stated, "those who are more religious and more committed to the faith in which they were raised are predicted to have a lower probability of intermarriage" (p.260).

### **Trends in Interfaith Marriages Between Jews and Christians**

The rates of interfaith marriages within Jewish and Christian denominations have been increasing for several decades. According to Lazerwitz (1995), the rate of intermarriage among American Jews quadrupled between 1970 and 1990. In his study, Glenn (1982) reported that 10% of Protestants married non-Protestants, 22% of Catholics married non-Catholics, and 14% of Jews married non-Jews. In another study conducted over a decade later, Kalmijn (1991) found that around 10-20% of Protestants had married non-Protestants, 15-36% of Catholics married non-Catholics, and 10% of Jews married non-Jews.

A number of studies have indicated changing patterns in marriage for Jewish and Christian individuals. Fishman, Rimor, Tobin, and Medding (1990) estimated that approximately one million Jews were in interfaith marriages over the previous two decades. In a more recent study, Schwartz (2006) estimated that half of Jewish men and women intermarried. Weaver (2011) noted that in 2007, a survey conducted on marriage

by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) revealed that marrying another Catholic was a low priority for young Catholics. Of the never-married Catholics, only 7% said it was very important to marry someone of the same faith (2011).

An increased frequency of interfaith mixing in various contexts may lead to a greater chance of interfaith marital outcomes for Jewish and Christian individuals. Alexander and Sussman (1999) asserted that intermarriage between Jews and Christians has increased significantly with each succeeding generation and reflects a trend in rising religious and ethnic intermarriage amongst all non-Hispanic Whites of European ancestry. Mayer (1985) proposed that the current large number of intermarriages may largely be a function of opportunity: greater acceptance of Jews by non-Jews, wider exposure and mixing at school, work, and in social contexts. Clamar (1991) summarized, “Jews and Christians [also] marry because society brings them together- at school, at work and in their neighborhoods- more frequently and more closely than at anytime in American or Jewish history” (p.80).

Several studies have examined the types of Jewish and Christian individuals who choose to marry inter-religiously. In one small-scale study by Lazerwitz (1981), which was limited to the Jewish communities of Springfield and Boston, Massachusetts, Providence, Rhode Island, Highland Park, Illinois, Washington, D.C. and the small Jewish communities of Iowa and Indiana, the researcher discovered several trends related to inter-religious marriages amongst Jews. First, Lazerwitz found that the intermarried were more concentrated in the younger age groups than were all currently married Jewish adults. Also, many more Jewish men intermarried than did Jewish women. Lastly, the typical convert to Judaism was a non-Jewish woman marrying a Jewish man. This

researcher also found that Jewish adults with non-Jewish spouses typically had either no Jewish denomination preference, or had some preference for the reform denomination. Lazerwitz concluded that attendance was infrequent during the High Holidays, and that these individuals seldom joined synagogues (1981).

The religious denomination or religious sect of the Christian or Jewish individual also influences whether marriage outside of his or her faith will occur. On a recent national Jewish population survey conducted by the United Jewish Communities (UJC, 2003) orthodox Jews and those with a higher level of Jewish education were found to be more resistant to marriage outside of the faith, while Reform Jews were less opposed. Waite and Friedman (1997) also discovered, using logistic regression analyses of Jewish endogamy in the United States to assess family influences, that those raised in a reform religious household are more likely to intermarry than people raised in a conservative or orthodox household. Sherkat (2003) posited that Catholics and members of conservative sects are less likely to intermarry compared to others.

Although attitudes toward interfaith marriage have historically been negative, they have become less critical in past years within Jewish and Christian communities. Schwartz (2006) noted that prior to the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in the 1960s, the Catholic Church strongly opposed interfaith marriage. However, Fishman (2010) asserts that today's Catholics do not face such harsh consequences when marrying someone of a different religion. Last year in a survey of 325 American rabbis by the Jewish Outreach Institute of the City University of New York, Adler (1997) found that acceptance of intermarriage was growing, though very slowly.

## **Experiences of Jewish and Christian Interfaith Spouses**

Jewish and Christian interfaith spouses face particular challenges. According to Gleckman and Streicher (1990) and Mayer (1985), religiously intermarried couples often face negative reactions and a lack of understanding from family friends, as well as personal disagreements concerning religious aspects of family life and their children's upbringing.

Jewish and Christian communities have often displayed apprehensive attitudes toward interfaith marriages. Mayer (1985) found that 43% of Jewish parents and 30% of Christian parents openly oppose their children's interfaith marriage.

Greenstein, Carlson, and Howell (1993) also indicated that the Jewish community and clergy on the whole frown upon intermarriage and consider it to be a major threat to the existence of the Jewish people. Orthodox and Conservative Judaism simply do not accept intermarriage as religiously valid and hold that intermarriage breaks Jewish law (1993). Alexander and Sussman (1999) noted that Jewish religious leaders tend to take the position that intermarriage will lead to a loss in ethnic identity. Weaver (2011) also stated that the Catholic Church holds concerns with making sure that a member of the church in a mixed-religion marriage continues to practice his or her faith.

The Jewish spouse may also experience feelings of guilt as a result of the commonly held belief that if every Jew intermarried, eventually the Jewish people would no longer exist (Greenstein, Carlson, & Howell, 1993). Cowan (1987) pointed out that Jews-including those who intermarry- worry that their 4,000-year-old history will be extinguished. The Holocaust serves as a constant reminder that survival is perilous (1987).

Greenstein et al. (1993) concluded that interfaith couples experience problems with decisions regarding life events such as birth, death, holiday celebrations, and weddings. McCarthy (2007) indicated that one of the greatest difficulties for Jewish and Christian interfaith couples lies in Christian claims about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The language of Christianity is very particular, and difficult to deal with by Jews, as well as being rather exclusive, so there is always the possibility of disagreements, conflicts and negotiation.

According to Greenstein, et al. (1993), as interfaith couples discuss what to do regarding their religious differences, they often demonstrate a determination by each partner that he or she wants to remain in contact with aspects of his or her own birth culture and to transmit something of it to the next generation. Gleckman and Streicher (1990) noted that because Jewish religious celebration is tied to family rituals, this tends to put pressure on the couple and may be a source of conflict or prevent the couple from creating a comfortable blended culture. Glotzer (2005) asserts that it is not unusual for individuals to discover the significance and intensity of their religious identity only when it comes into friction with another set of equally significant and intensely held beliefs.

### **The Role of Judaism and Jewish Culture in Interfaith Marriages**

In investigating the trends and patterns in interfaith marriages between Jews and Christians, scholars note that there is a differentiation between Judaism as a religion, and ‘Jewish’ as an ethnic culture. Zaretsky (2004) explained that the term ‘Jew’ identifies a person of ethnic Jewish descent, and that it is not a religious factor. The term ‘Jewish’ is a descriptive term for those individuals that are Jews. Langer (2003) also described that at its most fundamental level, the definition of ‘Jew’ is neither religious nor theological, but

ethnic. In contrast, the term 'Judaism' is the name for the traditional monotheistic religion of the Jewish people. Zaretsky (2004) denoted that the religious law of Judaism, *halachah*, requires birth of Jewish parentage and, more specifically, to be the child of a Jewish mother, in order to be considered a member of Judaism. The actual process of obtaining membership into Judaism involves ritual circumcision, immersion in a ritual bath, and taking on a Jewish identity through a Hebrew name (2004).

There are several denominations of Judaism, and Jews define themselves as being somewhere along a spectrum of religious beliefs. Langman (1999) stated,

on the most conventional end of the spectrum falls what is known as Orthodox Judaism, which is identified as being the most concerned with following the written and oral laws transmitted by God to Moses, being most closely related to historical Judaism, and having the least interest in adjusting to modern day values. Conservative Judaism is identified as attempting to balance traditional Jewish thoughts with modern values, and Reform Judaism is identified as attempting to appeal to Jews who are more involved in the secular world (p.155).

Judaism is a combination of religion, ethnicity, and culture. Within these categories, Jews often identify themselves in several ways. According to Krieger (2010) individuals identify their support of Israel or fight anti-Semitism, some are religiously observant and attend synagogue or wear a head covering, and some embrace the culture by eating particular foods, singing songs, and following traditions.

The Jewish spouse in an interfaith marriage may possess both religious and cultural identities, and this may impact his or her role in the marriage. Horowitz (1999) explained that because Judaism extends beyond the religious and onto the cultural



dimensions of life, marriage between Jews and non-Jews involves not only religious differences, but differences in many aspects of living and viewing the world.

Mayer (1985) also noted that, in interfaith marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew, often times the Jewish partner has not been particularly religious observant. This may create a paradox in an interfaith marriage. Weidman-Schneider (1989) holds that Judaism, for many Jews, is not integrated into their lives. Jews often have a difficult time conceptualizing and expressing what 'Jewishness' and Judaism means to them and why it [Judaism and Jewishness] is so important that it be preserved in their homes and be transmitted to their children. This can lead to confusion between spouses: If Judaism means so much to one partner, then why didn't the Jewish partner marry a Jew? Essentially, the Jewish partner may not be religious at all but insist that any children of the relationship be raised as Jews (1989).

The spouse, whose religion of origin is Judaism, often does not possess a clear understanding of his or her religion in relation to Jewish ethnic and cultural identity. Clamar (1991) asserted that Judaism for many young Jews is based on having a childhood that is confusing to deal with as an adult. For many Jews as well as Christians, Jewishness consists of bagels and lox, and the meaning and significance of Judaism as a civilization is often ignored or avoided (1991). This confusion for the Jewish spouse may create feelings of uncertainty in merging his or her religious identity with a partner as well as forming an interfaith family.

### **The Role of Christianity in Interfaith Marriages**

McClymond (2006) described Christianity as having inherited from its parent religion, Judaism, a monotheistic belief that there is only one true God, who is personal,

the creator of all things, all powerful, holy, loving, forgiving, and yet opposed to sin and evil. There are a number of inherent values within Christianity, which impact the role of the Christian spouse in an interfaith marriage. Several researchers, whose theories will be presented in this section, have asserted that Christianity is a religion that emphasizes church participation, having a role in the family life of its followers, and individual values.

One such researcher, Horowitz (1999), acknowledged that while the family is the fundamental forum for religious life in Jewish homes, Christians, in contrast, focus on membership in the church's congregation as the essential central foundation for religious life. While the family is an important link to religion, the liturgy, congregation, and church are also central to Christian practice. Sawin (1981) stated that religious beliefs displayed through rituals and ceremonies are linked with aspects of the family life cycle. These ceremonies include infant baptism, a child blessing, confirmation or an adult baptism, and marriage, to name a few. Each of these activities aims to promote family through church engagement (1981).

McClymond (2006) noted that Christianity offers instruction in moral and spiritual life. For instance, the Christian ritual of baptism marks the transition from unbelief to faith, from sin to repentance, from death to life, and from the world to the church (2006). According to Weidman-Schneider (1989), differences exist between Judaism and Christianity that influence the manner in which each partner views existential aspects of the world. These differences shape how each partner views life, death, morality, and the relationship between self-sufficiency and community.

Although religious background plays a role in shaping the Christian partner's life views, Heiss (1961) postulated that most interfaith marriages might be homogenous with regards to attitudes, values, and practices, because agreement is likely to be reached prior to marriage.

### **Raising Jewish and Christian Interfaith Children**

Chinitz and Brown (2001) assert that the religious education of children seems to be one of the biggest sources of tension in Jewish interfaith marriages. In raising their children, Jewish and Christian interfaith couples often face particular challenges and may utilize several strategies in developing their child's religious identity.

In his study, Roof (1999) found that interfaith spouses have a deep tolerance for their differences, which is an important message to send to their interfaith children. The same researcher noted that the process of creative recombination of religious belief, practice, and identity had occurred in his sample of interfaith couples. In other words, the couples had dismantled and reconstructed in new ways much of their inherited ritual, symbolic, and doctrinal traditions and even their personal religious identities.

Roof summarized his findings by describing four consistently observed strategies adopted by mixed-faith families, which include establishing one dominant family faith in friendly dialogue with the other, adopting 'free-wheeling' multi-religious practices and forming new traditions out of the resources at hand, attempting to observe the practices of both religions in their fullness, or the adoption of gender-based rituals and celebrations (1999).

Schwartz (2006) indicated that for those interfaith couples who chose to have their children follow the rituals and holiday celebrations of both religions, the children

attended church and synagogue services, learned about the heritage of both of their parents, and could decide for themselves, when they are adults, which faith they prefer to follow.

Though researchers have observed various trends in Jewish and Christian interfaith parenting, a general consensus has not yet been reached. Lazerwitz (1995) found that for heterogeneous marriages involving Jewish-born wives, 52% reported raising Jewish children. In contrast, amongst marriages involving Jewish-born husbands, only 25% were raising Jewish children. According to the American Jewish Yearbook (AJY, 2000), 34% of children of intermarried families were being raised as Christians compared with 18% being raised as Jews. Another 25% were being raised with both faiths and 23% of those children were raised with no faith at all (2000).

In his study examining spouses' involvement in each partner's respective religion, Dashefsky (2008) found that both Jewish and non-Jewish spouses were involved similarly in respect to raising their children. For instance, 71% of Jewish parents and 56% of non-Jewish parents reported talking to their children about what Judaism teaches, and 79% of Jewish parents and 76% of non-Jewish parents reported reading or telling Jewish stories to their children (2008).

Mayer (1985) noted that two out of three children of Christian-Jewish marriages were being raised without having a religion determined for them by their parents at all, whereas Chinitz and Brown (2001) asserted that children of interfaith marriages were most often raised in the religious tradition of the mother. One explanation, according to Horowitz (1999), is that in traditional Judaism the religious identification of children comes from the mother. Women have an intrinsic power to define their children's

religious identity within Judaism. However, Christian religious identity is not linked directly to either parent (1999).

There have been several studies exploring how Jewish and Christian interfaith parents experience religious traditions and holidays with their children. Horowitz (1999) conducted interviews amongst interfaith spouses and noted that the December holidays have major significance for both spouses, stemming largely from the symbolic value of Christmas and Hanukah. These holidays serve as representations of the religious, cultural, and ethnic identity of the family, and in particular, the identity of the children. The December holidays also often elicit exploration of commonalities and differences, encourage sharing of holiday traditions, and frequently lead to evolving efforts to create holiday observances that are meaningful for the couple and the family. Interfaith couples cope with the challenges of the December dilemma and the identity of their children by first examining and sharing respective memories of past holidays, then exploring commonalities and differences, and lastly making decisions and plans achieved through mutual agreement (1999).

Dashefsky (2008) indicated that half of the interfaith respondents in his study had a Christmas tree, and about 75% said they exchanged Christmas presents. Levinsky (2011) also stated that an increasing number of people grow up in households that practice more than one religion. When parents of different faiths marry, some choose to raise the children in both traditions; some choose to raise the children 'with the wisdom of all traditions,' some choose a primarily Jewish identity for the home, but enjoy trees and eggs at Christmas and Easter. A couple may choose to mix and match various religious traditions and practices when deciding how to raise their child (2011).

## **Outcomes of Jewish and Christian Interfaith Children**

A number of researchers maintain that interfaith marriages may weaken the religious commitment of the persons who form these unions and therefore also increase the likelihood that their offspring will be only weakly socialized into the faith of either parent (Barron, 1972; Bossard and Boll, 1957, Sklare, 1971; Vincent, 1964). Peterson (1986) postulated that the offspring of interfaith marriages are often weakly religious and have low religious commitment due to the irreligiosity of the parents and the lack of consistency in religious socialization.

On the other hand, children of interfaith marriages may also become religious ‘hybrids’ in which they blend the religious perspectives of both parents (Peterson, 1986). McCarthy (2007) explained that some interfaith parents and children themselves identify their religiously plural background as part of a valuable multi-cultural set. Clamar (1991) presented an argument against religious ‘hybrids’ for children explaining that,

children of Christian-Jewish marriages are psychologically healthier if they are raised in the religion of one of the parents rather than in both faiths or none at all. Such children cannot grow up with a clear sense of religious identity if they are not fully at home in either the mother’s or father’s faith (p.79).

Lazerwitz (1981) indicated that the levels of Jewish involvement reached by those adults with intermarried parents were consistently below the levels of Jewish involvement reached by adults both of whose parents were Jewish. For example, those with just a Jewish father reported only 16% lighting Shabbat candles, just 7% in a kosher home, 33% attending synagogue on Yom Kippur, 26% with synagogue membership, and only 17% with membership in a Jewish organization (1981).

## **Counseling Interfaith Couples**

Alexander and Sussman (1991) have asserted that, given the historical rise in interfaith marriages specifically between Jews and Christians, counselors need to be aware of how husbands and wives experience issues of ethnicity and religiosity in their relationship. The process of counseling interfaith couples and spouses is a unique one, which demands an understanding of the interfaith couple as two individuals presenting with major cultural differences. Eaton (1994) explained that counselors should be aware of the purpose of counseling interfaith couples, and that treatment requires dealing with family systems dynamics while educating the couple about the role of cultural difference in their relationship. The goal of treatment in intercultural couples therapy is to assist the couple in viewing their differences flexibly while they develop a blended culture, which satisfies individual and partnership needs, including the religious and the spiritual (1994).

Clamar (1991) also indicated that psychotherapists need to help interfaith families make choices that both spouses (and their children) can live with, and to also determine what role the therapist should play in helping parents (and often children) look beneath the issues of faith and into other, often more complex and emotional, issues.

According to Eaton (1994), the result of a successful interfaith couple therapeutic process is the creation of a blended culture through the interfaith couple, which essentially produces a mix of ancient traditions and unique rituals and routines that express the beliefs and fill the needs of the couple.

## **Direction For Future Research**

Incidences of interfaith marriage between Christian And Jewish individuals have been increasing over several decades, and a review of the literature demonstrated that a

majority of these individuals are more likely to be members of reform or non-conservative sects of the respective religions. Through further interviews with Christian and Jewish interfaith spouses, this study aims to explore the incidences of various religious sects and practices amongst interfaith Jewish and Christian spouses as well as the religious practices that their child or children has been exposed to.

Conflicts may arise regarding the integration of each partner's contrasting religious beliefs. This includes, for instance, the significance of Jesus Christ. For the Jewish partner in the marriage, confusion regarding the meaning of Judaism as both a religion as well as an ethnicity seems to be a consistently encountered issue. Weidman-Schneider (1989) summarized that Jews often have difficulty understanding what 'Jewishness' truly means to them. This study will examine how interfaith couples attempt to overcome personal religious ambiguity in shaping their child's religious upbringing, as well as which religious beliefs and traditions they choose to pass on.

Finally, Chinitz and Brown (2001) explained that interfaith spouses might choose to make use of a variety of strategies in religiously educating their child, and scholars have presented mixed opinions on the outcomes of children as a result of each strategy. This study aims to investigate the incidences of the religious education strategies described in the literature, as well as any new approaches that are currently being employed by interfaith spouses.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative study was designed to examine which religious traditions and practices Jewish and Christian spouses are currently passing onto their children, as well as their experiences and attitudes toward the religious outcomes of their children. It is hypothesized that mixed patterns will emerge with regards to the traditions and holidays that are being passed on and practiced by interfaith children. Mixed results are also expected for the religious beliefs and ideas that parents choose to emphasize in the religious upbringing of their children.

This chapter will present a description of the research methods that were used in order to test the research questions. The sections that will follow include: (a) sample (b) instruments (c) research design and (d) procedure.

#### **Sample**

Using random sampling, the sample was comprised of 6 married, heterosexual Jewish and Christian couples currently residing in the United States. Ages of the participants ranged from 43 to 56 years old. The ethnic background of the entire sample was white/Caucasian. All Jewish spouses identified with either the Reform denomination or no denomination, while the Christian spouses identified as Catholic, Protestant, mixed, or no denomination.

Subjects were required to be at least 18 years of age, a member of any sect of Judaism or Christianity, currently married to a spouse who is not of the same religious

background, and have a child or children with the current spouse who is not of the same religious background.

### **Instruments**

Each spouse was provided with an adult consent form, bill of rights, and introductory remarks briefly explaining the study's purpose and procedures, and a demographic questionnaire. An audio-recorded interview comprised of approximately 21 open-ended questions was also used (See Appendix A).

The demographic questionnaire consisted of 13 items covering essential information such as age, sex, ethnicity, education, number of years married, and number of children with the current spouse or any stepchildren. The questionnaire also covered each spouse's history in dating other individuals of other religious backgrounds, as well as any other interfaith marriages within the family. The latter portion of the survey explored religious background, denomination, level of religiosity, and importance in passing religion of origin to the child or children.

Questions from the audio-recorded interview explored several main themes including the following: participants' religion of origin and family history, knowledge of the other spouse's religion, presentation of religious differences to the child or children, conflicts over the child or children's religious upbringing, religious outcomes of the child or children, integration of one, both, or neither religion, particular traditions and practices, and advice for other interfaith couples.

For example, in order to assess the religious outcomes of the family, including the child or children, participants were asked questions such as: "Explain how religion has shaped your child/children's upbringing," "Does your child practice just one religion,

both religions, or neither religion? Is there a dominant religion that is practiced?”, “How would you describe your child/children’s attendance of religious services?” and, “Tell me about aspects of each religion that your child/children appears to value the most.”

In order to explore conflict over religious differences, the following questions were asked: “Explain a time when there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with your spouse,” “Describe any instances in which there were disagreements or conflicts regarding the role that religion played in raising your child/children with your spouse,” and, “Describe any past conflicts regarding how to explain these holidays to your children.”

Specific religious traditions and practices were also investigated by asking the following questions: “Describe any religious symbols that are used in your home (such as a mezuzah or a cross),” “Tell me about your child/children’s participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies (such as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, etc.),” “Describe any major Jewish and/or Christian/Catholic holidays that you and your spouse celebrate. How do you celebrate?” and, “How do you and your spouse celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah with your children?”

### **Research Design**

This was a basic comparative, descriptive study designed to examine the practices and outcomes of Jewish and Christian interfaith marriages with a child or children. No statistical formulas were applied in analyzing the data. Re-occurring themes, answers, and descriptions were explored and observed in connection with responses to the demographic questionnaire. Because the sample size was small, no conclusive statements

were made regarding the outcome of the study. All analyses were tentative and intended to spark further investigation.

## **Procedure**

The Human Research Committee at California State University, Northridge approved the questionnaire, interview questions, and data collection procedures on February 26, 2013. All participants were treated in accordance with accepted ethical protocol.

Subjects (N= 16) were recruited through online advertising as well as fliers that were distributed in a variety of settings, including the following: churches, synagogues, schools, and community centers. Project contact information was provided for individuals interested in responding to the advertisement. After the interested candidate contacted either via phone or email the primary investigator, a time and meeting place was scheduled to conduct the study. Subjects were also alerted of the following: that there would be no compensation, that the duration of the study would be approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes, that an audio-recording device would be utilized, as well as a brief explanation of the purpose of the study.

The duration of the study varied for each participant. The longest study duration was 1 hour and 15 minutes. Both spouses were interviewed together. After providing introductory remarks and reviewing and signing the consent form and bill of rights, participants were given 10-15 minutes to complete the demographic questionnaire. The shortest interview lasted 34 minutes and 53 seconds, and the longest interview lasted 1 hour and 55 seconds. After conducting the audio-recorded interview, extra time was provided to subjects for answering miscellaneous questions.

Using a comparative method, the responses for the interview questions as well as the demographic questionnaire were compared by categorizing and coding common themes in order to determine the similarities and differences across participants.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

This study is intended to explore the religious traditions and practices that Jewish and Christian spouses are currently passing onto their children, and aims to explore the various religious strategies described in the literature in chapter II. It is hypothesized that, amongst the spouses that are interviewed, a multitude of approaches, practices, personal beliefs, and tactics will be found. The premise of this study was carried out through the utilization of a demographic questionnaire, as well as a series of open-ended interview questions covering the main areas discussed in the literature. This chapter presents a discussion on the demographic results as well as the open-ended responses to the interview questions.

#### **Sample**

A total of 12 participants were included in this study, which were comprised of 6 heterosexual couples.

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

Tables 1.a. through 1.k. in Appendix E show the descriptive statistics (frequency and percent distributions) of the respondents' age, sex, ethnicity, education, number of children with partner, years married with current partner, religious background and denomination, religiosity and importance of religion in raising children, as well as prior experiences dating outside of religion of origin and previous intermarriages within the family.

All participants were white/Caucasian. A majority of participants (84%) were between the ages of 48-57 and had received either a 4-year college degree or a master's degree (66%). Approximately half of the participants were married between 17-20 years. A majority of respondents (67%) had 2 children together.

Most participants had previously dated outside of their own religious background (84%), and considered themselves to be only slightly religious (67%). Of those respondents who answered 'slightly' for level of religiosity, a majority were males (6 versus 2 females).

When asked about previous interfaith marriages in the family, 42% of respondents answered yes, while 58% answered no.

When asked about the importance of religion in raising their children, an uneven spread was found: while 42% of the participants felt that religion was only slightly important (3 males, 2 females), 25% answered that religion was not at all important (2 males, 1 female), while another 25% answered that religion was highly important (3 females).

## **Results**

### *Qualitative Results*

Using a general comparative method, the responses for the qualitative section, the open-ended interview questions, were compared to each other by categorizing and analyzing the common themes in order to determine the differences and similarities between the participants' responses.

The first question asked participants to describe participation in their own religion as a child, and to highlight any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that

they participated in. Three different types of responses were found amongst the participants. First, that the individual was raised in a religious household and followed all the holidays and traditions of their religion of origin. One individual explained, “we celebrated all the holidays-Hannukah, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. We kept Kosher, we were Kosher at home, I went to Hebrew school, um, probably all through elementary school.” One participant also described, “I came from a strong Roman Catholic family. I went to Catholic school through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. We went to church every Sunday, my father was an usher, he was active in the church so we were pretty active.” The second type of response was that the individual had little to no religious exposure in his or her family of origin. One Jewish respondent noted that she was not raised religiously, and did not learn a large amount of information about Judaism as a child. Other individuals had a slightly, but not strongly, religious upbringing. For these subjects there was an emphasis on culture versus religiosity. For example, one spouse recalled, “it was very flexible. There were no rigid, religious things we had to do. It was a basic belief in God, you know, not this way or that way. It was just a basic, Christian upbringing. Not anything hardcore or anything.”

The next question focused on each participant’s knowledge of their spouse’s religious background and the major religious concepts they had learned, if there were any at all. It is important to note that a majority of the wives in this study were Jewish. Most of the Jewish spouses could not recall a large amount of information regarding Christianity, while most of the Christian spouses felt that they were capable of discussing the traditions and practices of Judaism. For instance, one Jewish spouse answered, “I think for me as far as Catholicism I kind of really haven’t learned that much. Mostly just



holiday related stuff, except from my in-laws, but nothing really too much on the religious side.” On the other hand, one Christian spouse (who eventually converted to Judaism) explained, “I can talk about the whole philosophical background, both the Christian and Jewish side.” Another Christian spouse stated that he knew more about Judaism due to his involvement in raising his children as Jews.

When participants were asked about how they have explained their religious differences to their children, different responses were recorded. Several spouses answered that it was never necessary to explain religious differences, as their children had never inquired about it. Other spouses had agreed upon raising their children within a particular religion, while also being transparent about the fact that one spouse was not raised within that religion. For instance, one participant described, “they don’t really know anything other than they’re raised as Jews. They know I’m not but I don’t think it really hits them too often.” Another participant stated, “we just agreed that we were going to raise the kids Jewish. So it was real easy, we just had to explain to them that, that’s what they believe, that’s what they do.” A handful of spouses chose to explain their religious differences, while also allowing their children freedom in choosing which religion to follow. One spouse discussed, “we’ve told him that we have our own beliefs and that you don’t have to step into a church or a temple and speak to God, and that you can believe in what you want to believe in.” One respondent explained, “we’ve let them make their own minds up, really, because we’re both not that religious.”

Participants were also asked to explain a time when there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with one another. Almost all spouses had no issues to discuss, with a few exceptions. One husband discussed his hesitancy in the decision to circumcise

his child based on his wife's religious practices, while one Jewish spouse described disappointment in her family's lack of enthusiasm for fasting during Yom Kippur, celebrating Passover, and attending religious services.

When respondents were asked to describe instances of disagreement or conflict regarding the role of religion in raising their children, once again, almost all of the participants could not point to any specific instances. One participant explained, "we had made the determination and we went with it...you know the only disagreements we had were probably similar to disagreements two Jews or two Christians would have." One husband recalled past instances in which he had asked to take his children to church, and his wife was opposed to it.

Participants were also prompted to discuss how religion has shaped their child or children's upbringing. Most spouses answered that the morals and values from religion in general had been instilled. One individual responded, "we're big on values and tradition," while another spouse noted that his children had inherited the importance of, "giving and caring for others." Other participants highlighted their child or children's lack of religiosity and/or belief in God. For instance, one subject stated, "he doesn't believe in anything." Another spouse explained, "at this point, they're more leaning toward being sort of agnostic and not particularly religious. And probably my ambivalence toward religion has had some effect on that."

Spouses were asked to describe how each religion has been incorporated into their children's lives. As stated earlier, most of the wives in this study were Jewish, and as a result, the participants provided several different categories of responses. First, that the children were primarily raised with exposure to Jewish practices and traditions. One wife

explained, “it wasn’t just the fact that we’re an interfaith couple and we decided to raise the kids Jews, which, everybody says well if the mother’s Jewish than the kids are automatically Jewish--we didn’t stop there.” Other participants chose to incorporate a mixture of Jewish and Christian practices. For instance, one spouse stated that the family practiced Judaism in conjunction with major Christian holidays with the Christian spouse’s extended family. There were also a handful of individuals that integrated few traditions from either religion, and as a result, the children did not practice or identify with any religion in particular, “at the end of the day whatever my kids want to do, what makes them happy, that’s what I want to support...whatever God they identify with it’s not a Jewish god or a Christian god per se,” explained one respondent.

In terms of the religious symbols used in the home, almost all participants listed mezuzahs as one religious fixture, while a majority also employed particular religious items to celebrate various Jewish holidays, such as using a menorah for Hannukah. No crosses or Christian symbols were incorporated into any of the homes. One household contained a Buddha figure and no other religious symbols from Judaism or Christianity.

When asked about their children’s attendance of religious services, participants gave several types of responses. For those spouses who chose to raise their children primarily as Jews, the children attended High Holiday services regularly and celebrated almost all of the major religious holidays. For those spouses who did not raise their children within one religion primarily, or did not adhere strictly to one religion, the children only attended High Holiday services for Judaism, and celebrated the major holidays for both religions.

Next, respondents were asked to discuss their children's attendance of religious education classes. Several answers were given. Some children attended preschool classes as well as Sunday school/Hebrew school up until having a Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Other children attended pre-school classes only. A handful of children attended no form of religious education classes.

With regards to the religious rites of passages or ceremonies participated in by the children, spouses gave varying answers. Many respondents reported that the children had not participated in any Jewish or Christian ceremonies. Only a handful of children received a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. In describing her children's Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, one Jewish spouse reported, "it was important for us to not just have a party. They [the children] knew the significance of the event." In addition, some spouses reported that their daughter(s) had a baby-naming ceremony and that their son(s) were circumcised. No Christian rites of passages or ceremonies were reported.

When subjects were asked to discuss which Jewish and Christian holidays the family celebrates together, all spouses named the major December holidays from both religions: Hannukah and Christmas. "Sometimes we do Christmas presents for the kids, and we also do Hannukah presents for the kids. You know we usually light the menorah each night," one individual reported. In addition, some families also held Passover seders and observed both Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah (the High Holidays in Judaism). One couple also listed Purim and Shabbat in addition to these aforementioned Jewish holidays, and several spouses included Easter as well.

The next question prompted participants to explain, in further detail, their approaches to celebrating the previously mentioned December holidays: Christmas and

Hannukah, as well as any conflicts faced in the past surrounding the celebration of these holidays. Almost all individuals could not recall past conflicts, with the exception of one spouse who described his distaste in excess gift giving for both holidays. With regards to the inclusion of the holidays, most of the couples chose to integrate each holiday into their children's lives equally. "We made sure that [our children] saw the common denominator between the two holidays, to not focus on separation but to see that with both holidays it's all about tradition," explained one participant. Some couples, while choosing to integrate both holidays, also utilized unique approaches, describing, "we tried to separate that Hannukah is not like 8 days of Christmas. We had book night one night, and also Pajama night." Another participant recalled, "when [our child] was younger, yeah, he got presents for both. He got a present for each night of Hannukah, and then Christmas would roll around and there were gifts for that as well. As he got older, it became more intertwined." One couple described focusing on celebrating Hannukah while the children were young, and having more of a mixture of the two holidays (both Hannukah and Christmas) as the children got older.

Respondents were asked to discuss the traditions and practices that they feel are most important to pass onto their children. Three main answers were provided. First, that the children should understand basic morals and values. One individual explained, "I think the teachings that we think are important from both religions are more about how to treat other people, your role in the world, and how to take care of the world." Other couples mentioned the importance of family and tradition. "Having the family be together. Family always gets together during the holidays. Those are the values of the holidays and what they're all about," described one respondent. Some participants also

included the importance of believing in a higher being. One individual stated, “Believing, being open-minded. Believing in God and believing that there is another being out there that you can go to for help.”

When asked to describe the aspects of each religion that their children appear to value the most, some respondents were either unsure or could not point to anything in particular. Other couples described their children’s understanding of the importance of helping others, gratitude, and caring for other people. One participant explained, “I think the one value that they’ve really gotten from us is caring about other people. I think they have a strong sense and desire that the world does not necessarily revolve around them and that you’ve got to help other people.” Amongst the responses, there was no mention of a direct link to the learned values of either religion. “I don’t think it’s so much that they know this is a Jewish value, as much as it’s a value that they’ve learned and gotten through us through the Jewish religion,” clarified one spouse.

With regards to how family of origin has influenced decisions in their children’s religious upbringing, many Jewish individuals mentioned the significance of the holocaust and the importance of continuing the Jewish tradition. One spouse explained, “my parents were holocaust survivors so religion was huge, religion played a huge part in my life...Judaism is a big part of my life, and I’ve tried to transfer that onto my children and impress that upon them.” For other couples, the geographical distance that separated their two families of origin initiated the dominance of one religion over the other. “I would say [my child] has been around way more my family than, which is Jews, than he has around Christians,” described one individual. Another group of participants noted the generational continuation of the lack of religious emphasis in their own family of origin,

with one individual explaining, “I just think the way I was raised was much more open about religion...I think if you asked [my children], I kind of say look, I want you to make your own decision to practice Judaism.”

The final portion of the interview covered more general areas. Couples were asked to discuss other factors that have come into play in raising their children, as well as advice they could provide for other interfaith couples.

Although the answers provided were diverse, they can be broken down into two groups: couples who focused on raising their children in one main religion, and couples who did not enforce a specific religious upbringing.

Amongst the couples that chose to raise their kids as Jews, many of the individuals noted that it took hard work and consistency to ensure that the children would identify with Judaism. One individual explained, “I would say nobody chooses to be Jewish, it’s not a Jewish world. You can’t expect your kids to go and choose and say ‘do what you want.’ Religion is a family thing passed down from generation to generation.” The partners who gave up their religion for Judaism also felt that they had to make sacrifices. “You really have to be willing to give up a big part of your traditions; it’s not necessarily the religious part that’s hard to give up, but the traditions because it’s the more difficult side to give up,” described one spouse.

Couples who did not identify as being strongly religious, and who therefore did not enforce a particular religious identity for their children, appeared to face less challenges. “You know, the reason why it works for us so well is because we both didn’t have such strong beliefs, we just, both of us, believed in a family culture, and we do have very strong morals, right and wrong,” described one participant.

Respondents had several pieces of advice to offer to other interfaith couples choosing to raise children together. Many spouses noted that keeping an open-mind is key. “Respect people for who they are, not what they are,” clarified one participant. Another individual described that it would be important, “to keep an open mind and to respect the other’s religion and that it’s important to them.” Other couples pointed to the value in deciding on the religious strategies as early as possible and working hard to focus on those strategies. One participant noted, “if you make the decision earlier, it just makes a lot of the rest of that fall in line, but it doesn’t mean that it’s easy after that, because no matter what, you can only really pull it off if you’re involved and if you decide that you’re really going to try to understand and explain.” Amongst the challenges that were noted, one respondent highlighted the possibility of change in religious beliefs within one spouse, explaining, “you also have to prepare that life may change. I mean, certainly sometimes for people religion becomes important to them in a later stage of life. And that can be tricky for a family, even if you’ve decided on something in advance, maybe something happens to you in your life and you feel like it’s important to come back to a religion.”

## **Synthesis**

An open-ended question and answer format enabled the study to capture a variety of global responses from participants, which was predicted in the original hypothesis. Due to the limited number of participants and a lack of statistical analysis, no conclusive statements can be made regarding the results. It may be concluded that more empirical studies are recommended for exploring the areas covered in further detail.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **Summary**

The current study examined the various religious practices, holidays, beliefs, and traditions that Jewish and Christian spouses choose to integrate into their children's lives. Prior studies on interfaith marriage have found that most forms of ethnic and religious intermarriage have become more common over time (Kalmijn, 1991; Lieberman & Waters, 1988). Alexander and Sussman (1999) also asserted that intermarriage between Jews and Christians has increased significantly with each succeeding generation and reflects a trend in rising religious and ethnic intermarriage amongst all non-Hispanic Whites of European ancestry.

Researchers have examined rates of interfaith marriage between Jews and Christians as well as demographic characteristics of the individuals who choose to marry outside of their own faith. However, the particular practices and traditions that interfaith spouses choose to integrate into their children's lives, have not yet been looked at in depth.

To further examine the specific religious practices amongst interfaith couples, a total of 12 spouses, currently residing within the U.S., were recruited to take part in this study. Participants were presented with a 13-item demographic questionnaire assessing information such as age, sex, ethnicity, education, number of years married, and number of children with the current spouse or any step children. Subjects also participated in an 18-question audio-recorded interview that covered the religious beliefs and practices of

each spouse, as well as experiences and methods for integrating religion into the children's lives.

Results from this qualitative study revealed a number of different results, and is intended to be exploratory so as to direct ideas for further research.

## **Discussion**

Many individuals in this study, Jews and Christians alike, had very basic religious upbringings. Several participants described celebrating the major holidays from their religion of origin, but not necessarily having been fully educated about their religion in depth. This confirms findings from Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) stating that, "those who are more religious and more committed to the faith in which they were raised are predicted to have a lower probability of intermarriage" (p.260).

A majority of the couples that participated in this study were comprised of Jewish wives and Christian husbands. As a result, much of the data revealed that children in these marriages were raised based on a primarily Jewish framework that included the High Holidays (Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah), in combination with some of the major Christian holidays that were typically celebrated with the Christian husband's family.

Together, these findings suggest that the flexibility of religion within each interfaith spouse's family of origin, may influence the religious fluidity in which interfaith spouses choose to raise their children.

Some children attended Hebrew school beyond their toddler years, but most had only attended when they were very little, and only a few became Bar or Bat Mitzvah'd. All boys were reported to have been circumcised. This may indicate that for Jewish and

Christian spouses, religious ceremonies and religious education are either less important or less emphasized in raising children together.

Almost all participants described the importance of transmitting morals, gratitude, being a good person, family, and tradition onto their children. Most spouses also felt that their children had adopted these ideals rather than any particular religious concepts from either religion. It may be concluded that Jewish and Christian interfaith spouses emphasize non-religious values in raising and educating their children. Although one religion may be dominant, the particular tenets and beliefs of that religion may not be the main focus.

As a result of the Jewish wives being the primary religious educators of their children, Judaism appeared to be the dominant religion for most families. Many homes were reported to have mezuzahs and other Jewish fixtures, but no homes contained Christian symbols. Therefore, husbands claimed to know more about their wife's religion and not visa versa. This may indicate that, within Jewish and Christian interfaith marriages, if the wife is Jewish, the family will be primarily influenced by her religious background in deciding which religious traditions and practices the family adopts. This may confirm findings by Horowitz (1999), who asserted that women have an intrinsic power to define their children's religious identity within Judaism.

Most spouses had no issues in explaining their religious differences to their children. In most cases, the differences were either never focused on or were never made apparent. If the differences were discussed, many parents encouraged flexibility in their children's decisions for which religion to adhere to, regardless of the family's practices.

Therefore, Jewish and Christian spouses may favor religious freedom for their children rather than strict adherence to one religion.

The study also found that interfaith spouses had experienced little to no conflict throughout the course of their marriages (which ranged from 17 to 32 years together) in the religious upbringing of their children. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the couples had openly discussed their religious approaches to raising their children prior to marriage, and had also made decisions regarding how to integrate religion early on. In other cases, lack of conflict could be due to less involvement and enforcement of religion from both spouses. It may be the case that, for those individuals who value religion, early communication prior to marriage is critical. On the other hand, interfaith spouses that share religious fluidity may inherently encounter fewer obstacles due to placing less importance on this area.

Regardless of religious background, belief, and flexibility, almost all spouses discussed the importance of respecting the significant other's religious background and personal beliefs, particularly if these elements change throughout the course of the marriage. Having an open mind and flexibility in adjusting to the spouse's beliefs and approaches is critical for raising children together successfully.

### **Clinical Implications**

Implications from the current study revealed that although there are generally shared approaches amongst interfaith spouses, it is ultimately up to the spouses themselves to choose how to raise children together, and there are many successful approaches for them to choose from. However, success cannot be obtained without employing communication. Whether it is laissez-faire or hands-on, the religious approach

must be dealt with before having children, and counselors must also focus on communication between partners as part of interfaith couples counseling sessions.

Respondents also discussed the need for respect and openness between partners. Therefore, there is a need for competent marriage and family therapists who are sensitive to multi-religious backgrounds and ways in which religion and culture influence each partner's beliefs. Understanding each spouse's cultural and religious background is key to enhancing communication and decision-making processes for multiple aspects of marriage, including raising children.

Lastly, marriage and family therapists should be aware of their own biases and attitudes toward culture and religion in order to develop the necessary skills to work with interfaith couples and spouses.

### **Limitations and Recommendations For Future Research**

The goal of this study was to investigate the practices and methods that Jewish and Christian couples employ in the religious upbringing of their children. Despite the study's helpful results, the limitations of this study should be noted. First, the group sample was small and was only composed of Caucasian participants whose ages ranged from 43 to 57—an older age subset of the population. Secondly, this study only examined American interfaith spouses. Lastly, almost all wives that participated in this study were Jewish. Future research should focus on expanding the sample size, varying the mix of Jewish and Christian husbands and wives, and should also consider including participants residing outside of the United States in order to explore the role of other cultural factors in conjunction with religion. Future research should also include the religious experiences

of the children in Jewish and Christian interfaith marriages in order to gain their perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

Interfaith marriages have been on the rise for decades, and although this study sampled only a small subset of the population, the responses demonstrate that these individuals are indeed capable of successfully raising children together by collaboratively implementing particular strategies and approaches. Communication and respect is key, as well as the willingness to flexibly respond to beliefs and strategies that may or may not differ from an individual's family of origin. This study indicates that many Jewish and Christian spouses are deciding and choosing, early on, exactly how they want to integrate religion into their children's lives. Marriage and family therapists can assist in this process by facilitating openness and religious/cultural sensitivity from each partner.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INFORMED CONSENT/BILL OF RIGHTS FORM**

#### **California State University, Northridge CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

Exploring Parents' Perspectives On Their Interfaith Marriage (Jewish and Christian) and the Transmission of Religious Activities To Their Children

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

#### **RESEARCH TEAM**

##### **Researcher:**

Name: Jessica Jacoby  
Department: Educational Psychology  
Telephone Number: 818 399 0658  
Email Address: Jessica.s.jacoby@gmail.com

##### **Faculty Advisor:**

Name and Title: Michael Laurent, Ph.D., LMFT.  
Department: Educational Psychology  
Education 1218  
18111 Nordhoff St.  
Northridge, CA 91330  
Telephone Number: 818 677 2599  
Email Address: epcdept@csun.edu

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to capture the religious practices, beliefs, and traditions that are being transferred to children of interfaith marriages between Jews and Christians.

#### **SUBJECTS**

##### ***Inclusion Requirements***

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older, a member of any sect of Judaism or Christianity, are currently married to a spouse who is not of the same religious background, and have a child or children with a current spouse who is not of the same religious background.

##### ***Time Commitment***

This study will involve approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes of your time.

#### **PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will occur:

You will complete a brief demographic questionnaire (10 minutes).

You will participate in an audio-taped interview asking you questions regarding the religious upbringing of your child or children (45 minutes to 1 hour).

Time will be available, once the interview has ended, to ask questions or express concerns.

## **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

*None.*

## **BENEFITS**

### ***Subject Benefits***

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

### ***Benefits to Others or Society***

Greater understanding of how children and parents experience religion in interfaith families, which in turn will help counselors, therapists, and other mental health professionals understand this particular group.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

## **COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**

### ***Compensation for Participation***

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

### ***Costs***

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

### ***Reimbursement***

You will not be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses, such as parking or transportation fees.

## **WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

### ***Subject Identifiable Data***

All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed at the end of data collection.

### ***Data Storage***

All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password-protected. The audio recordings will also be stored on a password-protected laptop and then transcribed and erased as soon as possible.

### ***Data Access***

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically

required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

***Data Retention***

- The research data will be maintained for 3 years after the conclusion of the study and then destroyed.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep.

**Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

*I agree to participate in the study.*

_____	_____
<b>Participant Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed Name of Participant**

_____	_____
<b>Researcher Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed Name of Researcher**

## **EXPERIMENTAL SUBJECTS BILL OF RIGHTS**

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As an experimental subject I have the following rights:

- 1) To be told what the study is trying to find out,
- 2) To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices is different from what would be used in standard practice,
- 3) To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes,
- 4) To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be,
- 5) To be told the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study,
- 6) To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study,
- 7) To be told what sort of medical treatment (if needed) is available if any complications arise,
- 8) To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started. This decision will not affect my right to receive the care I would receive if I were not in the study.
- 9) To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
- 10) To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have other questions I should ask the researcher or the research assistant, or contact Research and Sponsored Projects, California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone (818) 677-2901.

X

Signature of Subject

Date



## APPENDIX B

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE/INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Demographic Questionnaire

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?** (Circle one of the following)

Less than High School

High School/GED

Some college

2-year college degree (Associates)

4-year college degree (B.A/B.S.)

Master's Degree

Doctoral Degree

Professional Degree (MD/JD)

**Have you previously dated an individual of a different religious background other than your own?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How long have you been married to your current spouse?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many children do you and your spouse have?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Are there any step-children? If yes, how many?**

**Have there been any other interfaith marriages in your family? If yes, how many?**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Religious Background:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Denomination:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How religious do you consider yourself to be?** (Circle one of the following):

Not at all      Slightly      Moderately      Highly

**How important is it to you that your child/children be raised in your religion?** (Circle one of the following):

Not at all      Slightly      Moderately      Highly

### Interview Questions: Interfaith Spouses & Raising Children

Describe your participation in your own religion as a child.

Were there any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that you participated in more often than others?

How would you describe your knowledge regarding your spouse's religious background--what are some major concepts that you've learned regarding your spouse's religion?

How you have explained you and your spouse's religious differences to your children?

Explain a time when there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with your spouse.

Describe any instances in which there were disagreements or conflicts regarding the role that religion played in raising your child/children with your spouse.

Explain how religion has shaped your child/children's upbringing.

How have both you and your spouse's religions been integrated into your child/children's life?

Does your child/children practice just one religion, both religions, or neither religion? Is there a dominant religion that is practiced?

Describe any religious symbols that are used in your home (such as a mezuzah or a cross).

How would you describe your child/children's attendance of religious services?

How would you describe your child/children's attendance of religious education classes (i.e. Sunday school, Hebrew school)?

Tell me about your child/children's participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies (such as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, etc.).

Describe any major Jewish and/or Christian holidays that you and your child/children celebrate.  
How do you celebrate?

How do you and your spouse celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah with your children? Describe any past conflicts regarding how to explain these holidays to your children.

Describe the religious traditions and practices that you feel are the most important to pass on to your child/children.

Tell me about aspects of each religion that your child/children appears to value the most.

How does your family of origin influence you or your spouse's decisions regarding your child/children's religious upbringing?

Describe other factors that have come into play in relation to your child/children's religious upbringing that you haven't brought up yet.

What important advice would you like to tell other interfaith spouses regarding the religious upbringing of their child/children?

## APPENDIX C

### Research and Sponsored Projects Approval Letter

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

Office of the Associate Vice President  
Research and Sponsored Projects

Jessica Jacoby  
934 Ellesmere Way  
Oak Park, CA 91377

Re: “Exploring Parents’ Perspectives on their Interfaith Marriage (Jewish and Christian)  
and the Transmission of Religious Activities to their Children” Research Protocol

Dear Ms. Jacoby:

Enclosed for your records is a copy of the cover sheet of your approved Human Subjects Protocol Form. Please note that approval for this project will expire on 2/25/14. If your project will extend beyond this date, you must contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects at least one month prior to the expiration.

If you have any questions, call this office at [818/677-2901](tel:8186772901).

Sincerely,

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

Suzanne Selken, Compliance Officer  
On Behalf of  
The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects

--

## APPENDIX D

### Human Subject Protocol Form

QuickTime™ and a  
H.264 codec are needed to see this picture.

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

## APPENDIX E

### Tables: Demographic Questionnaire Data

#### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1.a**

#### Respondent's Age

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
43-47	2	16%
48-52	5	42%
53-57	5	42%
Total	12	100%

**Table 1.b**

#### Respondent's Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	6	50%
Female	6	50%
Total	12	100%

**Table 1.c**

#### Respondent's Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percentage
White/Caucasian	100%

**Table 1.d**

#### Respondent's Education

Highest Completed Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Less than High School	0	0%
High School/GED	0	0%

Some college	2	17%
2-year college degree	1	8.5%
4-year college degree	4	33%
Master's degree	4	33%
Doctoral Degree	1	8.5%
Professional degree	0	0%

**Table 1.e**

**Dated outside of religion \* Sex**

<b>Dated outside of own religious background</b>	<b>Total/Percentage</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Female	5 (42%)	1 (8%)
Dated outside of own religion		
Male	5 (42%)	1 (8%)
Dated outside of own religion		

**Table 1.f**

**Religious background \*Denomination \*Sex**

<b>Religious background</b>	<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Sex</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
		<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>		
Judaism	Reform	1	4	5	42%
Judaism	Other/not specified	0	2	2	17%
Christianity	Protestant	1	0	1	8%
Christianity	Other/not specified	2	0	2	17%
Catholic	Other/not specified	2	0	2	17%

**Table 1.g**

**How religious do you consider yourself to be \*Sex**

<b>How religious</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Combined Percentage</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
Not at all	0	1	8%
Slightly	6	2	67%
Moderately	0	3	25%
Highly	0	0	0%

**Table 1.h**

**Years married**

<b>Years Married</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
17-20	6	50%
21-24	2	17%
25-28	2	17%
29-32	2	17%

**Table 1.i**

**Number of children together**

<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	2	17%
2	8	67%
3	2	17%

**Table 1.j**

**Interfaith marriages in family**

<b>Interfaith marriages</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	5	42%
No	7	58%



**Table 1.k**

**How important is it that your children be raised in your own religion \*Sex**

<b>How important is religion in raising children</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Combined Percentage</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
Not at all	2	1	25%
Slightly	3	2	42%
Moderately	1	0	8%
Highly	0	3	25%

## APPENDIX F

### Transcriptions

*Date: 3/31/13*

*Location: Video conference*

*Length: [35:27]*

*Interviewees: Coded*

*Interviewer: Jessica Jacoby*

*Transcriber: Jessica Jacoby*

*[A1, B1] = Interviewee initials*

*[I] = Interviewer Initials*

I: So, my first question is, describe your participation—and this question is for both of you—in your own religion as a child, and were there any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that you participated in more often than others?

A1: Who did you want to go first, me?

I: Sure, whichever. Whatever order you guys want.

A1: All right, well you know we celebrated all the Jewish holidays. We weren't big on going to temple; once in a while we went to temple. My brother, of course, was Bar Mitzvah'd, I was not Bat Mitzvah'd. I wasn't really pushed to go to Hebrew school or anything because I wasn't really interested in it. Um, but you know we did, mainly getting together with family and big holidays, um, I never learned Hebrew, never got involved in any of that. I was the rebel child. Um yeah but we went to temple maybe once a year and really, you know, we lit candles on Hannukah, we did the seder at Passover. I don't remember you know, being, I wasn't really raised necessarily religious. B1, how about you?

B1: I mean, for me it was very flexible. Are there any particular religious holidays you're interested in? Like family get togethers? Or religious holidays only?

I: Yeah, any religious related practices, traditions, or holidays or anything.

B1: The only ones while I was growing up was Christmas. There was also Easter—I remember we would come home and have a chocolate Easter bunny. So that was really it, it was very flexible. There were no rigid, religious things we had to do. It was a basic belief in God, you know, not this way or that way. It was just a basic, Christian upbringing. Not anything hardcore or anything.

I: Okay. And I have a bunch of questions that will touch on a lot of different topics related to religion—I'll ask questions that give you many different opportunities to talk

about religion. You'll have lots of options and I'll ask them in various ways. So the next question is: how would you describe your knowledge regarding your spouse's religious background—what are some major concepts that you've learned regarding your spouse's religion?

(A1 & B1 look at each other and start laughing)

B1: It's funny, you know, the basics that I've learned from Judaism is a very strong culture of you know, they tried to kill us, let's eat.

I: Ha ha ha.

B1: And there's a lot of stories of different events. And the things that I've learned from A1 and her family is to keep the traditions—it's a very traditional religion—and there's been a lot of attempts throughout history to annihilate the Jews and they failed every time so there's been, the Jewish people have always had back up from above. And then we eat!

I: Ha ha. And what about you, A1?

A1: And um I, I don't know, I mean I've always believed in God and I never went to church and we never really celebrated anything...

B1: I think she's asking what do you know.

A1. What have I learned? I don't know.

I: Okay, so maybe not a lot. Not a lot about Christianity?

A1: No, not really.

I: Then we will move onto the next question—how have you explained you and your spouse's religious differences to your children?

A1: Say that again?

I: How have you explained your religious differences to your child?

A1: Well I think we've been very open-minded with him. We've told him that we have our own beliefs and that you don't have to step into a church or a temple and speak to God. And that you can believe in what you want to believe in. Coming from a house where, we're not religious people. You can choose which things you celebrate.

I: Mm hmm.

A1: But we're very spiritual.

B1: Yeah and he has awareness.

A1: He knows that we celebrate all of the major holidays. He's gotten a little taste of everything.

B1: And I think it's always been about finding the common denominator between the two religions.

I: Okay, and explain a time when there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with your spouse.

B1: Well, men have to learn that women have to learn that they are subservient to men in every way and... ha ha, no no, I'm kidding.

I: Ha ha, that was a good one!

A1: I don't think we've ever really had any conflict?

B1: Yeah, really any conflict regarding religion.

A1: Not either one of us comes from a religious background.

I: Mm hmm.

A1: So no problems.

B1: Yeah I don't think we've ever had any problems.

I: Okay, so the next question is sort of related to the question I just asked but, describe any instances in which there were disagreements or conflicts regarding the role that religion played in raising your child with your spouse.

B1: I think the only time there would be conflict was not necessarily between me and A1, but more related to stereotypes and when stereotypes would come up.

I: Uh huh.

B1: Like when people would say things like, 'oh, you're so cheap, you're so Jewish' or 'you're Jewish so you must be cheap.' Or that you're Christian so you must have a stick up your ass. That stuff would irritate the crap out of me. And having to explain that to [our son] that there are people out there who are so narrow-minded and think that way.

I: Explain how religion has shaped your child's upbringing.

A1: Not at all. He doesn't believe in anything.

B1: No, but I mean, it's hard to say. We hope that some of the morals from each religion have been passed to him from us trying to convey why people have religions, that there's more to it.

A1: Hopefully he'll take what we've taught him and will bring it into his future with his kids. I mean, who knows what the future holds, you know?

I: Mm hmm. Okay, how have both you and your spouse's religions been integrated into your child's life? Does your child practice just one religion, both religions, or neither religion? Is there a dominant religion that is practiced? And on a side note, these are questions that I've written for the interview, but I know that they may seem a bit redundant based on what comes up naturally in our conversation.

B1: Neither.

I: Neither, okay. And describe any religious symbols that are used in your home, such as a mezuzah or a cross, or others.

A1: Well, we have like the hand of God up on the wall you know which is pretty universal. We don't have any like crosses, we do have a mezuzah on the door. Yeah, traditions. But you know we do have a Christmas tree around Christmas, we do light the menorah for Hannukah but, um, you know, we don't push for anything.

I: Okay so it sounds like it's mainly universal symbols—nothing particularly Jewish or Christian/Catholic, anything like that.

A1: Uh, not Catholic at all.

(A1 & B1 laugh together)

I: Ha ha, I do have to include Catholicism because it is part of the scope of my study. I'm looking at both. So, the next question, and I'm realizing that perhaps you've already answered this question but: how would you describe your child's attendance of religious services?

B1: Zero.

I: So nothing.

A1: Bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs, that's it.

B1: One thing we've sort of come to realize is that there's bat mitzvahs, bar mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals. So, of course we attend high mass every Sunday—ha ha, no.

A1: Very opposite of what other couples might be doing, like when both have been raised religiously in their own religion. So it would be interesting to see what those spouses end up doing.

I: Okay, and again this next question may seem a bit redundant, but how would you describe your child's attendance of religious education classes, such as Sunday school or Hebrew school?

A1: He did Sunday school when he was um, preschool age, just because I wanted him to have some idea of what was going on out there. Um, and of course he's been to holidays at family member's houses. He's been to grandma and grandpa's for passover seder. But um, it was more holidays than anything.

B1: Never any hardcore schooling.

A1: Only Sunday school when he was little.

I: And when did he stop going to Sunday school?

A1: I think he went for a year, and then we would have had to join the temple for him to go any further.

I: Oh, okay. And then tell me about your child's participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies, like a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, confirmation, or maybe baptism.

A1: Ha, I went to one when I was sixteen! But that wasn't very religious.

I: Oh sorry, say that again? Did you mean he attended one?

A1: Oh no, sorry you meant him. That was me!

I: Describe any major Jewish and/or Christian holidays that you and your child celebrate, and how do you celebrate.

A1: Hannukah I guess.

B1: Wait, holidays?

A1: She's saying any religious holidays that we celebrate.

I: Well yeah, any big holidays you celebrate that are related to either religion.

B1: There's St. Patty's day....uh, ha, no.

I: With a glass of beer, right? There's your religion!

(A1 & B1 laughing together)

B1: Christmas and Hannukah, mainly.

I: What do you guys do?

B1: We'll have a Christmas tree, send out Christmas cards, do presents. Um, lighting the menorah each night of Hannukah.

A1: Making potato latkes, having dinners for each holiday.

I: And when your son was younger, how did you do the gift situation? Like, did he get eight presents for each night of Hannukah plus morning of Christmas gifts?

A1: Yeah.

B1: When he was younger, yeah, he got presents for both. He got a present for each night of Hannukah, and then Christmas would roll around and there were gifts for that as well. As he got older, it became more intertwined.

A1: Yeah, he wasn't getting all those gifts once he got older!

I: So it's safe to say when he was younger, there was an equal amount of each holiday that he was exposed to. And it sounds like you really made sure that, with each of those traditions, it was very important for him to experience both, fully.

B1: As far as participation, when he was younger, it was much more Hannukah. Because of the lighting of the candles and saying the prayers.

A1: And being with his cousins.

B1: It was more of a décor thing for Christmas. The tree was in the house and there were Christmas lights up, but there was no participation.

A1: We always had our Hannukah ham!

I: How Jewish of you, eh?

A1: Ham and potato latkes, woo!

I: Ha ha, okay and I guess what I wanted to ask before was, was there ever any conflict regarding how to explain Christmas and Hannukah to your child?

B1: No, because we made sure that [our son] saw the common denominator between the two holidays, to not focus on separation but to see that with both holidays it's all about tradition.

I: So that was sort of the glue that held those two holidays together, and that, it sounds like, was what united those two holidays.

A1: It's kind of like, these are the two holidays we always get together at. It's when we're together as a family, and that never stops.

B1: And the point of tradition is to keep the family strong.

I: I like that. So, the next question is sort of a more global question but, describe the religious traditions and practices that you feel are the most important to pass on to your child. So what do you think are the most important to you, personally.

A1: Believing, being open-minded. Believing in God and believing that there is another being out there that you can go to for help.

B1: And at the same time having the family be together. Family always gets together during the holidays. Those are the values of the holidays and what they're all about.

I: So I hear, for you A1 there's the belief in a higher being and just in general a sense of spirituality for your child. And then for you, B1, I hear that for you religions and holidays are family and it's the importance of family and how religion is linked to that, and that's the biggest value for you to pass on—is that right?

B1: Yeah, and when families get together they really affirm their beliefs, that there is a higher power and that they should stick together because of it.

I: Yeah. And, tell me about aspects of each religion that your child appears to value the most? What have you observed?

A1: Hmm..me, me, me, what am I gonna get out of this...

(A1 & B1 laughing together)

A1: So um, we've really not pushed anything either way.

B1: He does definitely get caught up in the holiday cheer, though. There's something about the holidays that he's a little nicer to people, and I see him getting more involved in the holidays. Especially, he enjoys the gifts.

I: Ha ha, so yes of course he definitely enjoys the gifts but it sounds like he does value that time of the year and maybe that's a general...

A1: Well, we make it a big deal.

B1: Yeah, we do make it a big deal.



A1: We make it a big deal here. Whether it's getting together with family or friends, whoever we're close with, wherever we are, that's who we celebrate with.

I: Mm hmm. And how do you think that your family of origin has influenced you and your spouse's decisions regarding your child's religious upbringing?

B1: Well I think each side has invested a little bit in [our son]—'well of course you're going to raise him Christian, or of course you're going to raise him Jewish.' I don't know, does that answer your question?

I: No definitely, I mean it's an open-ended question.

B1: There's the feeling of obligation towards the elders. I mean I have no living parents, but I do accept the fact that they would want my child to have at least the knowledge of the religion that my family came from. Like, you know, A1 has actual living parents so..

A1: I would say he's been around way more my family than, which is Jews, than he has around Christians. But he, so we don't favor one over the other, we just, that's just how it was, because these were the people that were around.

B1: I think as a result there were a lot more get together's on that side—you know, bat mitzvahs, bar mitzvahs, weddings...

A1: ...Passover. We used to visit grandma and grandpa in Florida for Passover, actually. We would go every year. So he's been around a lot of Passovers.

B1: Yeah, unfortunately, he's been to a lot more happy events in Judaism, and the funerals he's attended have been related to church and Christianity. So, in his mind, Judaism might equal happy people and family, and Christianity, sad and funerals. You know it's something I hadn't even really thought about until now. It's probably shaped the way he looks at each.

A1: But he did do one fun thing.

B1: Yeah, he went on this trip—it was a Christian youth group in Flagstaff, they went up to the snow, and it was a weekend retreat thing.

A1: A bunch of the high school kids went, and it wasn't really religious. I mean I'm sure they did speak about Jesus and God, I don't know what exactly they spoke about, but it wasn't very influential. Yeah, we weren't there but that was the only other thing we sent him on. Like, he was having some issues and we thought: maybe this is a good thing. Maybe, you know, it would be good. And he did have a good time.

I: And when was that? The trip to Flagstaff.

B1: That was just last March or February?

A1: It was about a year ago, when [our son] was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

I: Okay, so it's pretty recently actually that he did attend something that was a religious, like youth social outing.

B1: The only thing that I think is a major turn off is that 'get in or get out' mentality—like, either you're with us or you're against us. There's just all of these ridiculous denominations in Christianity—what, you're not Christian? You're Catholic? It's like, are you kidding me?

A1: Yeah I mean, he has had some influence on each side.

B1: Yeah.

A1: Not a lot, it's basically just family and holidays. He's had friends of both religions and still does. You know, we're kind of like pretty open minded about 'you don't judge people by their religion or color or what political party they are.' So, I mean, that's probably, hopefully, brushed off on him.

I: So it sounds like something that you hope has been passed onto your child is the importance of not stereotyping, not boxing people in terms of religion and not, you know, kind of categorizing people. It seems like that equality and that openness of the religions is really important to you guys and important for your child to understand as well.

I think this leads in well to the next question I'd like to ask which is: describe other factors that have come into play in relation to your child/children's religious upbringing that you haven't brought up yet.

B1: That we haven't discussed yet?

I: Yeah, anything that you wanted to bring up or any other factors that you think have come into play.

A1: I like him to stay open-minded. Like, actually just the other day because of this interview I said to my son, 'when people ask you what religion you are, what do you say?' And he goes, 'I say I'm nothing.' And I said, 'well, why do you say you're nothing' 'Because I don't believe in anything.' So that's something that we need to look into a little bit further.

B1: Yeah, there's a maturity issue, you know? I think as he matures, he can discuss different things. As time goes on, I think he'll be able to think about it more. At this point, I don't think he can handle it. It's gotta be baby steps, you know? If we try to talk to him now, we'll just sound like Charlie Brown parents.

A1: Wah wah wah wah wah wah.

I: Ha ha ha.

B1: Does that answer that?

I: Yeah! And I guess I want to ask a little bit more about that, the fact that he does answer that way when he answers questions about his religious background. What do you think of that and how would you have hoped that he would answer that question based on the way you raised him?

A1: I wasn't hoping for that answer. I was hoping for a little more open mindedness, um, not so, 'well I'm nothing' 'well I'm this.' I don't think he's really had the chance to think about it, to tell you the truth. And he has been in a position where he's needed to really, um, you know, he had an option—I offered him if he wanted, to go to hebrew school, to have a bar mitzvah, but he wasn't interested. I wasn't interested when I was younger either. But I don't think, um...I would like him to say, 'well, you know, I do think there's a God out there and I believe this or I believe that.' But I don't think he's there yet. He's very influenced by other things in his life right now, and that's not one of them. It could change though if he meets the right person, it could change his beliefs. It's hard to say, though.

I: Okay, the very last question I have for you both, then, is what important advice would you like to tell other interfaith spouses regarding the religious upbringing of their child or children? What advice or tips do you have for them—what would you say?

A1: To keep an open mind

B1: To keep an open mind and to respect the other's religion and that it's important to them. Because it's important to them, you can't belittle it or try to take it away from them. Not forcing them to choose one religion over another. I just think that's so unfair and so unnecessary. That's usually because of selfish family pressure, you know? Respect each other's background—it's not just their religion, it's where they came from, it's where their generation came from.

I: And A1 do you have anything you'd like to add?

A1: Respect people for who they are, not what they are.

B1: I think it's important to respect each other's lineage and culture.

I: Mm hmm.

A1: Just because we didn't raise [our son] religious either way, doesn't mean we don't want him to not have belief in a higher power. Because, you know, whatever that may be. But at this point I think it is a maturity thing. And it's not a priority in his life.

*Date: 3/24/13*

*Location: Video conference*

*Length: [46:26]*

*Interviewees: Coded*

*Interviewer: Jessica Jacoby*

*Transcriber: Jessica Jacoby*

*[A2, B2] = Interviewee initials*

*[I] = Interviewer Initials*

I: Ok so, my first question is: describe your participation in your own religion as a child. And I'll elaborate on that--were there any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that you participated in more often than others when you were younger in your religion?

A2: Um, let's see, oh yeah we celebrated all the holidays--Hannukah, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. My mom was Hungarian and her father was a rabbi so she prided herself upon the fact that she was a 'super Jew.' Um, so we kept Kosher, we were Kosher at home, I went to Hebrew school, um, probably all through elementary school, after school, not a religious school, um and um I belonged to b'nai b'rith when I was a teenager for a short while--you know, went to dances and that sort of thing. Um, I think I went to a day camp once that was a Jewish day camp but nothing, other than that, nothing else.

B2: And what about Israel?

A2: Oh yeah and when I was 19 I spent the summer on a Kibbutz in Israel.

B2: And you've got family there?

A2: Yeah, I've got family there. My mom's sister settled there. Uh, we had a pretty large part of my mom's family was Orthodox, and they didn't really have a lot to do with us, because we weren't, but we did go to their weddings and that sort of thing. So um, yeah, it was very obvious to me what my religion was.

I: And what about you, B2?

B2: Yes, and you know I came from a strong Roman Catholic family. I went to Catholic school through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and even they were interested in seeing if I was interested in going to a seminary to become a pope. So, you know, all the holidays, and obviously being in Catholic school, and I'm the youngest of five, so we had a lot going on in the house. Christmas and Easter were all big holidays—they're obviously the biggest holidays but we were, we went to church every Sunday, my father was an usher, he was active in the church so we were pretty active.

A2: We did not go to temple a lot. Only on the holidays, only the high holidays, and other times that were related to Hebrew school events. But my parents did not go to temple on

Shabbat- actually my mother worked on Saturday's. So um and I don't even think we belonged, they weren't temple members, um, for a consecutive years, I think once in a while we were and sometimes we weren't, but no I don't think we went to temple regularly.

I: Okay and I guess I'll move onto the next question: how would you describe your knowledge regarding your spouse's religious background, um and maybe what are some major concepts that you've learned regarding your spouse's religion?

A2: Um, I can't say that I've done a lot of reading on Christianity, uh, but I think since I've married someone who is a Christian, um I think I am probably more curious about it, so we did go to Israel as a family, and so we learned a lot of background there and um every once in a while we'll watch a program on PBS about it.

B2: But, I think it's important to recognize that we made a decision before we got married as to how we were going to handle this, and I think that, that decision as it relates to what you're trying to look at, is that is where the time and effort is needed for couples, in our opinion, I didn't go into this thinking I was going to continue to practice Catholicism in the sense of bringing our kids into it. I mean, it was really clear, if we were gonna get married, it would only happen if we would agree we would raise the kids as Jews. So, that part of it I think while there's an appreciation, and A2 has a great knowledge for, you know, Christianity and Catholicism to an extent, um it was really more about my involvement in Judaism and all, I mean we've learned it all—because we've gone through all the life, okay well not all thank God of the life events...

I: A lot of em, ha ha.

B2: Right, we, when we were first dating, many of the couples we met, well actually I would say 90% of the couples we were friendly with in New York were interfaith couples. I don't know that many of them went through, went to the extent of what we did to try to figure out what we were gonna do. But, that I think lends itself to answering that question.

A2: Well I never really went to church much before I was married and we still don't go to church, but the few times that we've been, I think I've learned a lot more about the religion through the practices, and uh, you know the religious practices and things like that.

I: Mm hmm.

A2: Weddings, baptisms, funerals, so I think I know more about the religion than the average Jew who really doesn't, who's really not reading about it.

I: Yeah.

B2: And you know, because my family is pretty large, we have had a lot of events that we did come back for, but it was interesting that early on, also, we, because I didn't live where I grew up, or like we didn't go to like the church I went to when I was young very often and once, I, remember we went to midnight mass.

A2: At a Polish church, in New Jersey.

B2: And it was so weird.

A2: Weird for both of us.

B2: Right, weird and it was so eye opening because it wasn't like we were going to some place where friends and family, you know, had gone for years.

I: Okay, uh, so my next question is: how you have explained you and your spouse's religious differences to your children?

A2: Um...

B2: That's probably mine. Well, because they don't really know anything other than they're raised as Jews. They know I'm not but I don't think it really hits them too often, other than our youngest son, once he wanted to go to mass.

A2: And he was shocked that his Dad wasn't Jewish, remember? He said 'you're not Jewish?'

B2: Ha ha.

A2: He must have been about five at the time. I guess we didn't really process it.

B2: Clearly I didn't go, so it wasn't obvious to anybody in terms of, to the kids, there was no, they wouldn't have known that I was for any reason.

A2: And we always worshipped together. We never went to temple separately; well I never went to temple alone. So we always were together as a family, so there was never any reason for them to question it.

I: Mm hmm.

B2: And we went to temples that were accepting of the situation and were encouraging actually, so we were part of the interfaith couples at the temples.

A2: Groups.

B2: Right, and as A2 said, there was never really any evidence that there was some separation taking place. And that goes back to a conscious decision we made before we

got married. I don't know that we ever thought that it would, you know, go the way it went. But you know, that was very much our decision. And the other thing I think is really important is, because we moved to the west coast, we avoided a lot of the issues with my family. Now, we didn't do that on purpose, but they would've seen it a lot more because of the other events that we would've gone to with my family.

A2: But we did still celebrate Christmas with them if we were back east.

B2: But it didn't happen that often.

A2: No, and I guess I sort of just took it for granted that, that's what Jews do, ha ha, I don't know.

I: So it seems like the two of you were agreed from the beginning of the marriage that you were going to be united, and you wanted to be, there wasn't a separation, it was really a, it was valuable for you to be on the same front. At least for your children, to at least be together, to be integrated when it came to religion, to not...

A2: We would not have gotten married if we could not at least come to some sort of agreement. We actually visited a priest and a rabbi before we got married. And um, because that was a big concern of ours. And we wouldn't have gotten married if we could not come to some sort of agreement.

B2: We would've rather seen a counselor like you.

I: Ha ha. marriage and family therapy, yeah! So I'll move onto the next question. And these questions are all very different; they touch on a lot of different areas. Um, so, the next question is: explain a time when there was disagreement, if there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with your spouse.

A2: We really haven't had any.

I: Yeah, and it doesn't really sound like it. And that's why I changed the question to 'if you've had conflicts or disagreements.

A2: Yeah.

B2: Yeah, I don't think so. You know, probably I wouldn't say there was ever really a problem but some of the questions were about the holidays because before we had children it was like, I think A2 wanted to try to have me celebrate Christmas and so we had trees, we had Christmas stockings, some things, and then we made the decision that we really don't want to confuse the kids, we don't want them growing up thinking that there's two for them. We want them to be very clear about who they are, and so we stopped, we never really did any of that with them.

I: Mm hmm.

A2: But the funny thing is, as they got older and as I got more comfortable with them being comfortable with who they were, we started being a little bit more inclusive. Like, we always go out for a Christmas eve dinner, we always have a Christmas eve dinner, but we do that for their Dad. And we always gave my husband a gift on Christmas morning. We don't exchange Christmas gifts with each other, but there was always a gift for B2. And when their grandparents would send them a gift, it wasn't a Hannukah gift, it was a Christmas gift. And they do that.

I: Mm hmm, yeah. Um, and then I guess maybe the next question is a little bit similar, but describe any instances in which there were disagreements regarding the role that religion played in raising your children, specifically. So the previous question was about the two of you, and the next question is touching on your children, and maybe this is another another 'if' question.

A2: There really wasn't. We had made the determination and we went with it, um, you know the only disagreements we had were probably similar to disagreements two Jews or two Christians would have. It's saying, if there was a holiday we were celebrating and I felt overwhelmed because of having to do this and this and this, and my husband came home late, something like that, maybe he wasn't there to help me enough. But, you know, my parents used to fight about that too, so. It wasn't really...

I: It wasn't really religious specific.

A2: No, it had to do with other things, but religion was not the cause.

I: Mm hmm.

B2: I'm trying to think of any other rituals or things like that.

A2: Well we had, our older son had a bris, and when we first got married we were a little uncomfortable about not insulting people, not being disrespectful, and um we were living in California so we really didn't have a lot of friends and not a lot of family was coming out to that bris. So basically, it was my parents, not a lot of fun. That was probably the most uncomfortable I had ever been in my marriage, in terms of religion, because I didn't know who to hire—I hired this moyle, his last name began with a 'b' and I had no idea who he was, and he wound up being this orthodox, old man. B2 had to go pick him up in, we lived in Long Beach, and B2 had to pick him up in, I don't even know where.

B2: Downtown...

A2: Downtown, he got lost. Here I had this infant and I was suffering through postpartum depression, and it was just...and B2 didn't know, he had never been to a bris.

I: Ha, yeah.



A2: That was really uncomfortable.

I: Yeah.

A2: And it could've been such a joyous affair but it wasn't and when our other son was born, unfortunately our eldest son got the chicken pox when he was born, so we didn't have a bris for him. Um, he was circumcised in the hospital, we had a baby naming for him, about a month later, once Alex was better, and that was a totally different experience because we had family and friends, and it was just a different experience. And at that point we were a little more comfortable with our decisions and the religion.

I: Mm hmm. So, the next question, I guess it's a really broad question to answer, but explain how religion has shaped your children's upbringing, religion in general really.

A2: Do you want to take that, B2?

B2: I'll start off. I'll go back a little because I, when my parents heard that we were um serious and that we were gonna get married, their concern was, and because they're pretty simplistic, that well, aren't you going to confuse people with this Italian last name and you're, they're gonna be Jewish? So, um, and I do think that it's still really fascinating to me that there's still so many stereotypes that exist in the world, and I think I've seen them more so because people either assume I'm one thing or not, or they don't know what family is. It's, there's a lot of um, I think there's tremendous assumptions about it and people are at times pretty ignorant. And that sometimes has been one of the more difficult times for us. For me to feel uncomfortable because somebody assumes that I'm something or not, because I either happen to be, you know, in a certain circumstance or not. Um, and I'm sorry I'm gonna go back to the original question which was about the uh...

I: About your kids, yeah. But I do think it's still interesting what you're saying.

A2: How that had an impact on the kids.

B2: I actually, I mean, I think part of the reason why it was so comfortable for me and that I looked forward to was I had attended A2's nephew's, um, Bar Mitzvah and it's, there isn't anything comparable in Catholicism to a Bar Mitzvah where someone has to really study, and, I mean, there's not anything that's as intense. And I thought it was really just a kind of, it's uh, it was eye opening and I looked forward for our boys. And I think part of their experience, what's hard for me is not fully being able to share in it because I'm not the same religion and that separation sort of to me, I don't think for them, I don't think they've known any different, I don't think they've struggled with it, from their stand point, with it much at all, um, that I can think of.

A2: We have friends who have really large families, a lot of them are California natives and, you know, they have a ton of people going up to the bima when they have Bar Mitzvahs or Bat Mitzvahs. And one time, um, I don't know if it was my eldest son or

youngest, during one of the services he turned to me and said ‘who’s gonna come up there with me? Who’ll be up there with me?’ And I don’t know if it was so much that he thought his non-Jewish family members wouldn’t be allowed up there, or if it was just that we don’t have a lot of aunts, uncles, cousins, that kind of thing, I don’t know.

I: Yeah.

B2: Well, you don’t have on your side.

A2: I don’t, my husband has a million. But, they weren’t coming to the Bar Mitzvahs, not all of them came out.

I: Ah.

A2: Although a lot of them did.

B2: Yeah, they showed up.

A2: Ha, they were the majority at our Bar Mitzvahs. They were not the minority, that’s for sure.

I: Ha, okay, so my next question is: how have you both integrated your religions into your children’s lives. And specifically, um, maybe when they were younger, did your children practice just one religion? Um, I mean, I’m reading the question that I wrote, um but, both religions, neither religion, or there is a dominant religion that is practiced? Obviously you’ve answered this question, but if you want to sort of elaborate a little bit on how the religions have been integrated—is there anything else you’d want to add?

A2: Well we’re very involved. It wasn’t just the fact that we’re an interfaith couple and we decided to raise the kids Jews, which, everybody says well if the mother’s Jewish than the kids are automatically Jewish, we didn’t stop there. I mean, we joined a temple right away and we became very involved. There was Shabbat for Tots, I mean they started immediately. They went to JCC, preschool, and Mommy and Me so they were indoctrinated pretty early on, and it continued. I mean we belonged to Temple Judea in Tarzana and a lot of our friends belonged there and we all worshipped together and we celebrated holidays together and the kids all went to religious school together and not so much our eldest, but our younger son, had a huge group of friends who all turned 13 the same year and we were going to Bar Mitzvahs every weekend because we were friends with their parents as well. It’s a really large part, played a really large part of their lives.

I: Yeah.

A2: And we didn’t take it for granted, it was just sort of, we did charity work through the temple, and my husband was even on the board at one point.

I: Mm hmm, okay, wow. So it sounds like you both were really, there was a lot of presence of Judaism in their lives growing up, and in a lot of different areas of life.

A2: And it was religion too, it wasn't just Judaism, they were taught to respect religion.

B2: And we had an opportunity, whenever we went back, to go back East to see my family (and there was some of A2's family as well), and for the events that were religious in nature I think they had an appreciation for it. It didn't, I mean, they were pretty well grounded at that point so I don't think they ever struggled with what their identity was or having to worry about that. It was clear that it was one way, the other side of the family never factored into that and I think, again, it goes back to, again, that decision was made pretty early on, and we were comfortable enough with it to continue it.

I: Uh, describe any religious symbols that are used in your home such as a mezuzah or I had also said a cross.

A2: Um, we don't have any crosses in our home. We do have mezuzahs and actually, one of them was given to me by B2's sister in law as an engagement gift, um...

B2: Menorahs.

A2: Yeah, we were in Israel and we bought some Judaica there. Nothing Catholicism related, or nothing else.

B2: And we used to laugh because there were crosses in my house growing up, ha ha ha.

A2: Nothing really, I'm trying to think. No, nothing.

I: So just Jewish symbols in the home.

A2: Just Buddahs. That's as close to it as it gets. Ha ha.

I: Ha ha. Okay. And the next question, and you've already answered it, but how would you describe your children's attendance of religious services? And I think you've answered it, it sounds like, but if you wanted to add anything else to that question.

A2: I'm, they're pretty active, and they still, um, our youngest son goes to University of the Pacific, which doesn't have a huge Jewish population, but he belongs to Hillel. And he's a member of a fraternity but he still goes to Hillel events and you know, our eldest son goes too. He doesn't go to Hillel but he still goes to celebrate the holidays with our friends in Calabasas even though we don't live there anymore, ha ha.

I: Yeah, so they're both still actively involved in Jewish, or at least Jewish religious services.

A2: You know it's pretty common, I know statistically people in their twenties, college students, men and women in their twenties it's probably a time of least engagement in terms of religion so it's probably, whatever they're doing is probably a little more than the average person but not, you know, they don't go crazy with it.

B2: Yeah, and you know I do think it's different for our eldest who is out of school. So he has to make more of an effort, whereas our youngest is still at school and doesn't have a large Jewish population but he does still have Hillel events that, for those of us in school, to have a church or a group that you know you could go with to celebrate holidays. So it'll be interesting to see what happens when he leaves, if he is still as observant as he is now.

I: Okay. Uh, the next question, and again I apologize if it's a bit redundant but, how would you describe your children's attendance of religious education class such as Sunday school or Hebrew school?

A2: Yep, they did it all.

I: Yeah, and you were saying they even attended, I've actually never heard of this before, but you were saying Shabbat for...

A2: Shabbat for Tots. Every Sunday morning, oh yeah it was fun.

I: So Shabbat for Tots, Hebrew School...

A2: Yeah, every synagogue has something like that.

B2: Well, it's different, when they were growing up we lived in Long Beach and so the Jewish community in Long Beach is a very tight knit community because it's not very large, and it's really Long Beach and Orange County. So, it's not nearly what it is in the Valley, right? And we actually struggled a little bit because there's a lot of people that take it for granted in the Valley, or in L.A. That, in Long Beach, we had a pretty close group of friends and a few more who were interfaith there as well, so I think there were some of those things because they really tried to reach out as much as they could...

A2: To the interfaith couples.

B2: And the other struggle that always takes place is post Bar or Bat mitzvah, where the kids then are like, okay, they do religious school up until that point and then it's like, okay, we've had enough. And so, they both slowed down quite a bit.

A2: Yeah, but they both continued on, they both were confirmed.

I: Okay, so they did continue on, it sort of, um, like diminished a little bit, but they did participate beyond their Bar Mitzvahs.

A2: And our eldest son was even on the board of...what...Jistee [spelling]? Is that what it was called? The teenage group/youth group. He was on the board of that too.

I: Oh okay, so they were very involved.

A2: My eldest was. And they both worked as teacher's aids in the religious school, yeah they were pretty, they were involved.

I: Um, okay, and this has already been answered but...

A2: We talk a lot, ha ha.

I: No, you guys are wonderful! I prepared these questions to really cover a lot of different areas but...

A2: Well, not that many people ask us these things.

I: I'm, I'm happy to hear all this, it's great, it's better that it's redundant. So, it's, tell me about your children's participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies, like a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, confirmation, anything else. And so, if you want to elaborate on the Bar Mitzvahs, or you talked about their bris...

A2: Well, it's meaningful, it was important for us to not just have a party. They knew the significance of the event, and we worked really hard on those programs, and...

B2: And, to an extent, we're very happy with the way they turned out, but with our younger son, he went to a lot of them, and a lot of them were...

A2: Oh my god...

B2: Religion was a very minor part of what was going on.

A2: Ha ha.

I: Okay, and I'm sure we've touched on this a little bit but describe any major Jewish or Christian holidays that you and your children celebrate, and how do you celebrate? So I guess maybe going a bit more into the Jewish holidays and how your family celebrates them.

A2: Um, well we do, until now, we do observe Passover, we always went to Seders, um, we always fast on Yom Kippur, went to high holiday services.

B2: One of things we were actually talking about earlier when we knew this was gonna happen tonight, for Friday night...it was a night for us all to be together and it didn't always work out as well as we'd liked but it was important to try and keep reminding them.

I: Yeah.

A2: And we don't celebrate Christian holidays.

B2: Well, for me you do.

A2: Christmas eve dinner, we do a Christmas brunch, I always do Christmas brunch, but we don't go to church, and we never did Easter at all, not even like Easter baskets, no bunnies, not anything like that. And then, those are like the only Christian holidays anyway, right B2? Ha ha.

B2: Ha ha.

I: Ha ha, that's it, no more.

A2: Oh and there's Ash Wednesday... ha ha. Oh and there's St. Patrick's day, I'm sure my boys celebrate that one.

I: Ha ha, yeah. Um, the next question is: how do you and your spouse celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah with your children, and I also added: describe if there were any past conflicts regarding how to explain these holidays to your children.

B2: Well, we kind of answered this earlier by saying that we had the issue early on before they were old enough to know what was going on, and then we just decided that it was gonna be...

A2: And they never questioned, they never said, 'how come we don't celebrate Christmas because Daddy's not Jewish?' So easy for them to say, 'why can't we celebrate Christmas, every body else who isn't Jewish, does.' But, [turns to B2] remember that, when we went to Rabbi Karen? They invited a bunch of interfaith couples and they wanted us to discuss the December Dilemma.

I: And that's what I'm getting at actually, it's sort of funny that you mention that. Because, it's, I think for some couples and spouses, it is an issue, and that's why I ask.

A2: We didn't have one, ha ha.

B2: Well, the one thing that I think was interesting for us, is that we tried to separate that Hannukah is not like 8 days of Christmas and so, it was a very different holiday in terms of, we had book night one night...

A2: Pajama night...

B2: Something simple for them that, we tried to kind of downplay the expectations around some of what some of that was, and I think that's where what ends up happening

as parents is you do have to try to rely on, to some extent, the group of friends as to what they're going to allow their kids to do, because they do start to ask questions, if one gets something different, or they act differently, or they allow certain things to occur, we always tried to be vigilant about that and downplay some of it, but we didn't really have any issues.

A2: But even when we celebrated Christmas with B2's family, and they did go all out and above and beyond, it wasn't as though one year they were there and getting tons of gifts and the next year, 'how come last year we got a lot of gifts and this year we're not?' They never really did that, I don't know why, but they didn't.

I: They didn't question it, they just, whatever you were practicing with them and doing with them, it was just what it was. So, next describe the religious traditions and practices that you feel are the most important to pass on to your children.

B2: Well if we go back to the conversations we had with the priest and the rabbi, the way we characterized it was, it was all about values—the religious part of it obviously was important and ended up being a decision we made. Neither one of them condoned what we were doing, but they said that if you have similar values, that, that's what you're kind of gonna bring to the table, so our focus I think has always been on trying to use that to some extent.

I: Mm hmm, right. And I guess adding to that question, tell me about aspects of each religion that your children appear to value the most?

A2: Um, definitely repairing the world. You know that's a big part of Judaism and you know Christianity as well, um, helping others, and I think both of them are like that. I think that's a very comfortable concept that both of them have to deal with.

B2: I think that their sensitivity to the fact that their grandparents were holocaust survivors, cannot be understated in any way, shape, or form because that just puts them in a different place, and I think there's just a concern over that and having, when we did visit Israel, and it was kind of amazing to see that they saw A2's family and it was like the most amazing experience to see her cousin's daughters interacting with our kids like they had known them for their entire lives and they had never met before, and I think there's just some connection to understanding and appreciating that, and we've been to the holocaust museums and..

A2: In Washington, and in Israel, in L.A...

B2: It sometimes, I think it can seem very distant, but it was right there for their grandparents.

I: So, how do you think that your family of origin has influenced both of your decisions regarding your children's religious upbringing?

A2: Well for me, my parents were holocaust survivors so religion was huge, religion played a huge part in my life, and we don't try to play the guilt trip on our kids, and we don't say, 'you have to do things this way because your grandparents were holocaust survivors.' I don't try to deal with things in the same way that my parents dealt with them with me, so, but Judaism is a big part of my life, and I've tried to transfer that onto my children and impress that upon them and I think that, that has had an impact on them.

B2: It's interesting, I'm trying to think when, definitely I don't recall being taught when I was young, that the Torah was really the Old Testament, ha ha.

I: Yeah...yeah!

B2: Right? So, this idea that there is really this sort of commonality at least to the first half of the bible, to the Torah, to the Qu'ran, this sense that, that sort of gave me a little bit of comfort around the decision. That, it wasn't like we were, I'll pick on Mormons, like we were going to follow something that was invented in 1926. The older I've gotten the less religious, and I think they all have these crazy stories, and there's an aspect to them that is difficult to really fathom, that someone's gonna believe all this stuff. But, faith is important and we wanted to make sure that they had a singular faith, the kids did, and at times for me it was difficult. I thought, because I didn't convert, but I'm so active, you know, the comments to me that 'oh, you're really a Jew anyway' But it was like, I'm really not, you know, I know it's meant with love from the people who said it but, like I said, there's been a few things that have been said that have been a little odd. And the decision we made as to the impact on our kids, like I said, I don't think there's ever really been an issue there, like we said. But there definitely have been times when there's aspects of it that are uncomfortable for me.

A2: Yeah, not so much for me. But I, I'm connected to B2 and so I feel uncomfortable for him at certain times, but...

B2: You have to accept that uncomfortable component, or at least accept that you're gonna have to deal with it. I'd never tell anybody that just because you made the decision, that means, 'hey, it's gonna be easy at that point.' It isn't, you still think about it every now and then, and there are aspects of, like Christmas, the religion that I enjoyed and remembered fondly, and I thought, 'but my kids will never have that experience, they'll never go through that in the same way,' but they have other things that I never had.

A2: But we don't really want them to have that at this point. You know, we want them to remain as Jews, and it's kind of hard for us to preach that because, 'do as I say but not as I do,' I think they know how we feel.

B2: Well, and the other thing is, and I don't know if you were gonna get to this, but the other thing I think that for us was really difficult to hear was how the big problem that they talk about in Judaism is interfaith marriage. And, you know, in our case, not that we're gonna toot our own horn, but that isn't our problem, and our problem is not the



interfaith marriage part, it's the decisions after that, about how someone decides to raise their kids and whether they're gonna be active or not. But, you know, we have plenty of friends who are interfaith marriages and are very active and raise their kids Jews and there was never any issue to it. Sometimes, that part is a little hard to listen to, and I mean I understand the numbers and how it works and why it is, but it's usually a lack of involvement from the couple.

A2: But then we have friends who are both of the same faith, and you know, they don't worship together, and one spouse is really not as active as the other one or involved, and then, it could happen to anybody. But it's definitely easier when you're of the same faith. It's something that you don't have to deal with.

I: So I have two more questions, and I think I'll ask them together. So, the first one is: describe any other factors that have come into play in relation to your children's religious upbringing that you haven't brought up yet, that's the first question, and then the second question is: what important advice would you like to tell other interfaith spouses regarding the religious upbringing of their children?

A2: Um, factors that we haven't discussed yet with our children? Well, as we said, the time has not yet come for either one of them, thank goodness, to settle down with one person, so we don't really impress that upon them.

B2: Well...

I: Ha, I think B2 disagrees.

A2: Well, we do.

A2: Well, we don't nail it down with a hammer. They know how we feel, but there may come a time when we have to be a little bit more firm ha ha. Um, but other than that, there's nothing else, I can't tell them how to observe, they're grown-ups already so we only know what we've given them in terms of a base, and hope that eventually they'll carry through with it, but I can't, my mother would say, 'Are you eating bread?' and I don't do that, I don't ask, I sort of skate around the issue, 'Do you have any plans for the holidays? Do you have any services?' and we just trust that they'll do what's right, and most of the time they do.

I: And, other than what you've said already, do you have any other advice or tips for other interfaith spouses? Is there anything in general that you'd like to advise to others that might be helpful?

B2: Well, I would say that the common thing that we would hear from couples who would talk about it, and I guess it would apply to any religion is, 'My kids will decide when they're old enough.' And that's true no matter what happens when they're younger. So our view was, we didn't want them to a) Be confused, or we wanted them to feel comfortable in their faith. And faith was important and obviously we made a decision

about it and I do think that, if you make the decision earlier, it just makes a lot of the rest of that fall in line, but it doesn't mean that it's easy after that, because no matter what, you can only really pull it off if you're involved and if you decide that you're really gonna try to understand and explain. And in some ways, maybe it was easier for us because we picked one and we didn't really have to keep explaining and keep educating, and so, if someone takes on that challenge, then yeah, they could do it, but they'll have to keep explaining those things and trying to figure out how to adjust, and we simplified it for ourselves and so while it was not the simplest, because obviously if we were the same faith it might've been simpler in some ways, but maybe not, part of it was we decided to take on the challenge of how we were gonna try to make sure they had as clear of an upbringing as they could so I think that's probably the advice I have: is to just think through it, because at certain times as you get older, you start thinking what like, for instance, what would happen if I died, what would we celebrate? Where am I gonna be buried? Things like that.

A2: And we need to translate that to them too, because I'm not going to be giving last rites by a Priest, and my husband's not gonna be given last rites by a Rabbi, and they need to know that, they need to be clear about who's gonna be coming, ha ha.

B2: Well, it's funny you say that, but since we moved, things have changed since the temple we belonged to in Tarzana. But, had it been a few years ago it probably would have been Rabbis because Rabbis were the religious leaders in our lives, so, if we had asked them to participate they would have done it. So, there's no doubt and they knew me, and there was no priest that knew me.

A2: That's true.

B2: And it's interesting that it puts a responsibility on them too, we would ask them for that, and I guess they would do something...they had a Rabbi on the bima every time I was up there, so it was almost like, well I'm already up here so might as well get it done now, ha ha.

I: Okay great, well thank you guys so much for answering my questions—you've really been very helpful, and I've enjoyed hearing all of your answers.

*Date: 4/9/13*

*Location: Oak Park, CA*

*Length: [34:53]*

*Interviewees: Coded*

*Interviewer: Jessica Jacoby*

*Transcriber: Jessica Jacoby*

*[A3, B3] = Interviewee initials*

*[I] = Interviewer Initials*

I: Okay, so let's go ahead and get started. So my first question for you guys is: describe your participation in your own religions as a child, and were there any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that you participated in more often than others?

A3: Okay so I was raised Jewish and we were in a conservative temple with the synagogue, most weeks we went to temple, and we were pretty traditional. We weren't super religious though, like we didn't keep kosher, and we were kind of a modern Jewish family. Uh, we celebrated all the Jewish holidays, um, yeah I don't know what else to say.

I: That's okay.

A3: Um, yeah.

B3: So uh I was primarily raised Catholic so of course we did the usual Christmas, Easter, were big holidays. Um, kind of when I was around fifth grade my parents became born-again Christians so they got involved in that and sort of less involved in Catholicism.

I: Mm hmm.

B3: But, uh, I still had to go to church, um, and I had sort of had an ambivalent feeling toward both of those things, and uh then by the time like end of high school I kind of stopped going to church, and then in college I tried to get into religion a little bit, and for the most part decided it was not too exciting for me.

I: Mm mm, okay.

A3: Yeah, and my husband went to a Catholic high school all the way through high school as well but um...

I: Oh, okay.

A3: I probably, you know, waned off of participating more in college. I was part of a Jewish youth group all through high school and I always assumed I would live kind of a more Jewish life.

I: Okay. The next question I have is: how would you describe your knowledge regarding each others' religious backgrounds, and what are some major concepts that you've learned regarding each other's religion?

A3: Wow.

I: I know, ha ha, it's a big question, right?

A3: I think for me as far as Catholicism I kind of really haven't learned that much. Mostly just holiday-related stuff except from my in-laws, but nothing really too much on the religious side. But our son is now going to a Catholic high school, and I'm picking up a few things from him., ha ha. Um, but I would say my knowledge is pretty simple. Just the holidays and um, yeah. Basic things.

I: Mm hmm.

B3: Uh, I guess I've learned a fair bit. Before we got married we did go to like a class in Judaism and then we primarily raised our family Jewish, so I participated in the holidays and you know, does that answer the question?

I: And you have two sons, correct? And so are both of them attending a Catholic school?

A3: No, it's just one who's attending a Catholic High School. He had gone to Hebrew school, and he had his Bar Mitzvah. My other son is taking Bar Mitzvah classes but is still undecided.

I: Okay, so the next question is how have you explained your religious differences to your children?

B3: So, we haven't a lot. Um, because we, even before the kids were even born, we kind of decided that we were going to raise the kids Jewish. So, we kind of just went with that, and then you know obviously we believe that everybody's free to believe what they decide is right for them. Um, and we have participated in my family's traditions of like Christmas and Easter but more of the secular side of those things.

I: Mm hmm. Okay so, just to clarify, the kids have been raised Jewish, that was the decision. And then, this is probably going to come up later in the interview, but when did the decision come, who made the decision to send your son to a Catholic high school?

B3: I really don't think the decision was religious, it was more about the school.

I: So it was mostly just the quality of the education at the high school.

A3: It's a nice and small environment, and there's really not that many choices in L.A.

B3: And frankly a lot cheaper than the Jewish high schools.

I: Ha, yes, they can be quite expensive, so financially it's always a good decision to save. Okay, and explain a time when there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with each other.

B3: Uh well, every Passover there's a lot of unhappiness about the eating restrictions... not a lot of excitement about the fasting...

A3: Nobody fasts! There's nobody who fasts. So yeah, nobody's thrilled about the negative participation that revolves around that holiday. Also, my husband and I, and maybe he goes to services to support me, but it's really not too much fun for him or the kids really. So it's been kind of disappointing for me that the kids haven't enjoyed that sector of religious life.

I: Yeah. Um, okay, and describe any instances in which there were disagreements or conflicts regarding the role that religion played in raising your children.

A3: My husband would seem like he was pretty fine about it. I mean, the only thing just might be, I feel kind of bad asking him, asking people, to participate when they're not that enthusiastic about it, or when it's not that much fun for them. So um, or not that meaningful, so I guess that's the only conflict. About raising the kids, I think we decided that he was okay about it. We didn't really have any conflicts about that.

I: So it wasn't so much that there was conflict per se, but more of an ambivalence with certain religious practices.

A3: Yeah, that's a good way of putting it.

I: Okay.

A3: And then we dated a long time too, so I think we had a long time for some of those things to come up, and for him to get comfortable with what I do, and me to find out that he wasn't really doing anything, but he didn't seem against doing something for the family.

I: Mm hmm, and how long did you guys date before you got married?

B3: 6.5 years?

I: So that is a long time, you had a long time to really learn about and explore each other's religious backgrounds and how you were going to handle different situations before you got married.

B3: Yeah, well I wouldn't say we spent a lot of effort.

I: Mm hmm. And explain how religion has shaped your children's upbringing in general.

A3: Um, wow. Well it was important for me that they learn about their heritage and learn just the basic morals and teachings, and I think they have learned that. They kind of seem, at this point they're not that interested in participating much. But they have learned a lot and I think that's been a positive thing.

I: And B3, what do you think?

B3: Well, they're not too enthusiastic. At this point, they're more leaning toward being sort of agnostic and not particularly religious. Um, and probably sort of my ambivalence toward religion has had some effect on that.

I: And how so, would you say? How would you explain that effect on them?

B3: Well I, although I was fine raising the kids Jewish, I obviously haven't gotten that involved in it and, you know, I'm a little ambivalent toward religion in general. You know, I think kids catch onto that.

I: Okay, I understand, yeah that makes sense. Let's see, what's the next question. How have both of your religions been integrated into your children's lives? And I guess you sort of answered this earlier a little bit but do they practice just one religion, both religions, or neither religion, and is there a dominant religion that is practiced?

B3: So, the family really only practices Judaism with the exception of doing holidays with the extended family.

A3: But they do enjoy that.

B3: But it's more of a secular participation.

A3: Yeah.

B3: And then, our son going to a Catholic high school is forced to go to masses there, but we don't go as a family.

A3: Yeah, and he does take religion classes like right now he's doing the life of Jesus Christ and last semester he did the Old Testament. So we feel like it's good to learn more about any religion and I really do want my kids to come to their own spirituality, I guess. I was hoping that it would be more important to them but at this point in their lives they're going to go through a lot of changes and at least they have a background if they want to use it later. If it becomes more important to them later, then that's great and if not, then that's okay too.

I: So at this point, there's really been more of a focus on... I guess not religious participation per se, but there's an openness to learning about religion and it sounds like

Judaism was obviously the main focus in terms of what was being practiced growing up, but it sounds like there's also an openness to that general sense of spirituality. So Judaism is the focus, but I'm also hearing that spirituality is also...

A3: It's hard, because our family is not very spiritual and even our temple, like, it's probably the least spiritual-feeling type of place. Our temple is a little drier. So, for me personally, I was, you know how Judaism can be more about practice, and a little less emphasis on spirituality, and that was certainly my experience growing up until I went to Jewish camp, which I found some sense of spirituality in and it probably was my link to wanting to raise my kids that way and practice. But, I haven't been able in any way...my kids have not experienced that. So if they find that later in life I'll be happy for them but maybe they didn't need it and maybe that just doesn't fit into... they're bothered by it, it just doesn't seem logical to them.

I: I'm sorry, what doesn't seem logical to them?

A3: Like spirituality or belief in God.

I: Okay. And B3 did you want to add anything to that at all?

B3: Ah, no.

I: Ha ha, okay. Describe any religious symbols that are used in your home, such as a mezuzah or a cross.

A3: Yeah, we've had a mezuzah up in our home, and our kids went to Hebrew school and made them and we put those up as well.

I: Mm hm.

A3: But I wouldn't say they're our focus. We don't really have a lot of religious symbols. We'll have a menorah for Hannukah, and we'll have a seder plate, you know, for Passover, but we don't really have a lot out all the time. Um, we don't really have crosses up at all but um I don't know... every year for about 5 years one of our kids got a nativity scene from his grandma.

B3: We would never put it up, though.

A3: Yeah, we never put it up.

I: Okay, interesting. So it was received as a gift, but it was never put up in the household.

A3: Right, so I wouldn't say that we really have a lot of religious symbols in the house.

I: Okay, and how would you describe your children's attendance of religious services?

B3: Ah...very, very little.

A3: You know, we started out when they were little, we used to go to Tot Shabbat regularly when they were like preschoolers, but since then I'd say it's been just a few times a year.

I: Mm hmm.

A3: And when they were in Hebrew School they had to do tefillah. And they would go to tefillah like once a week, but, and one of my sons still does, but very begrudgingly.

I: Mm hmm. And are there any particular high holidays that they attend?

A3: Well, I usually drag them to the high holiday services and then I'll go, like their Hebrew school will have a fifth grade Shabbat. And when one of my sons was leading up to his Bar Mitzvah we went to services a little more regularly to get more comfortable for him but my other son's just been dragging everybody and they're honestly not that fun. They really are not enjoyable services and I have to admit even more myself, um, so it's hard to get momentum for everybody to go.

I: How would you describe your child/children's attendance of religious education classes such as Sunday school or Hebrew school?

B3: So one of our sons went all the way though his Bar Mitzvah and our other son is almost to the point of having a Bar Mitzvah. Um...

A3: He's been going like twice a week.

B3: But, since our son has been going to a Catholic high school he's also been taking religious classes at the high school.

I: Okay, and let's see, and some of these questions may seem a bit redundant because basically the more talkative you are the better, because it means you're telling me more information and covering more areas, which is great! But it also probably means that some of the questions may come across as being redundant. So, but tell me about your children's participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies and that would include the Bar Mitzvah's but then also confirmations, baptisms, those sort of things.

B3: So they didn't do any Catholic rites at all.

A3: They had a bris.

I: Mm hmm.



A3: Uh, they had, one of my boys had his Bar Mitzvah and my other son is in Bar Mitzvah training, but actually he really does not want to do it so we'll see if we actually go through with that. Um... anything else?

B3: Confirmation?

A3: Confirmation, I think our eldest has stopped at this point, so at this point he's not on track for confirmation.

I: That sounds pretty straight forward, I guess. And, describe any major Jewish or Christian/Catholic holidays that you and your children celebrate and how do you celebrate them?

B3: Uh okay so for Christmas we usually go over to my parents or one of my brother or sister's house and usually have family party dinner etc. and sometimes we'll actually go and cut down a Christmas tree with my parents to help set it up for them at their house.

A3: We hang stockings at our house.

B3: We actually do hang stockings.

I: Okay.

A3: And Easter, same thing we'll go to your sisters or something.

B3: Sometimes we do Christmas presents for the kids, and we also do Hannukah presents for the kids. You know we usually light the menorah each night., and sometimes...

A3: Yeah, so we do Hannukah. Oh sorry, what were you about to say?

B3: I said sometimes we'll also do something for the more minor Jewish holidays.

I: Mm hmm.

A3: Yeah, we'll make hamentashen for Purim or we'll, you know...I don't know, what else do we do...

B3: Well a few times we've done kind of a dinner thing.

A3: And a few times for Purim we've actually gone, when the kids were young, we would go for the Purim service and um and then the high holidays we just go to services and...

I: So Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, and then you also said you do Passover as well?

A3: Yeah, we do Passover. My family is not that close together to each other but we'll try to get together with a member of my family, actually the past couple of years my sister and I made a seder together which is really nice. Um, this year we went to my parents. So, yeah, we try to do something with them but it's just not easy for every holiday and I think it's been kind of, you know, it's been not too bad because growing up that was kind of a big thing for us all, we'd get together with the extended family for some of the religious holidays.

I: Yeah. So another sort of related question touching on Jewish and Christian or Catholic holidays is, how do you celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah with your children and describe if there have been any past conflicts regarding how to explain these holidays to your children.

B3: I don't recall any conflicts, honestly.

A3: No, not really. Yeah, it's all been fine.

I: Okay. Next, describe the religious traditions and practices that you feel are the most important to pass on to your children.

B3: Hm.

A3: Huh, that's a great question.

B3: So, I think what we decided was that it wasn't really so much a matter of which religion we were going to raise our kids, we just wanted them to have a sense of the religions' values.

A3: The morals, the teachings and I think the teachings that we think are important from both religions and are more about how to treat other people, your role in the world, how to take care of the world, um...

B3: I think it was fairly easy for me to decide that we were going to go with Judaism because Christianity adds a bunch of other stuff, which I was quite happy to drop off.

I: Mm hmm, like what?

B3: Judaism is a much simpler religion. I don't know, just a lot of beliefs that I thought were sort of extremist.

I: So what I'm hearing is that you like that Judaism is more of a focus on sort of the morals and values and that core of the religion.

B3: Yeah, and there's still a lot about family participation and that value. But, without having to believe a whole bunch of other things.

I: And I'm curious, what are some of those things that you were happy to let go of?

B3: I think just the whole idea of trinity never really worked for me. And, the church service has a lot of things like you're eating the body of Jesus and drinking his blood.

I: Yeah.

B3: And mostly it's just magically turned into it, and I, I just didn't buy it. I was happy to leave that behind.

I: Yeah.

A3: Well I think I just really wanted to continue my tradition. I probably felt stronger than my husband did about carrying on the religion, and you know your sort of level of belief is not very important in Judaism. There's no, like, you don't have to believe in anything to participate in Judaism whereas Christianity is based on faith. Judaism is based on action and acts, you know? And in Christianity there's a bit of a different focus.

I: Interesting.

A3: At least in my perspective. I wouldn't feel comfortable in a religion that asks me to have that faith. I think the thing that might not be comfortable for my husband, and maybe I'm wrong, but Judaism puts an emphasis on 'the chosen people' and 'our people, the people of Israel' you know, our history. I don't know if that makes you [B3] feel excluded at all.

B3: Maybe, but I don't really care.

A3: Ha ha.

I: Ha ha. And, tell me about aspects of each religion that your children appear to value the most. What do you think has been their outcome?

A3: Presents. Ha ha. Right now, I don't know, they're also just being 12 and 14. Not really so much into admitting valuing anything. I do think that it has shaped them unknowingly, though.

B3: Sure.

A3: You could ask them in 4 years and they might feel differently.

I: And in what way would you say that they've been unknowingly shaped or unknowingly value things about the religion?

A3: Well I think they're very questioning and skeptical and I think that could be something that's been allowed and that's been a part of their Jewish education. Um, I

think at our synagogue and hopefully in our family we value community service and you know trying to do good things for others. And I think they do have a general sense of citizenship and caring for others that maybe is a part of that.

I: And when you say that they're questioning or skeptical of things, what do you mean by that?

A3: Just the existence of God and, you know, the face value of the stories in the bible. So, for example, one of my sons at Hebrew School when he was in kindergarten they went over creation. And he's raising his hand saying, 'uh, don't you know about the dinosaurs?' You know, from day one he's been questioning it. They've been pretty okay with him doing that, and we have as well. So, I don't know if that's good or bad, but that's how it's been.

I: Yeah, neither good nor bad, it's just interesting. And how do you think that your family of origin has influenced your decisions regarding your children's religious upbringing?

A3: Um...

B3: I guess, certainly I've had a sort of ambivalence due to the fact that my parents changed around their religion growing up. And that made me sort of not excited about it at all, so I didn't really care, so that influenced me to not raise them in the same religion.

I: Mm hmm.

A3: I think, are you asking about my parents and his parents?

I: Yeah, yeah. And B3's on the right page, there's certainly many different ways of answering the question.

A3: I think my husband's family would probably love it if we raised them Catholic. They've made a few comments to me, to show me that they are very accepting of the fact that we're raising our family Jewish. You know, I think they think it's one step on the right path but maybe not all the way there. So, they've been accepting of me, which has been great.

A3: I think the question though, was how did your upbringing influence your decision to raise the kids Jewish.

A3: Oh, is that what you're asking me?

I: Yeah, and I think it's okay to talk about B3's parents as well, but yeah.

A3: Okay, so my upbringing, yeah. My parents, I feel like I had a pretty good experience for the most part, religiously, growing up. It was a good part of my life, and I wanted to continue that. Um, yeah, I would say especially having gone away to Jewish camp, was a

solidifying experience, and made me really want to continue it probably more than any other thing with my family.

I: So the Jewish camp, I hear that, that that was a very meaningful experience for you and that it was one of the major factors that helped solidify...

A3: And then I sent my kids to Jewish camp, but they didn't want to go! But yeah, it was just a great experience for me. It was the time period in my life and it was important. And, did you want to know how our families feel about raising our kids Jewish?

I: Yeah, I mean if you'd like to share, sure.

A3: I think I sort of misunderstood the question.

I: Well, if you do want to share I would like to hear.

A3: Okay, so I think my parents would prefer that each of their kids married a Jewish individual but none of us did. But I think we all made some sort of attempt to raise our kids Jewish. And um, I think they've been fine with that.

I: And B3, what about your parents?

B3: My parents were thrilled that somebody was willing to marry me!

I: Ha ha, oh, now. Well I just have a few more questions and I think what I'll do is combine the two since they're both very big questions. The first part is describe any other factors that have come into play in relation to your children's religious upbringing that you haven't brought up yet. So that's the first part. And then the second part is what important advice would you like to give to other interfaith spouses regarding the religious upbringing of their children?

B3: So I think really the most important thing is to just decide everything before you have kids.

I: Mm hmm.

B3: So, we haven't really had a lot of conflicts and it's mostly because we kind of decided what we were gonna do before we had our kids and were confronted with any issues.

I: Mm hmm.

A3: Yeah, I think it can be bad to wait and then it turns out to be important to both of you to do your own religions. I think you can do both, I think, certainly like [my brother and sister-in-law] succeeded in each sharing what was important to them with their kids, and I think their kids benefited from that too. So there's a lot of great ways, I don't think

there's a wrong way, but I think as B3 said it's talking about it in advance, deciding in advance, but you know you also have to prepare that life may change. I mean, certainly sometimes for people religion becomes important to them in a later stage of life. And that can be tricky for a family, even if you've decided on something in advance, maybe something happens to you in your life and you feel like it's important to come back to a religion. And I think that's something you have to acknowledge that might happen later on, when you marry someone who is of a different faith.

I: Yeah.

C: But also I think, like what you were saying earlier [pre-interview] there are so many people, it's just so integrated now, it's not really, unless you're living a more orthodox life, a more insulated life, you're just as likely to marry someone who is Jewish as someone who is not Jewish now, or visa versa. I think you have to make a sincere effort with it. You know, you meet someone who's the right person for you, and there are lot of people out there.

I: So it's really about being on the same page going into the marriage. It's all about being prepared and open about it but then at the same time, you never know, it's also maybe being open to things in life that can change and beliefs that might change for some people, for some spouses. That's the reality of the situation as well is, there has to be an acceptance of that flexibility in what could come up and how people feel about religion and I guess what it means to them.

So, is there anything else that you'd like to add, any other factors that you haven't brought up yet? Anything on your mind you'd like to share?

A3: Well, I've got laundry to do tomorrow... ha ha. No, that's it, thank you Jessica.

I: Thank you so much for participating, both of you.

*Date: 4/14/13*

*Location: Oak Park, CA*

*Length: [1:00:55]*

*Interviewees: Coded*

*Interviewer: Jessica Jacoby*

*Transcriber: Jessica Jacoby*

*[A4, B4] = Interviewee initials*

*[I] = Interviewer Initials*

I: Let's get started. My first question is, describe your participation in your own religion as children. Were there any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that you participated in more often than others?

B4: I went to church on Sunday, bible study on Wednesday, we celebrated Christmas and Easter.

A4: How long did you go to bible study, like how many years did you spend doing that?

B4: Oh, quite a few actually. Yeah, it was up through high school.

I: Wow. And then, okay? Any then any...

A4: I should have done this interview before I married him!

I: Ha ha. I know, maybe you'll learn quite a bit about his religious upbringing. And what about you?

A4: I started Hebrew School when I was 5, and I went all the way through until I was 15. So, and we went to temple like a lot times on Friday's, had my Bat Mitzvah, had my confirmation, and celebrated all the holidays, yeah.

I: Mm hmm. Okay. And how would you describe your knowledge regarding each other's religious backgrounds. And, maybe, like A4 you had said that...like, what are some major concepts that you've learned regarding each other's religions?

B4: Well I was raised Methodist Baptist, I know a lot more about hers than she does about mine. Considerably more, ha ha.

A4: Well yeah, you converted to mine, I didn't convert to yours so it's not like I had any reason to find out about it.

I: And so, what are some major concepts that you know?

B4: That I know?

I: Yeah.

A4: You can sing 'I have a little Dreidial,' come on honey.

I: Ha ha.

B4: I can talk about the whole philosophical background, both the Christian and Jewish side. So, you know...I can give both arguments, argue both positions...

A4: He studied philosophy and he's a lawyer, you know?

I: Ha ha, so he's an intellectual guy.

B4: When you convert, you learn more. You're raised in one, and you've gotta learn about the other, so.

I: Mm hmm. And would you say that there is anything that you do know about Christianity?

A4: Yeah. I took a World Religion Class at CSUN. My cousins are Mexican, so I've gone to quinceaneras. Growing up in Simi Valley I was the only Jew. Every body was something else. So I hung out with someone who was Unitarian, I hung out with the Mormons, I know a lot about other cultures, absolutely. Tons. Because most of the world is not Jewish.

I: So it sounds like on both of your parts, it was more of an academic and...more of an education around other religions. So naturally by attending college, by getting an education and taking these courses, it just sounds like both of you are naturally more aware of both religions to begin with.

A4: It was never part of my life. Religion never really...it didn't ever really come up. We just co-existed and, you know...it wasn't the cornerstone to a relationship or a friendship. Whatever somebody was, they were, we didn't care. So, I don't know if for me it was so much that...

B4: Well, my mom took me to church, so that's why I had that background. It wasn't until later in life that I learned about Judaism. Probably, I had met one Jew before I met A4. So, my background comes from a Christian family upbringing, whereas the Judaism comes from studying. So it's a bit of both.

I: So, the next question is: how you have explained your religious differences to your children? And I guess it's sort of a tricky question because, keep in mind I wrote these questions trying to cover every possible scenario that I was gonna come across...you know, whether the wife or husband was Jewish or Christian or Catholic...so, you could answer this question however you'd like but I guess if you have, have you had to explain your religious differences?



A4: It comes up like when they were little, their grandmother had Christmas, so we'd go over there and have Christmas. And then she [my daughter] said, 'oh, we have Christmas,' and I said, 'no, you don't have Christmas.' You have to hit it on the head early on, otherwise kids get really confused.

I: So how did you explain it, then? It was like okay, Grandma has Christmas and we celebrate with her, but how did you do that?

A4: We actually stopped going because they were...his sister was playing, I don't mind Christmas carols, but she was playing very...music that was very religious. And it wasn't like, if they were to come here I would make Christmas cookies, and I would bring in their favorite food...but nothing of ours was ever brought there. You know, my best friend, she always did both. She always had Jewish things in the house, and she still does to this day. I always felt like we would go to her house and she would have a Menorah and Hannukah cookies. It was just a celebration of whatever everybody was experiencing. But I never experienced that with your [B4] family.

I: What do you think? Any thoughts?

B4: I'll answer the question that you asked because that's probably the safest. When the girls were...early on we just kind of said that's what grandma did, that's what my mom did. And as we got older we just explained to them that, there's different beliefs, grandma believes in Christmas and we don't and that's just not what we celebrate. And we've been open about the fact that I converted and what my beliefs are...how I was raised. Even though we're both Jewish now we still have different beliefs within our faith in Judaism. Because I converted it was really very easy. We just agreed that we were going to raise the kids Jewish. So it was real easy, we just had to explain to them that, that's what they believe, that's what they do, and it wasn't, I don't think that big of an issue.

A4: But actually, something that I think is the basis of Judaism as I know it is, in Christianity some of my friends were told: here is what it is, Jesus is the son of God, this is what you believe, that's it. In Judaism I've been always taught to question and that there's so many different opinions and interpretations that there's one right because there's Reform, there's Conservative, and by doing this study you now have more questions. Now you're wondering, what are the kids thinking?

B4: I think what A4 doesn't understand is...maybe she doesn't fully understand the Christian religions because she was raised in and given a very narrow view of what they believe and preach, but I was given a more broader view, more of... you do question, you do um...you make your own choice...it was never the, 'you're going to burn in hell.' You have to make that decision for yourself, so.

I: My next question is: explain a time when there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with your spouse.

B4: Well, that's easy! She's narrow minded about all religions other than Judaism. Having been raised in another religion I happen to be more open-minded. But I'm also a philosophy major and I've learned more about religion and philosophy, so.

A4: I think that it's a big world out there and there's one God. And the best bumper sticker I ever saw in my life... 'God is too big to fit into one religion.' And I firmly believe that, I don't think Christianity is wrong. I think there's many ways of controlling people and society and if we didn't have religion it would be a big mess.

I: So what would you say... were there times when...there were more common areas of religion that you've tended to have conflicts over? Is there anything that you can recall?

A4: Yeah, his mother didn't send a card for the Jewish New Year because she couldn't find it. She got confused and thought it was Hannukah and I was like, it's the New Year, ha ha.

B4: I think our conflict is that she has a narrow view of what Christianity teaches and believes. And having been raised in it, I had more of an understanding of the teachings, the culture, and the traditions than she did. But by the same token when it comes to Judaism I may know more technical things about it, but she knows more about it culturally, more traditionally, she has a better understanding. And she's right, I don't always relate to it like she does so when she makes comments about Christianity, although I don't believe it, it is the way I was raised and it's kind of like, okay first of all what you're saying is incorrect, and two it's hurtful the way you say it.

I: So it sounds like there have been times when she's made assertions about your religion, about Christianity, that weren't necessarily accurate.

A4: Well I only know from my experiences with my friends. And, like I said, I grew up with Christians so I only know from them. Being told my whole life by my best friend in high school that I'm going to burn in hell because I'm Jewish, you kind of have a little bit of a ...you know what I'm saying?

I: So you've had some experiences that have shaped your...

A4: I was called a 'dirty Jew' my whole life. I remember when I was seven my neighbor called me a 'dirty Jew.' My Dad walked me down to their house, these German people that lived in the neighborhood, and they went to a Christian high school in the valley, and they told their mother and they had to apologize to me.

I: Wow.

A4: So, he's never had any anti-Semitism directed towards him or anti-Christian back then.

B4: No, I had to wait until I met you and your family.

A4: Ha ha.

B4: Because they're probably the most prejudiced people I've ever met... ha ha.

I: I will not comment—I'm supposed to be the non-biased, non-opinionated interviewer! Ha ha. I'm the blank slate tonight...I'm just the question asker. Okay, so next question, ha ha. Explain how religion has shaped your childrens' upbringings.

A4: They go to a Jewish high school, they go to a Jewish day school.

B4: Yeah we've tried to raise them with the Jewish values, and Jewish beliefs.

A4: My daughter is in Israel as we speak.

I: Really? Wow.

A4: She went on the March of the Living.

B4: But at the same time, having had my family Christian and having been raised there I can answer questions that come up a little bit better than had there not been one parent that did it. They may get a little better understanding of Christianity from that point.

I: Mm hmm. And I'm curious, going back to the Jewish values, what are some examples of Jewish values that you think have shaped your girls or influenced their lives?

B4: I think I've tried to do Tzedakah more than anything. Giving and caring for others.

A4: To me, education, hands down. I didn't even know that you could not go to college, like it wasn't even an option. My mother did go to, she was a nurse, my dad was a doctor. But she had babies when she was in her twenties, and things were different. But I think the fact that...like I hear his family say, 'my parents didn't pay for it for me, I'm not going to pay for it for you.' I don't have any of my friends who are Jewish, they have the same values as I do in terms of education. And I have friends who are Christian and they feel differently about what they're willing to do for their kids. Eighteen, and they're on their own. I've never heard a Jewish parent say, 'you're eighteen, you're an adult, you're on your own.' I've never heard that.

B4: Really?

A4: That value of education has been...

B4: There's just as many Christians who have that same value.

A4: Oh, of course.

I: I think it sounds like there are some aspects of Judaism that aren't necessarily written in the Torah and written somewhere that says, 'all Jews will get an education,' it's something about being surrounded by other Jews, it's something that's passed on through people and through generations. Okay, so the next question is: how have both you and your spouse's religions been integrated into your daughters' lives, and I know you've answered this question already but do your children practice just one religion, both religions, or neither religion, and is there a dominant religion that is practiced?

B4: Well, obviously we practice one religion.

I: Yeah.

B4: I've tried to teach them some of the other traditions, just so they're aware of it. That's part of who I am and what's made me who I am.

I: And what types of things have made you who you are?

A4: Wood working, ha ha.

I: So what religious traditions and practices?

B4: They've asked me and I've told them about Christmas and how we used to celebrate Christmas and some of the other things. So I've talked to them about that. A lot of it though is not so much that it's the religious side of Christmas that I remember, it's the traditions. The Christmas tree and the opening of the presents. It's not so much the religious side of it. So that's part of my knowledge as well. And we've gone to visit my family and we've experienced that as well.

I: Okay, next talk about any religious symbols that are used in your home, and this would include mezuzahs, crosses, things like that.

A4: We have a Mezuzah.

B4: Yeah we also have a Menorah.

A4: We also have a Jewish library.

I: Really? Like a collection of books?

A4: Yeah, I have all my High Holiday prayer books. We have seven bibles, because I bring them to my bible study class. We don't have any Christian bibles.

B4: Really? I thought we had one here at some point. I think we had one that my mom had given me.

A4: See over there, those are Jewish prayer books.

I: Cool.

A4: And I have a dreidel collection when you walk in. They're from all over the world.

I: That's awesome. So my next question is: how would you describe your children's attendance of religious services?

A4: Well they go to Jewish day school.

B4: Jewish high school.

I: And like High Holidays? Shabbat?

B4: We don't do Shabbat usually.

A4: We do all the holidays. We do Passover. We do Rosh Hoshanah, Yom Kippur, Hannukah.

B4: Can we go back to one of your earlier questions? I will tell you what our biggest fight is around here: how much oil do you fry the latkes in? That is probably the biggest fight when it comes to religion that we have in this house. I say you need to put a lot, and she says you should just put a little.

A4: I think you can just bake them.

I: Ha ha, well that's the healthier way I guess. And, how would you describe your children's attendance of religious education classes?

A4: They went to Jewish preschool when they were two. They started Hebrew school or Sunday school when they were five. They had their Bat Mitzvah, and they went to Hebrew school all the way up until then. And now they go to a Jewish high school, and they can read and write Hebrew.

I: So the next question is related to what you just answered, but tell me about your children's participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies, so that would include the Bat Mitzvah but also confirmation, baptism, etc.

B4: No baptism.

A4: They had a baby naming when they were one, they had a Bat Mitzvah, and they had a sweet sixteen, ha ha.

B4: They didn't do confirmation, though.

A4: No, I didn't make them go through confirmation.

B4: So they went through the steps.

I: This next question may seem a bit redundant, but describe any major Jewish and/or Christian holidays that you and your children celebrate, and how do you celebrate?

B4: We do Hannukah. We usually have a family Hannukah party with friends and family. We do Passover and we usually go to someone's house. We've only done Passover at our house once or twice, we usually go over somewhere else.

A4: We went to my mom's house every year when they were little. We've done many Shabbats here but we don't do it all the time. But we do try to do Shabbat as a family on Friday's.

B4: We've done a lot of Shabbats. And then we do, we'll do a Rosh Hoshanah dinner, we'll have your parents over. Well have friends over. Yeah, that's about it.

I: How do you and your spouse celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah with your children, and describe any past conflicts regarding how to explain these holidays to your children.

A4: Christmas is Chinese food and the movies.

B4: Yeah, ha ha, pretty much. We don't celebrate unless we go to my parents house or a friend's house, we don't. Christmas is not a big thing in this house.

I: And care to talk about how you guys celebrate Hannukah?

A4: I work my ass off—I go to Costco, Trader Joe's, and Ralph's and we make latkes.

B4: We?

A4: B4 makes latkes. And we have like forty people here and it's crazy.

I: And then on Christmas you were saying you don't do anything for Christmas but your mother celebrated Christmas with you in the past?

B4: Well we had gone to visit them in the past when my Dad was alive. They would do Christmas so we would...

A4: It was dinner, it wasn't church or anything.

B4: I don't think we ever went to church. It was usually just, you'd open gifts and then there would be a dinner. My family is not huge, my Dad was not religious, my Mom was probably more so than my Dad. So, even then as she got older we didn't really go to church. I think one time we went actually with my sister and my Mom, but I don't think the girls were born yet.

I: So, next describe the religious traditions and practices that you feel are the most important to pass on to your children.

A4: Repairing the world, taking care of other people, tikun olam, charity, tzedakah, and being kind to other people, number one.

B4: There's a reason why I don't practice Christianity. Because I think the whole Jesus stuff is...I honestly could not, the whole theory of Jesus and dying for our sins makes absolutely no sense to me whatsoever.

A4: He's able to look at this stuff analytically, and he can tell me why the other stuff is philosophically incorrect or doesn't make sense.

I: So I have a question--did you convert once you two met? Or had you converted earlier?

B4: Honestly, I think before I met A4, I can remember really only meeting two Jewish people.

A4: So what did you know about Judaism?

B4: I didn't think about it, I knew nothing of it. I remember one girl bringing her Menorah into school. I mean I grew up in the 'People's Republic of Orange County' on a military base which, let's face it, there's not a lot of Jews there either. Anyway, so when I met A4 was when I really got introduced to Judaism. So, I didn't convert for her, but I did convert because of her because had I probably not started dating her I probably wouldn't have known anything about Judaism. But she didn't know that I was going to convert.

A4: I had no idea, he did it all, found a Rabbi, I had no clue.

I: So, she sort of opened the door for you.

B4: Yeah, exactly.

I: Tell me about aspects of the religion that your children appear to value the most.

B4: I think the one value that they've really gotten from us is caring about other people. I think they have a strong sense and desire that the world does not necessarily revolve around them and that you've gotta help other people. They're very loving and compassionate toward other people.

I: And would you want to add anything or do you agree with that?

A4: Hmm...you mean one thing religiously that they've gotten from us?

I: Yeah, yeah.

A4: I mean...it's the love and values that Judaism stands for, and the fact that it's a great way of...the values are good guides to live a righteous and fulfilling life. Like, it can help keep you on a track.

B4: But I think that although they got the value, they don't necessarily equate it with the Jewish religion. I think it's because of our acceptance of that value which we've gotten in part from Judaism but they've also picked it up from us. I don't think it's so much that they know this is a Jewish value, as much as it's a value that they've learned and gotten through us through the Jewish religion.

I: Okay. So I just have a few more questions. How do you think your family of origin has influenced your decisions regarding your children's religious upbringing?

A4: I know the roots of my parents, my grandparents, their parents. I don't know anything about his side of the family. It's like null and void. I don't know where his family comes from, like nobody knows. And that's so important to me. Like, we went back to the region where my grandmother was from. I was really close with my grandparents, both sets of my grandparents. They were just as important to me as my parents were. So I have a whole different upbringing, his is very different.

B4: But that's not the religious side of it.

A4: But you can't separate it out.

B4: Sure you can. I was raised, and it had nothing to do with my religion, but I was raised in a family that moved a lot because my Dad was in the military.

A4: My family moved a lot too, though. But like our grandmother lived with us and made the Jewish foods from where she was from, and they spoke using Yiddish terms. Like, he doesn't understand that Judaism creeps into everything, and he wasn't raised with that. So my mother will use little terms and say things. It's just the way that I was raised was different, not necessarily better.

I: What about your family of origin, do you think they had an influence?

B4: Yeah, to answer from a religious point of view, I obviously had been raised in a different religion. So, I'm much more open about why people may not accept other religions. And, its fine, I may not accept it, but I'm not one who's gonna say, 'that's crazy', or, 'they're crazy,' where she will about anything but Judaism.

I: And are you saying that it's your family who's shaped your perspective on that?

B4: Well I'm saying that because I was raised in a different religion, I can understand. I think I'm less judgmental toward that religion. The way I was raised, my Mom and Dad



were very different. My Mom was more of the religious one in the family, but not once did my Mom say 'you will be this or you will marry a Christian'. A4's Dad flat out said 'you will marry a Jew'. I was never told anything like that. I think they tended to be a little bit more open about different religions. I just think the way I was raised it was much more open about religion. Like, when I converted, my Mom, it didn't affect her at all, didn't bother her at all. I think if you asked the girls, I kind of say look, I want you to make your own decision to practice Judaism, whereas I think A4's approach is more you are Jewish, that is what you are.

A4: That's what you told them? That they could choose?

B4: Well yeah. And, your parents would die if you converted to Christianity.

A4: And I would never do it, because of those reasons.

B4: My point is that I was raised that it's more flexible.

A4: But it all has to do with the Holocaust, nobody gets that. The reason that your parents don't care is because Christianity is not threatened, but when one Jewish child intermarries, they say like to save one Jew, is to save a nation. Jews value every life, like especially because Judaism was exterminated.

B4: That's had a huge influence on her beliefs. I know about the Holocaust, I have my feelings toward it and I think it's tragic and disgusting that we're still doing it. But at the same time, what about the Armenian holocaust? Nobody talks about that, why not? That was just as bad.

A4: But they're not going into Greece, like every bordering country.

B4: So it may be less bad. This is where I'll tell you, not being a Jew, in many ways, becomes an issue because when you talk to Jews about these things it's all about the Holocaust. Whereas when you talk to somebody outside, it's like, yeah, you're right, that was sickening and it's hard to believe that man could do that. But what about the Armenian holocaust? I'm not as connected, and I just can't be because I didn't have family members that died there. Obviously that gets passed onto our kids. She has a stronger passion about the Holocaust. Now, I will tell you that now that I've converted, and as I've learned, getting to know her family, you do become more passionate about it.

I: Okay, well I've got two more questions but I'm going to bundle them. First, describe any other factors that have come into play in relation to your children's religious upbringing that you haven't brought up yet. And second, what important advice would you like to tell other interfaith spouses regarding the religious upbringing of their children?

B4: It isn't easy.

A4: I would say nobody chooses to be Jewish, it's not a Jewish world. You can't expect your kids to go and choose and say 'do what you want.' Religion is a family thing passed down from generation to generation. Otherwise, they're going to know on the door and be offering The Watch, and your kids are going to become Jehovah's Witnesses. So, you could leave it up to that and then take that risk.

B4: My advice is you better agree before. If you don't, then you better be willing to live with it, it's going to be a nightmare. I don't think you can raise kids in two different religions and expect them to...

A4: I want my kids to be Jewish because it's who they are. Not because I'm telling them I want you to do it because I did it, but because it's who you are. I'm hoping they're going to choose that because of the values and what it is. I believe in God and I want my children to have a place with God, that's very important to me.

I: Yeah. And did you want to add anything to that, any advice?

B4: You just have to agree, otherwise, the problem is, is somebody, I guess a careful thing is not to necessarily get with the other person's traditions and figure out a way to keep those traditions part of their life without bringing in the religious context to it. That's really hard to do. And that's the hard part, coming from a Christian background and having a Christmas tree, you know waking up in the morning I remember having the Christmas gifts, but it's something you...and I don't know if there's an easy way to continue that without confusing the kids. You really have to be willing to give up a big part of your traditions; it's not necessarily the religious part that's hard to give up, but the traditions because it's the more difficult side to give up.

A4: To me, I love when people are religious. I feel like when people are religious I'm hoping that they're honest and ethical and moral. I'm not ultra religious, I'm more traditional. And yeah, that's it, was there anything else?

I: No, that concludes the questions I have for you both. So we'll end it here.

*Date: 5/27/13*

*Location: Calabasas, CA*

*Length: [45:38]*

*Interviewees: Coded*

*Interviewer: Jessica Jacoby*

*Transcriber: Jessica Jacoby*

*[A5, B5] = Interviewee initials*

*[I] = Interviewer Initials*

I: So, I'll go ahead and start with the first question: describe your participation in your own religion as a child, and were there any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that you participated in more often than others?

A5: Okay, well I grew up in just a notch above Reform Judaism. So, what is that, Conservative? Yeah, a conservative Jewish household where my mom's parents were the most religious and so I definitely grew up with all the holidays and a pretty big deal was made. Our actual household, my immediate mom and dad, weren't all that religious. But everything would kind of go to my grandparents. We did all the traditions and Passover dinners and Hannukah was a big deal. Um, never did we ever celebrate anything outside of the Jewish religion so we never celebrated Easter or any of the commercialized—you know, I wanted a Christmas tree, that was never gonna happen. Um, and I had a Bat Mitzvah, and actually my Mom didn't want me to just have one of those 'five second' Bat Mitzvah's, you know? A lot of the kids they get tutored for six months and...

I: Yeah, you're out, you're done.

A5: Yeah, my mom wanted me to have a real... to really learn it. So I ended up having my Bat Mitzvah when I was fourteen. She wanted me to have that extra year. I think I starting studying around ten or something. She wanted me to study for a good three or four years. So, I had a Bat Mitzvah and um, and yeah, I think that's it for me.

I: Okay.

B5: Um, let me see...I did go to church when I was younger.

I: Mm hmm.

B5: My parents took me to church and we celebrated Easter, Christmas, and let me see...at primary school we sang hymns every morning. 'All things bright and beautiful' and most of the Christian ones and we read out of the bible and all that. And then um, on the holidays you know we sort of knew it was Jesus' birthday but it was more about the presents and all that. And then as we got a little bit older our next-door neighbor, she was the leader of the choir. And she used to give us like candies to go around there and to sing and to be a choirboy. And that's sort of the reason I started going to choir, being at the

choir at the local church. It was quite good, you know I really enjoyed it. It, you know, raised my spirits I suppose in a way. And then it kind of faded off for me in my teenage years I guess, and, very rarely go to church now.

A5: No, I've never known you to go.

B5: Never go to church. But you know, thought about it and thought about taking the kids but, you know, never had actually done it. And well, I don't know if it has anything to do with it but I do more yoga these days and get sort of a spiritual feeling.

I: Yeah, so more spirituality versus like religiosity.

A5: Yeah we're actually both quite spiritual.

I: Okay, so I'll move onto the next question. How would you describe your knowledge regarding each other's religious backgrounds, and what are some major concepts that you've learned regarding each other's religions?

B5: Ha, not much you know because A5 is not very religious. And, we go to Passover and some Bar Mitzvah's and what's the other one?

A5: Oh, we've done Hannukah celebrations.

B5: So Hannukah, and things like that. I don't know much about it though. I've heard that it's similar to Christianity but it has something to do with the Jews and the Israelites...something or other.

I: Ha ha, something like that!

A5: There's a point where things just sort of go off in the opposite direction.

B5: I know there's one day where...it's awful, you have to wait for ages to get a bit of the...um...apple stuff.

A5: Ha ha.

B5: And the wafer...that's terrible. I don't even want to go there.

A5: Matzoh (laughing). And you would wear a yarmalke to the kids' services.

B5: Yeah, I have gone to one at the kids' Jewish preschool. And that did give me a good feeling, I liked the rabbis and it's the same sort of uplifting feeling I think so yeah I do think it's good. It was good for the kids, the teachers.

A5: Um, you know it's funny because I, honestly, I don't think when I was growing up celebrating the Jewish holidays and going to Hebrew School and Sunday school that even

grasped, I never really paid any attention. It was just about the festivities, in all honesty. Um, but, I don't know that much, however one of our sons has been very interested in the bible.

I: Really?

A5: Yeah, and so, he likes the bible stories. So we bought him a bible, and he reads all the stories. So, if anything. I probably learned more from him.

I: Yeah.

A5: But I honestly couldn't tell you much.

I: About your own religion, or...

A5: I mean I know the basics about why we're celebrating Passover and all that. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the cleansing and the start of a new year.

I: Mm hmm. Okay. And, how you have explained your religious differences to your children?

A5: We've always told them that Mom's Jewish, Dad's Christian, we both believe in God, we both believe in right and wrong, and both of us are on the same page in terms of values, and we really try to instill that for our kids. We talk a lot about just being a good person. We really just do spend a lot of time on values. But, we've told them that the religious part of it, neither one of us is religious. So, for us, when we celebrate these holidays it's from a traditional standpoint. Although, I wanted them to be exposed to Judaism because I was raised so heavily in it, which you would never know. But, so that's why they all went to Jewish preschool. But we didn't continue on from there, partly because of finances. It was too expensive.

B5: Yeah, like A5 said, we just told them one's Jewish one's Christian, that's kind of almost the same thing.

A5: Not really.

B5: Well...we haven't really explained it I don't think so.

A5: They're all pretty well read. Like, one my of my son's probably knows more than we do. He's in boarding school, and he's very intelligent. All our kids really are. But, yeah, he honestly could probably tell you more.

I: So it sounds like the basic differences are there. They know that Mom is this and Dad is this, but it hasn't really come up in a very complex way.

A5: They know that I don't believe that Jesus is resurrecting. And whenever we celebrate Christmas we don't refer to the Christmas tree as a celebration of Jesus or anything like that. So, they know that that's something that's more tradition-based. But they do know that that's what, you know, Christmas is. And they do know that Easter is about the resurrection. So they do know that.

B5: I think we've let them make their own minds up, really, because we're both not that religious. And I mean, I grew up thinking God was the big man with a beard in the cloud. I really did.

A5: Yeah, I did too.

B5: I don't think he is anymore. I mean, comedians refer to God as the man sitting up there on a cloud, and it's kind of ridiculous. So we haven't really pushed it on them.

I: Ok. And explain a time when/if there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with each other.

A5: I feel like there was at some point. Um...you know what, when the twins were born, from my husband's point of view, there was not a religious...we didn't have the religious service or ritual for circumcision, the bris, at our house. Um, I was like no they're having a circumcision just because of the way it looked—it's clean. Where as in England, no one really gets circumcised, unless you're Jewish.

I: Oh wow, I never knew that.

A5: As a country, he (my husband) had never seen such a thing. So he did not want our kids being cut. To him it was like, what are you doing? It was foreign to him. So, they were born premature and it was an Indian doctor who did the circumcision and I think they had a little talk—B5 came to him and said 'I'm not real comfortable with it.' And honestly, I'm not sure what they said but he agreed that they weren't going to take too much off. And I swear, my babies, as kids, had the weirdest circumcisions you've ever seen. Partly because they were premature so there wasn't much to work with, but I think B5 was happy because they're really half and half.

B5: So really, you said that everybody here was getting circumcised so I didn't want them to be different—that's why I did it. You know, I did talk to the Indian doctor and he said it wasn't dangerous or anything and that everybody does it. So, I told him to take just a little bit off, and he said alright.

I: So, you found that middle ground in a sort of...interesting area ha ha ha.

A5: Yes, it represents our compromise.

B5: Of the foreskin.

I: Ha ha ha.

B5: I was baptized at church, and I had a quick thought about it.

I: In terms of the kids, you mean?

B5: Yeah. But I didn't push it, you know.

A5: And I wouldn't allow it—I'm not as flexible as you. When they first came to the preschool though, at first you were not thrilled. I just sort of pushed the matter, and he's very easy going, and it was fine and he was very open-minded. I mean honestly, if he had said 'could they go to a Christian preschool,' I just wouldn't have been comfortable.

I: Yeah.

A5: I just wouldn't have been. And, I guess that was it...I mean, when it came to Hannukah the only other thing about Hannukah and Christmas was he didn't like the overabundance of it. Because there's a lot of our friends who do both, and it's sort of obnoxious. So we did make a point...when we celebrated Hannukah they just lit candles, they never got gifts. We'd give them a dollar a night or something, you know, when they were little.

I: Right.

A5: And B5 doesn't like the dinners and things, like when everyone has to speak out loud, just because he's not the most talkative by nature, he's not comfortable with that. So, he'll often opt out of joining us when we go to these family dinners, and it doesn't bother me at all. He goes sometimes, sometimes not. I mean we've been happily married for nineteen years.

I: Woo hoo! So the next question, I think maybe you might have answered it already, but describe any instances in which there were disagreements or conflicts regarding the role that religion played in raising your children.

B5: The one thing I'd say is I have suggested to A5 that I would like to take them to church a few times and she's really just dead against it.

A5: I'm not dead against it.

B5: Yes you are.

I: So you're saying that in those instances where you wanted to take your children to religious services other than Judaism, there's been some disagreement.

A5: Yeah. However, he's very much into yoga which incorporates Buddhist philosophy, and that we were open to. Like, if you see this jar (on the table) we do family outings, and we try to do things that don't cost money. Anyway...

B5: We went to a Buddhist temple.

A5: It was really cool, I actually really liked it, and the kids were very open. We haven't gone back I don't think again, but, yeah.

I: Explain how religion has shaped your children's upbringing.

A5: Well, again, we're big on values and tradition, and I think there's a lot to be said for family gatherings, even though my husband doesn't attend all of the dinners. But overall we make a big deal of Christmas, Easter, it's always festive and fun, we're really, really family oriented, so caring for one another...

B5: Well, I think you're getting off the question, how did religion shape our kids. I don't think religion has shaped their upbringing that much at all, really.

A5: Well, we do refer to God, I mean I refer to God a lot.

B5: Yeah, but I don't think we mention it all the time really.

A5: Well we do talk about God and Karma, and that's... but I know what you mean. We don't do Shabbat dinner and all that.

I: So it's really a lack of religion. And you talk a lot about spirituality and values, but would you say that, that is a part of how you incorporate religion, or is it instead of religion?

A5: Instead of.

B5: Instead of, and in combination with sometimes a little bit of religion...you know, 'god this, god that' but not straight on God or religion, I don't think it's shaped their upbringing that much.

I: So next, how have both of your religions been integrated into your children's lives? Do your children practice just one religion, both religions, or neither religion? Is there a dominant religion that is practiced?

A5: Well, like my husband said, we've told them we want to expose them to different religions. They haven't really been exposed to, like he said, church because I haven't really been comfortable with it. But, at the end of the day, you know, whatever my kids want to do, what makes them happy, that's what I want to support. I'm not like my grandparents, who were very strong about marrying into the same religion. And, I got married first, before I met my husband, to a man who was Jewish, and the whole thing



fell apart really quickly. But, as far as the second part goes, they (my children) are all different. One of them started asking me questions about Jesus, which I really couldn't answer. And then my other son chose nothing. Then, my other son, because he struggled emotionally, if anybody needed religion it was him. And he's asked for it and reached out for it, but he does get a little weird sometimes. Like, if there really is a God why would I be going through what I'm going through. Recently he said he was an Atheist.

I: But it sounds like your children are very exploratory and inquisitive. So in answering the question it sounds like both, in a way, and many different religions. It sounds very inclusive.

B5: Yeah, well I think it has to be because we both married out of our religions so we're not strict Jewish or strict Christian, so it hasn't come up with the kids either. We haven't said, 'right you're Jewish or a Christian'.

A5: Well, to me being Jewish has always been very cultural. When I'm with a Jew, I just feel a certain warmth. And I don't know, I'm sure you (my husband) probably don't feel that way. But I've always...I've told my boys that you are inherently what your Mom is. But I feel like, like I said, it just sounds like I'm contradicting myself but there is a part of me that sees them as being Jewish. Like, when I was applying for boarding school I wrote down that my son was Jewish, but not necessarily practicing. So I identify with it almost like you would an ethnicity or a culture.

B5: Um, I don't think they really practice either. I don't know what they identify with really.

A5: Whatever God they identify with it's not a Jewish god or a Christian god per se.

I: Okay, and describe any religious symbols that are used in your home (such as a mezuzah or a cross).

A5: Don't have a mezuzah at our door, which we just never did. And I would not be comfortable with a cross anywhere in my house. But I have Buddha in the corner.

I: So there's the middle ground, I sense, that the Buddha has brought the two of you together. And that would be the one religious symbol that is integrated in the home.

A5: And it's my husband who brought it to me. Not that I embrace it as far as practicing, but I do like the concepts a lot. But, so there's really no religious symbols-- nobody wears any jewelry.

B5: I mean, I did wear things when I was younger but I haven't worn any jewelry...I don't have any symbols really.

A5: I would not be very comfortable if he was wearing a cross.

B5: No, I don't think I would be comfortable with a mezuzah on the door.

A5: Although I was going to say, one thing we did do when we named our kids, in the Jewish religion you never name your kids after somebody who is still alive. And all my boys kind of have Jewish middle names...

I: Ah, okay next how would you describe your children's attendance of religious services?

A5: Well one of my son's has gone to maybe thirty Bar Mitzvah's in the past year, and Bat Mitzvahs. He has gone to temple a lot. We have not gone to temple really since the kids were in pre-school. So we haven't attended with the exception of maybe a wedding here and there.

B5: No, we haven't really done anything. Just the Buddhist temple.

A5: And funerals, we've gone to Jewish funerals.

I: Okay, the next question is about your children's attendance of religious education classes, such as Sunday school and Hebrew school.

A5: They went to preschool, and that was it.

I: And that was for all three of your kids?

A5: Yep, all three of them.

I: Okay. Next, talk about your children's participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies (such as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, etc.).

A5: Yeah, no nothing, other than graduation from Jewish preschool.

I: So just to clarify, none of them had a Bar Mitzvah?

A5: Well, I figured we did the Jewish preschool thing, and I think we touched on it for a second like I asked my husband 'would you be opposed to them going to religious school' and I think when I told him that it cost quite a bit, you know especially with twins, that's where he was like, 'no thanks, we're doing preschool' and it didn't bother me. Honestly, I feel like our kids are so overscheduled. I look at our Jewish friends and I just see Sunday's there's school, Wednesday's there's school, and most of them don't want to go.

I: It's busy. There's a lot of preparation and pressure in preparing for a Bar and Bat Mitzvah.

B5: I do like the ceremonies, but there's a lot of learning for just one day.

A5: Some of our friends take their kids to Israel, and I like that.

I: Describe any major Jewish and/or Christian holidays that you and your children celebrate, and how do you celebrate?

B5: Christmas, presents, Easters, with Easter bunny and chocolate. And probably the Jewish ones there's a bit of gifts as well, so it's all gift giving.

A5: But Hannukah is really about lighting the candles—that's what it is for them. But most of the Jewish holidays revolve around food and getting together with the family. And like I said, my husband isn't always present, but he's such a good dad and involved in so many things.

B5: Well half the time it takes place at 5:30 in the afternoon, and I've just gotten back from work and I don't want to run out in traffic again. But yeah, we haven't brought them up doing anything...they'll light the candles during Hannukah and stuff like that. But, you know, nothing really that religious. There are some things that I wish I could've done though, so hopefully there's a question that covers that.

I: Well, actually that can be part of one of the last questions, so keep that thought in mind. My next question, and you've already begun to answer it, but how do you and your spouse celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah with your children? Describe any past conflicts regarding how to explain these holidays to your children.

B5: You know I did feel a bit weird, we did talk a little bit earlier, my wife's mom really over did it with the presents, and I was brought up without the presents.

A5: You grew up with simplicity.

B5: Yeah, it was a bit more about the religious, rather than the overload of presents, and I did not like all these presents coming in just because it was Christmas without thinking of what it was really about.

I: It held a different meaning for you.

B5: Yeah, and it was more about the closeness rather than sitting there unwrapping the gifts.

A5: We mellowed out the past few years, he took a stance and I respected that. I mean, yeah, everything he said was right on.

I: Okay. Describe the religious traditions and practices that you feel are the most important to pass on to your children.

A5: Well, I do like just stopping and remembering and being together as a family, I like that. I feel like too many people are coming and going and doing too much, and so I really enjoy the dinners and being together with close friends and family and that sort of thing. It's kind of sad because Hannukah was so meaningful to me, and the last couple of years, I don't even know if they lit the candles the past few years. So I've really let it go, and I guess that's the one thing I'm a little sad about. I'm not sure if it's going to continue—I try to have it continue, but I don't know. It's slowly going to be gone by the time they raise their kids, for at least two out of the three.

I: And is that something that would have been important, would you say?

A5: I just think it would have been nice, there's something to be said about tradition.

I: And I also hear family.

A5: Family and tradition. Yeah.

B5: I think Christmas, like my wife says, is sitting around with the family and eating the meal, even though it's under a religious thing, but we don't really do it religiously. But the being together, the family and all that. But I think the practice that we didn't keep up was prayer. I used to pray when I was younger, every night, like only through certain ages, five to eleven. And um, you know that was good because I'd say 'and god bless' and go through my family, my pets, and it was nice. It was like gratitude every night, and it felt good going to bed after doing that. It was a good habit. We haven't done that, we didn't do that with them either. I think occasionally we'd say thank you for this meal, when I was younger.

A5: The one thing I do hope if I have grandchildren, is that circumcision still continue. In America, it will most likely still happen, but I do have a few cousins who are not circumcised.

I: Okay, where are we... tell me about aspects of each religion that your children appear to value the most.

A5: The traditions. I think from each holiday we do have very specific traditions that I do every year. You know every body has their own take on that, so they love that. And I think that they are grateful...they definitely feel some kind of protection and gratefulness to somebody up there. I definitely think that that exists for all of them.

B5: I don't know what they value.

I: Yeah, it's hard to know at this age what they're really thinking about religion in general.

A5: Well one of our sons has gone back and forth like he's said 'I'm a Jew' or 'I want to be a Jew.' He has a lot of Israeli friends, and he goes through stages based on his friends.

I: It fluctuates but in general you can sort of gather that they have a sense of spirituality or connection to a higher being.

B5: They took to the Buddhism.

I: And, how do you think your families of origin have influenced decisions regarding your children's religious upbringing?

A5: I feel like my grandparents are probably rolling in their graves, because they were so religious.

B5: So my Mom and Dad kind of believed in God but they didn't go to church a hell of a lot. I was baptized, so the basic things. But, you know, my Dad would say 'I guess the big guy is looking down on me' or something like that. You know, when he was here, and when he was still alive, he would say 'God is looking down on me' or something like that. I think school was quite a lot for me because, like I said, we said the hymns at school assembly every day, and they read out of the bible. We read stories and fables, the Ten Commandments. But my family not so much. I remember we'd go to church occasionally when we were younger.

I: So for you, schooling was very significant in terms of religion.

Okay, the last few questions I have for you guys I'd like to combine them. So the first question is: describe other factors that have come into play in relation to your children's religious upbringing that you haven't brought up yet. And then, what important advice would you like to tell other interfaith spouses regarding the religious upbringing of their child/children?

B5: Well as far as religion, I wish we did have a little bit of religion even if it was just like the Ten Commandments, I think that would have been a nice way to start. It gives you at least a basis for what's wrong and what's right. I wish we had raised them a little more religious, either one way or the other. And the advice I suppose would be to give them some sort of...more values. I think we were sort of easy going and did our example thing. I mean, they turned out alright.

A5: I talk a lot about values, especially in the car.

B5: But I think it does have a role, religion. I mean I guess we'll find out but...

A5: And I agree that it would have been nice to have a few additional things that we could have combined like prayer, I think you can say prayer non-denominationally. But I don't think it would have been...I mean he's more flexible than me so it would have been raising our kids Jewish. I think he would have embraced it if it would have meant taking it seriously. But honestly, because I didn't have Christmas or Easter I wanted my kids to

have it. Purely because of the fun of it. So, I don't think we could have done it. Because never could I have just embraced Christianity.

B5: The stories, whatever religion they are...if you give stories to your kids...common sense stories, I don't think it matters what religion it is.

A5: Well, values.

I: So your advice then, and something you wish you would have done more of, is to have integrated different aspects of each religion.

B5: Yeah.

I: And to embrace the role that religion can bring in your childrens' lives.

A5: It's values based. It's about practicing what you preach.

B5: And I think the being grateful bit is good as well. All that sort of new religion, it's about thanking the universe, and there's nothing wrong with that. Nobody really knows if the man's up on the cloud anyway, or...

A5: Well we like that too, The Secret, both of us have read a lot of books on that.

B5: Also, the Law of Attraction sort of thing, like you visualize. I think that's pretty good as well.

A5: What you put out there.

B5: It could be 'God-ish' as well. And who knows. I try to keep open-minded about it because no one really knows.

A5: Well I don't necessarily believe the stories. Like I said, I'm a cultural Jew.

I: Great, well you two have been super helpful and thank you so much for sharing and opening up with me. We'll end here.

*Date: 6/30/13*

*Location: Oak Park, CA*

*Length: [36:01]*

*Interviewees: Coded*

*Interviewer: Jessica Jacoby*

*Transcriber: Jessica Jacoby*

*[A6, B6] = Interviewee initials*

*[I] = Interviewer Initials*

I: Okay, so my first question is—and keep in mind that these questions are for both of you, so you can both chime in at any point. Describe your participation in your own religion as a child. Were there any particular religious services, traditions, or holidays that you participated in more often than others?

A6: Um, I'll start. I'm Jewish, but as a child I wasn't raised in a religious home. Um...and, so well, in the beginning I was raised by my dad and not my mom...

I: Mm hmm.

A6: ...and we basically had a Hannukah bush, a Christmas tree, and that's what I grew up with as a young child. And then when my dad started dating my step mom, who is very Jewish and very religious, the Hannukah bush disappeared, and then we started observing Hannukah and actually lighting the candles, but that wasn't until I was about twelve.

I: Okay.

A6: So I was not raised in a religious home. When she came in the picture we did start going to temple just for the high holidays, and that was it. And that's it as far as...I don't know a whole lot, I never really knew a lot about the Jewish religion. I only really knew from the high holidays, and lighting the candles, but I don't really know the history behind it.

I: Mm hmm, okay. And what about you, B6?

B6: So, I grew up in the Midwest, where there was a lot of variations of Christianity, and my parents weren't particularly religious. I attended Church sometimes, with neighbors or friends or my family, and we always celebrated Christmas and Easter. But, you know, no confirmations, no very religious activities. It was more of a kind of cultural...

I: The major holidays, without the more religious practices.

B6: Right.

A6: And both of us I would say more cultural than religious.

I: Yeah, it sounds like it.

So, the next questions is: how would you describe your knowledge regarding your spouse's religious background--what are some major concepts that you've learned regarding your spouse's religion?

B6: Well I've learned a lot about Judaism.

A6: Yeah I would say he knows a lot more about Judaism than I do about his religion.

B6: From attending their family events, and her Uncle is very knowledgeable and I listen to what he has to say during the services.

A6: Again, since my step mom came into our lives, and she and my dad married when I was fourteen, we celebrate Passover, we celebrate all of the holidays, and we do have a Passover seder, so I eventually learned about that, and he kind of participated in all of that, and my husband, when the kids were little, would attend temple for the holidays, we would always go to temple for the Jewish holidays, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, those were the...I did go to temple every year for those two.

I: So B6, you then know a lot about the Jewish holidays by having participated and gone to services with the family. So then A6, is there anything that you would say you feel you know fairly well about his religion of origin?

A6: No. Because we never really talked about it, I never went to church with him, um Christianity was never really introduced.

B6: And my family is in Michigan, her family is here.

A6: Yeah, my family is here. His entire family is in Michigan. So, if they had all been here it would have been different.

I: Yeah.

A6: We go back to Michigan for Christmas, and celebrate Christmas. On occasion there'd be an Easter. But it was only presents, there was no religious aspect.

I: So just a basic, surface understanding of the holidays at least, but not that religious aspect.

A6: No, not at all.

I: Okay, and how you have explained you and your spouse's religious differences to your children?



A6: We never really did. We didn't. We felt like we didn't have to because I wasn't religious, and if I had been really religious and had celebrated the holidays, and if it was brought up that way, then it would've been more of an issue. But it never was an issue, it didn't come up. We celebrated Christmas, we celebrated Hannukah. But, there wasn't a lot of religion in our home, it was more cultural.

B6: And traditions.

A6: And traditions. So, that's what they grew up with.

I: Yeah.

A6: The traditions, and being with the family, and family was more emphasized as opposed to the religion.

I: So, it never really came up. That's why there was never really a need to discuss it. It sounds like there was more of an emphasis on the family, and what the family practiced. But not necessarily what the beliefs were behind the practices.

A6: Right.

I: And, explain a time when there was disagreement or conflict regarding religion with your spouse.

A6: We've never...no.

B6: I don't think we ever have, at least not between us. Maybe within your family.

A6: I mean when we were dating in the very, very beginning...but no, my parents loved him and have always loved him. And maybe in the very beginning. But again, it didn't bother them that I was going to marry him. Well no, in our wedding ceremony we were married by a Rabbi. So I guess it did...we did want to respect their wishes and they paid for the wedding, ha ha. It was a very reformed Rabbi, it was mostly in English, but you know. We never really, when we told them we were getting married, we didn't really talk about...they didn't ask us if we were gonna raise our kids Christian. I mean...I don't remember, it might have come up with my parents in terms of 'how are you going to raise the kids.' So yeah, it may have been problematic to them, but we've never really had any issues talking about it.

I: And I think the phrasing of the question using 'when' instead of 'if' is probably pretty presumptuous—like it assumes that all interfaith couples are going to have conflict and disagreements, but perhaps it's not always an issue.

A6: Right, and I don't know if I could have married a person who wasn't Jewish if I was a different person.

I: Yeah.

A6: My sister, who is a little bit younger than me, decided to marry someone who's Jewish and they're more religious. Yeah.

I: Okay, so this question is similar to the previous question but: describe any instances in which there were disagreements or conflicts regarding the role that religion played in raising your children with your spouse

B6: Between us, I don't think there were really.

A6: Yeah, no I don't think there were. Both of our kids participated in, they went to, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs...and no.

I: Explain how religion has shaped your children's upbringing.

A6: Unfortunately, I don't think it has much. Because it's not been a huge part of our lives. Again, it's more of the tradition, um, I... I think that my parents have made a huge impact on my kids. And, because they have been religious and they talk about the religion and so, I think they've had much more of an impact than my husband and I have.

I: Okay.

A6: Um, we really haven't had an impact, but they have. Would you agree?

B6: Yeah, they've shown interest.

A6: Yeah, like they've both gone to Israel on Birth Right, and really wanted to do that and enjoyed it. Um, and I think that a lot of it is because my parents have instilled a lot of curiosity in them. But it's something that they didn't grow up with, with us. It was more through my parents.

I: So although it doesn't sound like it was through you directly, and that the religious beliefs weren't emphasized per se, it does sound like the traditions and practices did have an impact on your children. They went on Birth Right, so something about Judaism as a tradition and practice does sound like it impacted them somewhat.

A6: Yeah, more so my son than my daughter. My daughter seemed to enjoy the trip but it didn't really impact her that much. My son just went though, and he really enjoyed it. When I last spoke to him he was going to come home and join a temple and do a lot.

I: Ha, the whole shebang!

A6: Right ha ha.

I: Okay, so it sounds like there has been a little bit of an impact—something has resonated at least with the eldest child.

So this next question you've already begun to answer but: how have both you and your spouse's religions been integrated into your children's lives? Do your children practice just one religion, both religions, or neither religion? Is there a dominant religion that is practiced?

A6: I think it's probably more Jewish than Christian just because of the fact that my family is here, my sister is here, my parents are here, my sister's kids were Bar and Bat Mitzvah'd. So again, we go to temple for the holidays. So I think that it's more ingrained in them. When asked what is your religion, um, my daughter has answered different things to people. 'Oh my dad's Christian and my mom's Jewish, so I'm a combo.' Um, and she also will say, 'I don't have strong religious beliefs,' that's her feeling. My son has had more...he identifies more with Judaism, because he has been very close with my dad, he was the first grandson. Am I getting off topic?

I: No, this is great because you're differentiating your two children. And how...it's not like both have been equally affected by religion in one way or another. They're two separate individuals in terms of how they've been impacted and the result of how you've raised them, so you're not going off on a tangent at all.

B6: He also goes by the definition of being Jewish, which is being the child of a Jewish mother.

A6: Yeah, that's true. When he's asked what religion he is, he says he's Jewish.

I: So he bases it on that technical point that my mother is Jewish, but also...

A6: I think he just has more of a feeling about it, maybe because of my dad, and just having been more around it more growing up.

I: And it sounds like a common factor in how both of your children identify themselves religiously is their parents. The structure of you both. It's interesting how they've internalized that as they've gotten older, versus what they've practiced. It seems like the lineage of the family is what at least your daughter is basing her religious identification on.

So next, describe any religious symbols that are used in your home (such as a mezuzah or a cross), or any other symbols I might have forgotten.

B6: We don't have a Mezuzah.

A6: No, I was thinking...we don't have anything, we don't have a cross. You know, only during the holidays we'll bring out stuff. And there are many times when we've all had a

Christmas tree, but every year I've had a menorah, and we've lit the candles. So that's been more predominant.

I: So the Jewish symbols will come out at certain times in the year, if a Jewish symbol is present in the home.

A6: And occasionally we'll have a Christmas tree but it just depends.

B6: If we're in town...or...we're not too busy, if the kids are in town.

A6: And it's not that big of a deal, it's never been that too huge of a deal.

I: Mm hmm, okay. And how would you describe your children's attendance of religious services?

A6: Um, miniscule. It was just during the high holidays.

I: And would you say that, that was from an early age until today? Or would you say up until they were at an age where they could make the choice for themselves?

A6: Yeah, from a very early age, when they were very young. Um...

B6: They always attended while they were here.

A6: Yeah, and while they were here they'd come with us.

I: And which particular services?

A6: Just the high holidays.

I: So Yom Kippur, Rosh Hoshanah.

A6: Yeah.

I: Okay. Alright. How would you describe your children's attendance of religious education classes (i.e. Sunday school, Hebrew school)?

A6: Nothing.

I: So they never went to Hebrew school or Sunday school?

A6: No. Neither did I.

I: Ah, okay so you didn't either. And what about you, B6?

B6: Um, occasionally when I was younger I went with the neighbor kids to Sunday school.

I: So it wasn't a regular thing.

B6: Well, just sometimes. Some months it was more regular than others, but not consistent.

I: Okay. Tell me about your children's participation in any religious rites of passages or ceremonies (such as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, etc.).

A6: My son was circumcised, but in the hospital.

I: So he never had a bris.

A6: No. We never had anything religious. They've had no religious teachings and ceremonies.

I: And did they ever attend religious ceremonies like a baptism on your side of the family, B6?

B6: No. There was none that happened out here.

A6: Or even...does your family even do that?

B6: Well I've got fifteen first cousins...

A6: Yeah, he's got fifteen first cousins.

I: Ha wow!

B6: So it probably happened a few times.

I: So it was just be the Bar and Bat Mitzvah's that they attended, but never had.

A6: Yeah, and they attended...they went to a bris but they were very little. It was my niece and nephew. And there was also a baby-naming.

I: And did your kids ever have a baby-naming?

A6: Well, the baby-naming is for the girl, and the bris is for the boy.

I: Oh, I see. And so your daughter didn't have a baby-naming?

A6: No, she attended my niece's but didn't have one herself, no.

I: And your son didn't have a bris.

A6: No, he didn't.

I: Okay. Describe any major Jewish and/or Christian holidays that you and your children celebrate. How do you celebrate? And this is sort of going back to what you said earlier, but if you wanted to expand on that.

A6: Passover every year with my family, um, from the time since they were babies. Passover seder, and then the high holidays, and temple, breaking the fast, we'd have breaking the fast dinners at various people's houses, Um...Hannukah, lighting the candles, and I did try, I'd get books that would explain what it meant and when they were little we'd read it to them. And when they were little, they would have a present every night, and then Christmas.

B6: Christmas was either here or in Michigan.

A6: Michigan it was a bigger deal.

I: And what did you do for Christmas, either there or here?

B6: My parents would have my brother and sister and the family over, and we'd celebrate Christmas eve and Christmas day.

A6: It wasn't religious. It was all very much about family.

I: So no midnight mass or anything like that, like no services.

A6: Well we didn't go.

B6: I had a girlfriend who I attended midnight mass with...

I: Ha ha.

A6: Your sister and brother might have gone to services, but we and the kids never did.

I: And then you were saying earlier when you celebrated Christmas at home, you would have the Christmas tree and everything...

A6: Yeah in the morning we would wake them up and they got presents.

I: So when you were celebrating at home, you did celebrate both Hannukah and Christmas fully.

A6: We never did Easter though, just Christmas.

I: Yeah that's right you hadn't mentioned Easter yet, okay. So my next question is sort of repetitive, but how do you and your spouse celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah with your children. And describe any past conflicts regarding how to explain these holidays to your children.

B6: No conflicts.

I: So no conflicts in how to describe them. But I'm curious, how did you describe the differences? Or did it just never come up.

A6: They never asked about why we're celebrating both or what does this mean.

I: It just was.

A6: It just was from the time they were little they had both, and it was what they grew up with, that was what they knew. So, it was their understanding of what our family did. That some families did only Hannukah, some families did only Christmas, and our family did both.

I: It was kind of the family identity. And it sounds like that was maybe why it was never really questioned. Because it was just part of what the family is—this is what we do, this is who we are.

B6: And I think that in a big city like Los Angeles, we had a lot of friends who were in a similar situation.

I: That's an interesting point you make, because if they hadn't felt like they were part of the norm, perhaps they would have asked more questions.

And, describe the religious traditions and practices that you feel are the most important to pass on to your children.

A6: That's tricky.

B6: Yeah, I don't think I have a strong feeling as to which particular tradition needs to be passed on.

I: So it sounds like maybe it's not an area that you've thought about often.

B6: Well it's not something I've thought about often or given too much weight to.

A6: Yeah, I mean our kids have turned out so well and are such good people that I think that they've become who they are because of how we've raised them, and if any of the religious traditions we practiced are a part of that, then I would hope that they would look at that and possibly continue.

I: Yeah, and I think the next question will help you answer this, because it sounds like this is where you're headed: tell me about aspects of each religion that your children appear to value the most.

A6: I think that what they value the most is the traditional aspect and the family aspect of it—understanding that it's something we do as a family and that it's important to do these traditions the same every year, and it's important as a family. It's not religious, it's more tradition. You know, so I don't think of religion as right and wrong and as instilling morals, that's something separate. And I think we've definitely instilled morals in our kids.

B6: But not by pushing God, but by being good examples.

A6: So it wasn't like people who are very religious, and religion is when they're reading the bible and there's all these rules and regulations about what's right and wrong. They never had that, so it's nothing really, it's never been anything formal. So it's more just an overall feeling.

I: Yeah. And maybe that's set by the traditions and practices that you've incorporated into the family. And it sounds like that's something you do hope they take with them into the next generation. And that sets a similar feeling that they had while growing up.

A6: And I know that it would be nice...well I couldn't say that I'd be unhappy if my daughter fell in love with somebody who wasn't Jewish and he treated her like gold. You know? And with respect, that's the most important. And that's what's most important to me. And then it would be nice if she married someone who's Jewish. But that's not as important to me.

I: What's important is the person.

A6: The values that the person has.

I: The commonalities that aren't necessarily linked to religion and religiosity.

A6: Yeah, exactly.

I: How do you think your family of origin influenced you or your spouse's decisions regarding your children's religious upbringing?

B6: Family of origin?

I: Your parents, how you were raised, and your own experiences growing up.

A6: For me, because I was never Bat Mitzvah'd, I never went to one religious class, ever. So if I had, it would have been different for my kids, and I would have married differently. Because that's how I was raised, for the most part until my step mom came



into the picture, my kids have pretty much gotten the same thing. So really, although my dad would probably roll over in his grave if he heard me say that because he thinks he raised us in a really religious way.

I: Maybe by his standards it was?

A6: No he forgot, he really thought...I mean he was doing his best, but he thought he was raising us in a Jewish way but he really wasn't.

B6: My family was all immigrants, and I think their culture was more important than religion.

A6: Well his parents were two different religions as well.

I: Ah, interesting. What were the two religions?

B6: Well my dad was a non-practicing Catholic, and my mom was Armenian orthodox.

I: Okay.

B6: Those are different. So it was more about family, and talking about old times, and the food, kids, and getting together, having a good time.

I: And would you say that, that was brought into raising your own family?

B6: I think it's across a lot of different religions and cultures.

A6: But what's interesting is, his sister and brother, they're religious.

B6: More religious, yeah.

A6: They're more religious than he is. I think they're quite religious.

I: Interesting.

A6: They both go to church.

I: So it goes to show that religion and religious upbringing can influence each sibling in a very different way.

Okay, so the last two questions I have for you, I like to ask in a pair because they're both very general, broad questions that are sort of related. The first part is: describe other factors that have come into play in relation to your children's religious upbringing that you haven't brought up yet. And the second part is: what important advice would you like to tell other interfaith spouses regarding the religious upbringing of their children?

A6: Um, well the advice is, with any couples getting married, even when they are both from the same religion, is that they have to communicate before they get married, that's the most important thing. And talk about, if they are going to have kids, especially if they are of two different religions, about how they're going to raise them, and if they are very religious and they're going to raise them in both religions, it's going to be very difficult. I can't see how that would work. One has to convert I think, but I just can't see how that would work. You know, the reason why it works for us so well is because we both didn't have such strong beliefs, we just, both of us, believed in a family culture, and we do have very strong morals, right and wrong, and when we raised our kids, we were pretty strict. And some of those things people get from religion from the bible. I know that my kids, my daughter was always so upset because all of her friends could go out to see r-rated movies but we wouldn't let her. We were very conservative in that way, and it had nothing to do with religion in my mind, it had to do with what was right for my children. So, again I think that they have to be of one mind, I think, when they're getting married. And if they're not, then it's going to be very difficult.

I: And is there anything you'd like to add, B6?

B6: I agree wholeheartedly.

I: Ha ha okay, I want to make sure you get your two cents. Well then, we'll end here—thank you both so much for taking the time to talk with me.