

JEWISH AND SOMETHING ELSE

A Study of Mixed-Married Families

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FOREWORD

In the mid 1960s, the late Marshall Sklare, dean of American Jewish sociologists and then a research director for the American Jewish Committee, first alerted the Jewish community to a rising tide of mixed marriage and its assimilatory impact upon Jewish identification. In subsequent decades, the American Jewish Committee, under the leadership of the late Yehuda Rosenman, continued to probe the dynamics of mixed marriage, its impact upon the Jewish community, and what should be done about it. In the past decade, since the release of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study, perhaps no question has exercised Jews so much as the implication of mixed marriage for Jewish continuity.

The current research by Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman of Brandeis University continues AJC's leadership role with respect to researching mixed marriage. Professor Fishman's study demonstrates how the dynamics of Jewish identity within mixed marriage are particularly ominous for Jewish continuity. The rise of dual-faith homes, practicing a mixture of Judaism and Christianity, brings religious syncretism that undermines the integrity of both faiths. The nature of Jewish identification in such homes is being so radically redefined as to become unrecognizable, forfeiting distinctive Judaic ethos—to say nothing of Jewish continuity.

To be sure, the mixed-marrieds in Fishman's study do not see themselves as doing anything extraordinary. Merging both faiths in one home expresses the ethos of American fairness and egalitarianism. So fluid has become the boundary between Jew and gentile in America that people move easily between faiths. While this says much for American tolerance, it erodes Judaic distinctiveness in favor of a bland coalescence of Jewish and American identities. Historically, American Jews have known that they were not Christians. As Fishman's study documents, even that boundary may today be at risk. Furthermore, the idea of conversion to

Judaism, with its call for distinctive and unambiguous Judaic identification, is unlikely to thrive in such an environment.

More hopefully, the study reveals that parental encouragement to marry within the faith does have positive impact; only 5 percent of mixed-married couples in Professor Fishman's study reacted negatively to parental discouragement. The messages of Jewish inmarriage and conversion to Judaism can still be heard if parents and Jewish leaders are willing to articulate them. For that reason, the American Jewish Committee convened a coalition, Dr. Fishman included, to reaffirm the values of Jewish inmarriage and conversion to Judaism while welcoming those mixed-marrieds interested in leading a Jewish life.

Doubtless this issue will continue to occupy the Jewish communal agenda. AJC's *Annual Survey of Jewish Public Opinion* last year documented with stunning clarity the pervasiveness of mixed marriage and widespread communal acceptance of it. Professor Jack Wertheimer, in an important article in *Commentary* magazine, charged that Jewish leaders were abandoning their historic leadership responsibility to encourage endogamy in the name of accommodating the needs of mixed-marrieds. In the face of an American culture that has declared interfaith marriage to be as American as apple pie, only Jews themselves can articulate the importance of Jewish inmarriage. The question is whether the Jewish leaders have the will to do so.

This research study represents part of a comprehensive AJC approach to mixed marriage consisting of data gathering, analysis, interpretation, advocacy, and coalition building. It is our hope that Dr. Fishman's research will provide some of the building blocks for formulation of communal strategy and policy.

Steven Bayme, Ph.D.
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I have been fortunate to work with an exceptional research team: Naomi Bar Yam, project manager, juggled tasks ranging from negotiating logistical challenges to creating analytical materials. Interviewers Christian J. Churchill, Lila Corwin, Margie Nesson, Rachel Rockenmacher, and Mark Rosen brought passion and insight to their sensitive assignments. Benjamin Phillips skillfully ran data and crafted useful tables. Sidney Goldstein and Len Saxe, the study's official consultants, gave invaluable advice as the project developed. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Len and to Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, especially Gloria Tessler and Christie Cohen, for providing institutional support services at every level; Len has shared his wisdom and professional expertise throughout the implementation of this study, benefiting it in numerous ways.

As always, I am grateful to Jonathan Sarna and my colleagues in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department, and to the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women, Shulamit Reinharz, Susan Kahn, and Helene Greenberg, for their support. My assistant, Naomi Goodman, accomplished numerous tasks related to this project with pa-

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Numerous colleagues, friends, and family members shared good ideas and constructive criticism with me as this project progressed, and I am happy to share credit with them. Any shortcomings are my own.

S. B. F.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the major findings of the Listening to Learn qualitative study of Jewish family life, a research project funded by the American Jewish Committee. The project was designed to deepen our understanding of households with children in which one spouse is a Jew and the other an unconverted non-Jew. One of the first intermarriage studies utilizing systematic interview data, the report explores how couples decide on the ethnic, cultural, religious, and social organization of their households. It shows how families express their attachments to different faiths and deal with their tensions around religion, as they negotiate holiday celebrations, sacralize life-cycle events, and relate to extended-family members and the community.

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

Because we were exploring subtle interpersonal relationships and people's feelings, experiences, motivations, and conflicts, our concern was with locating a variety of mixed-married family types, and comparing them

to inmarried (two born-Jews) and conversionary (one born-Jew and one Jew by choice) households. We conducted separate, in-depth interviews with husbands and wives in a broad spectrum of households. Our mixed-married families included some who were Jewishly identified, some who described themselves as raising children in two faiths, and others who said they had no religious affiliations. Some were overtly Christian and others were principled nontheists. A few informants grew up as Christians but discovered as teenagers that they had Jewish antecedents. While most of our Jewish informants were married to Christian spouses, we also included Jews married to Muslims, as well as interracial households.

Our interview data are also richly illustrative of the full range and diversity of mixed-married households in a variety of geographical areas. Our analysis is based on data from 254 interviews conducted in sixty-eight mixed-married, thirty-six inmarried, and twenty-three conversionary households, which we compared. Interviews were conducted in thirty households in Denver, thirty-seven in New Jersey (MetroWest), thirty-four in New England, and twenty-six in Atlanta. In addition, we conducted four focus groups with teenagers growing up in interfaith families (two in New Jersey and two in Denver).

While participants were diverse, the study oversampled those households that describe themselves as *raising their children as Jews*. Households purporting to raise Jewish children are regarded by some observers as the most promising, in terms of American Jewish demography. Indeed, some have suggested that mixed-married households raising Jewish children may result in a net population gain for the American Jewish community. However, *Jewish and Something Else* demonstrates that the vast majority of mixed-married households incorporate at least some Christian observances into their family life, and their children often regard themselves as the recipients of two religious birthrights.

This study is also innovative in paying systematic attention to the role of gender in the negotiation of ethnoreligious identity in mixed-married households. Gender comes into play in the differing impact of a Jewish husband or a Jewish wife in the family unit. Our data clearly demonstrate that Jewish women married to non-Jewish men are more likely to maintain religious and social ties to the Jewish community, to raise their children as Jews, and to incorporate Jewish activities into their homes than Jewish men married to non-Jewish women.

Our interview questions were organized around negotiations of re-

ligious identity within the family. We explored strategies men and women use to deal with the tension or stress around differences of opinion concerning the religious character of their families. We asked how parents perceived themselves as providing their children with information about or attachment to one or more religious and cultural faith systems. We looked at the critical ways in which family experiences are shaped by grandparents and other relatives. We also asked about the influences of teachers, outreach workers, rabbis, and other personnel encountered in Jewish religious, cultural, and institutional environments.

As described in detail in Appendix 2, we utilized a software package called AFTER to quantify the data contained in our recorded and transcribed interviews. In addition, we collected written data sheets on all our informants, which were used to create a separate and complementary data set. These quantified findings are presented in Appendix 1. However, most of the analysis contained in this report grows out of extensive reading of the interview transcripts the “old fashioned” way. The analysis of this qualitative data, in all of its richness, opens a portal to the subtly nuanced, ongoing ethnoreligious developments within mixed-married American Jewish homes today.

In oversampling couples involved in intact marriages who said that they were raising their children as Jews, we paid close attention to a combination often considered the “best-case scenario” of mixed marriage, vis-à-vis the Jewish community. Indeed, participants in this study seemed to be exceptionally tuned in to the needs and concerns of their spouses. Given the statistical fact that mixed marriages are twice as likely to dissolve in divorce as are inmarriages (1990 NJPS), our informant group is biased toward successful marriages. We interviewed only a few couples who reported unusually tension-filled relationships.

Similarly, we interviewed roughly double the proportion of mixed-married couples raising their children as Jews—63 percent, compared to fewer than one-third of mixed-married households raising Jewish children reported in the 1990 NJPS. We found our sample by employing a survey research firm to make random screening calls from Jewish community center lists in each of the geographical areas we studied. While the membership of each of these JCCs included Christian and Muslim families, each JCC’s primary membership was of course Jewish, and arguably more likely to be Jewishly identified than families who do not affiliate with a JCC. Moreover, couples who felt their relationships to be relatively stable, and

who thought of themselves as having some relationship with Jews and/or Judaism, no matter how tenuous, responded more positively to the original screening calls than those who believed their marital relationships to be heading toward trouble, or those who had a frankly antagonistic attitude toward Jews and Judaism.

This bias toward disproportionately high levels of Jewish identification makes the findings of this study, especially the persistent and recurring influence of Christianity even in mixed-married families who consider themselves to be raising their children as Jews, all the more striking. Our data show that, influenced by American values of empathy, ecumenism, and multicultural sharing, many Jewish partners in mixed marriages report feelings of personal conflict between their desire to raise Jewish children and their desire to be fair to their spouses. Even when couples initially agree on creating a Jewish household, our data show that boundaries become more and more permeable over time, and the tendency toward Judeo-Christian, rather than exclusively Jewish, family festivities increases. The blending in mixed-married households of Judaism and Christianity was especially striking when contrasted with our data from conversionary families.

The sociological study of mixed-married households is a complex project, partly because Jewish identification in America today is voluntary. Contemporary American Jews often become part of a Jewish society by joining a voluntary community, either in one of the Jewish religious denominations or in a secular setting such as a Jewish voluntaristic/philanthropic organization. Additionally, some Jews join largely Jewish friendship associations, or do work-related Jewish networking. Some perceive their political and social-welfare activism, along with other Jews who share these values and activities, to be a symbolic expression of their Jewish identity. Some are deeply involved in Jewish culture, such as Jewish literature, music, theater, film, or other artistic expressions, and find their Jewish society primarily among practitioners and consumers of the arts.

Mixed-married families can also choose to identify with Jewish societies and/or with Judaism as a religion or culture. We explore the extent to which intermarried households constitute one or more distinctive subgroups within the larger American Jewish community and the ways in which these intermarried societies are distinguished by particular characteristics. We look at patterns among intermarried families that point to shared symbolic frames of reference, common norms, goals, and means for

accomplishing those goals, along with adaptive strategies, structures, and/or interpretations that invest their activities with particular meanings.

This report also reflects the author's interpretive framework. My primary focus as a sociologist of the American Jewish community is exploring the complex negotiations through which families construct their ethnoreligious identities, the ways in which these ethnoreligious identities are implemented, and shifts that occur in the families' religious definitions as their lives change. As I demonstrate in this report, the vast majority of mixed-married households have constructed dual religious identities, especially in households in which the wife is a non-Jew. Moreover, mixed-married households tend to become more influenced by cultural aspects of Christianity over the years.

However, for the families interviewed in the midst of their daily, multifaceted lives, ethnoreligious identity construction is just one aspect of experience—and often not the most important one. For study participants, ethnoreligious identity issues are grounded and contextualized in the fabric of their lives. The concerns that galvanize them are the quality of their interpersonal relationships, the extent to which they are able to treat each other with kindness and empathy, and their ability to make whatever religious expressions they choose meaningful to them as individuals and as families.

This study reports on the outlooks of individuals and family units, analyzes their ethnoreligious identity constructions, and discusses the impact of these identities on the broader American Jewish community. The tension between these vantage points is often evident. In focusing on the community, as well as on the informants and their families, I do not mean to trivialize the multilayered reflections of this study's participants. I am acutely aware that their stories necessarily have a different meaning to them than they do to observers studying Jewish life. Rather, I aim to present their generous offerings as a basis from which we may rethink critical issues in American Jewish public policy today. The findings that have the most salience for Jewish communal policy are presented in a summary of "Major Findings at a Glance" following this preface and in my concluding chapter, "Thinking About Mixed Marriage and the Jewish Future."

MAJOR FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

1. Mixed-married households have diverse strategies for dealing with the dual faith heritages of the two spouses. Some raise children in the Jewish faith only, some in both Jewish and Christian (or some other) faiths, some in no religious faith. Others divide the children in a household, raising some siblings as Jews and some as non-Jews.

We oversampled mixed-married families who said they were raising their children as Jews. In our study, 63 percent of parents said they are raising their children as Jews—compared to fewer than one-third of mixed-marrieds in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. Oversampling allowed us to determine to what extent such households actually maintain religious exclusivity.

2. The great majority of mixed-married households incorporate substantial Christian celebrations into their family lives, compared to only a tiny proportion of inmarried families.

Despite our oversampling of Jewishly identified mixed-married families, more than 80 percent of participating mixed-married families reported Christian activities of some sort. Christmas celebrations were the most frequently reported in mixed-married families, with Easter celebrations second.

Among our mixed-married households, two-thirds celebrated Christmas at home. Sixteen percent also went to church, in addition to home celebrations. Another 16 percent celebrated in the homes of extended family, but not in their own homes.

In contrast, among conversionary households, 9 percent celebrated Christmas at home but didn't go to church (no converts in our sample went to church), and 54 percent celebrated in the homes of extended-family members.

Among inmarried households, 4 percent had Christmas celebrations at home.

Easter celebrations were reported by over half of our mixed-married households, and 12 percent went to church in addition. Twelve percent of our mixed-married sample celebrated Easter only with extended family members.

Among conversionary households in our study, 7 percent had home Easter celebrations without church, and 15 percent participated in Easter celebrations with extended family.

Among inmarried households in our study, 5 percent had some type of Easter celebration.

3. The gender of the Jewish parent is strongly related to the Jewish character of the household in a mixed-married family. Jewish mothers, in general, create much more Jewishly identified mixed-married households than do Jewish fathers.

Jewish women married to non-Jewish men were far more likely to maintain religious and social ties to the Jewish community, to raise their children as Jews, and to incorporate Jewish activities into their homes than were Jewish men married to non-Jewish women.

Among mixed-married study participants, nearly three-quarters of children of Jewish mothers were being raised exclusively as Jews, compared to fewer than half of the children of non-Jewish mothers.

Children were more likely to receive some Jewish education when the mother was Jewish, and among those receiving education, children of Jewish mothers received more intensive forms of Jewish education. Overall rates of Jewish education for children growing up in mixed-married households are much lower than in inmarried or conversionary households.

4. Most Jewish mixed-married participants received little or no guidance from their parents about dating and religion while they were still in high school and living at home. Their parents did not communicate to them an expectation that their dates be Jewish. However, when parents did encourage children to date and marry Jews, their children were much more likely to marry either a born-Jew or a Jew by choice.

Among mixed-married informants, 62 percent said their parents said nothing to them about not marrying outside the faith. In contrast, 62 percent of parents of inmarried couples and 48 percent of parents of con-

versionary couples said their parents discouraged mixed marriage. A backlash effect of negative reactions to discouragement of mixed marriage was reported in fewer than 5 percent of cases in any category.

5. Most study participants had discussed the religion of the household as soon as they realized their dating situation had the potential to become more serious.

A minority of the participants in this study had waited to discuss religion until after they were married. Discussing religion—and deciding before marriage to raise the children as Jews—had a measurable effect on household activities, including celebrating Jewish holidays, joining a synagogue, and not going to church. Jewish spouses in “raising the children as Jews” households had often issued ultimatums while dating that their households and children “had to be Jewish.” Non-Jewish spouses usually acquiesced. When non-Jewish spouses were themselves very religious, some agreed to raise their children as Jews, but insisted that Jewish partners had to learn more and be more Jewishly religious, and to raise their Jewish children in a structured Jewish environment. Other very religious non-Jewish spouses arranged for a dual-religion household.

6. Christian observance is normative in our culture, and mixed-married households that initially try to create exclusively Jewish observances often drift increasingly into Christian activities as time passes.

After years of marriage, even in “raising the children as Jews” households that initially relegated Christian activities to the households of extended families, boundaries between Christian and Jewish activities softened and Jewish spouses often agreed to move Christmas and/or Easter festivities into their “Jewish” homes, especially as non-Jewish grandparents aged.

7. Extended-family members exerted an important influence on children growing up in mixed-married households.

Although this influence did not manifest itself primarily in religious areas, it often contributed to the closeness teenagers felt toward one or the other faith tradition. Thus, for example, according to her own report, a Jewish-raised teenager found affection for her Christian aunts made her feel closer to Christianity than to Judaism. In addition, extended-family members often enriched the religious lives of growing children by providing a

place where either Jewish or Christian observances could be celebrated more intensively than in the child's own home. Finally, as grandparents aged, religious observances previously celebrated in the home of extended family were often moved into the mixed-married households of study participants.

8. The desire to be "fair" and "balanced" led many Jewish mixed-married spouses to incorporate more Christian observances into their households than they had originally intended.

9. Both Jews and non-Jews tended to describe Jewish activities as "different" or "religious," while they called Christian activities "just cultural" and "fun."

10. Most non-Jewish male or female spouses in mixed marriages expressed negative attitudes toward conversion, and had negative memories about pressure to convert.

11. In contrast, Jews by choice often spoke positively about familial pressure to convert (it made them feel wanted), and glowingly described their spiritual journeys.

Clearly, the "success" of a particular strategy depends as much on the subject as on the strategist.

12. Hanukkah and Passover celebrations were almost universal among our mixed-married participating households. Other Jewish holidays were celebrated far less frequently.

Holidays other than Hanukkah and Passover were celebrated in 55 percent of households that were raising all the children as Jews, 28 percent of households raising children as both Christian and Jewish, 22 percent of households that raised some of their children as Jews and some as non-Jews, 14 percent of households raising children as neither Jewish nor Christian, and none of the households raising their children as Christian.

13. Non-Jewish spouses raising Jewish children often later found themselves resenting the fact that they had given up their Christmas and other Christian celebrations.

As their children got older and received Jewish education, some non-Jewish parents had mixed feelings about the children's use of Hebrew and participation in ceremonies that they didn't share.

14. Mixed marriages generally involved somewhat older marriage partners than did inmarriages.

15. Non-Jewish spouses who didn't like organized religion often said they preferred Judaism to Christianity, and didn't mind raising their children as Jews, but looked forward to their children being old enough for them to share their misgivings about organized religion in general.

16. Participants who described familial dysfunctions said they married across religious lines because they were seeking warmth and stability and a different type of family than the one they had grown up in.

Although a minority of participants recalled dysfunctional families of origin, the proportion of problems recalled by mixed-married individuals was dramatically higher than among inmarried individuals. Reports of familial dysfunction of various kinds (cold and distant families, excessive mobility, alcoholism) were higher among mixed-married spouses than other participants in our study. Both non-Jews (31 percent) and Jews (23 percent) who married someone of another faith, and Jews by choice (26 percent), in our study were disproportionately more likely to remember their families of origin as cold than Jews who married each other (7 percent).

Similarly, alcoholism in the family of origin was reported disproportionately by certain participant groups in our study:

Seventeen percent of female non-Jews and 4 percent of male non-Jews married to Jews; 25 percent of male and 20 percent of female Jews by choice; and 8 percent of male Jews and 4 percent of female Jews married to non-Jews reported alcoholism in their families of origin. Reports of alcoholism among Jews married to other born-Jews or to Jews by choice were very few.

17. Training does matter. Religious patterns from childhood and the teen years, whether gleaned from formal Jewish education or from information education in the household, tended to be repeated.

Within each cohort, for example, the holidays celebrated in the household of origin tended to be celebrated in the current household, all other things being equal.

18. Jews who had grown up with many Jewish friends during their teen years were much more likely to find at least partially Jewish friendship circles in college.

19. The religion of the current spouse was related to the friends one chose in college.

20. Factors associated with a stronger Jewish profile in mixed-married families:

- *Couple discussed religion before marriage and agreed to be Jewish.*
- *Woman in family is Jewish.*
- *Jewish family of origin openly advocated on behalf of Jewish dating and marriage.*
- *Jewish family of origin celebrated many Jewish holidays and had some Sabbath observance.*
- *Jewish spouse had many Jewish friends as a teenager and in college.*
- *Jewish spouse received several years of formal Jewish education.*

Factors associated with a more Christian profile in mixed-married families:

- *Couple discussed religion before marriage and decided that neither one was religious, OR decided to have a Christian household, OR didn't discuss religion before marriage.*
- *Woman in family is not Jewish.*
- *Jewish family of origin did not advocate on behalf of Jewish dating and marriage.*
- *Jewish family of origin did not celebrate many Jewish holidays, and had no Sabbath observances.*
- *Jewish spouse had mixed or mostly non-Jewish friends as a teenager and in college.*
- *Jewish spouse had little or no formal Jewish education.*

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1. STUDYING MIXED-MARRIED JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS

Disappearing Boundaries

Jews in the United States enjoy unprecedented freedom. Xenophobia and anti-Semitism, which profoundly affected Jews for centuries, no longer block American Jewish educational, occupational, and increasingly even social mobility. Regarded as racially as well as religiously other in preimmigration societies, American Jews have navigated a successful “odyssey” from the status of the “Hebrew” race to that of “Caucasians.” Jews are regarded as “white” in most contemporary American societies. This erosion of boundaries marking Jews as essentially different¹ has ultimately made Jews acceptable as coworkers, neighbors, friends, and potential mates to numerous non-Jewish Americans.

From the Jewish side as well, boundaries between Jew and non-Jew have blurred, and in recent years American Jewish resistance to intermarriage has been replaced by the view that intermarriage is normative. The great majority of American Jews believe intermarriage is inevitable in an open society, and fewer than half actively oppose such marriages, according to a study recently published by the American Jewish Committee. When asked whether “it would pain me if my child married a gentile,” only 39 percent agreed with this statement, including 84 percent of Orthodox, 57 percent of Conservative, 27 percent of Reform, and 19 percent of “Just Jewish” respondents. Of Jews who said that Jewishness was “very important” to their lives, only 54 percent said it would pain them to have a child marry a gentile.²

This AJC report sent shock waves throughout the American Jewish community, as it amplified the startling intermarriage trends revealed by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. 1990 NJPS had shown that

around half of recent marriages involving a Jew included a non-Jew, and also indicated that in mixed-married households fewer than one-third of the children were being raised as Jews.³

Conceptions of Jewishness and processes for joining the Jewish people have changed dramatically over the course of Jewish history. The Hebrew Bible itself does not prohibit all intermarriage. According to historian Shaye Cohen, although “mixed multitudes” and “resident aliens” attached themselves to the people of Israel in various times and places and were protected by Jewish law, they usually remained distinct and did not blend into Jewish families and societies. On the other hand, while Deuteronomy prohibits intermarriage with certain specific nations, the Israelites, like other ancient peoples, assumed that alien wives would simply take on the religion of their husbands. As Cohen comments, “a wife’s loyalty to her husband’s religion would last as long as her loyalty to her husband.” During the Hasmonean period the notion of formal conversion into Judaism emerged, at first exclusively for men, effected through ritual circumcision. Gradually, in “the late first or second century C.E. ... the idea arose that gentile women (wives) too must convert; if they do not convert, they remain gentiles, even if married to a Jewish husband,” because “a woman’s personhood is beginning to emerge.” At that time, “immersion became *a* conversion ritual for men and *the* conversion ritual for women.”⁴

Cohen suggests that the status of mixed-married households and the details of the conversion process that we are familiar with through rabbinic Judaism began to be developed during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, “was well under way by the time of the Maccabees, and was substantially complete by the time of the Talmud,” largely in response to changes in the social structure of Jewish life:

Neither Exodus nor Deuteronomy prohibits intermarriage with all non-Israelites, and both of them prohibit intermarriage with Canaanites only because it might lead to idolatry. Biblical Israel was living on its own land and had no need for a general prohibition of intermarriage with all outsiders. Attitudes changed when conditions changed. In the wake of the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C.E., Judaea lost any semblance of political independence, the tribal structure of society was shattered, and the Israelites were scattered among the nations. In these new circumstances, marriage

with outsiders came to be seen as a threat to Judaeon (Jewish) identity and was widely condemned. The Judaeans sensed that their own survival depended on their ideological (or religious) and social separation from the outside world.⁵

Similarly, after the exile the familiar principle of matrilineal descent became established. Matrilineal kinship principles are not invoked in preexilic portions of the Hebrew Bible, and even in rabbinic law familial succession and status are mostly patrilineal within inmarried families.⁶ Thus, the method of incorporating born non-Jews into the Jewish community changed from biblical to postbiblical and then to postexilic times.

Nevertheless, for the two millennia that shaped the Judaism that we know, the Jewish status of children followed the status of the Jewish mother. Non-Jews could join the Jewish community only by following the conversion prescriptions of rabbinic law. Moreover, for most of Diaspora Jewish history, entry of non-Jews into Jewish families and communities was discouraged not only by Jewish authorities but even more by the non-Jews among whom they lived. Indeed, we learn much about some historical reasons for Jewish antipathy to outmarriage from non-Jewish edicts against Christian or Muslim fraternizing or cohabiting with, or marrying into, local Jewish societies. Despite the notable exceptions of a few philo-Judaic rulers and/or populations, the boundaries around Jewish societies were for the most part reinforced both by external and internal resistance to socializing and marriage across ethnoreligious lines.

In these Jewish societies, a densely interwoven fabric of distinctive Jewish religious behaviors, social norms, linguistic, cultural, and structural characteristics made Jewishness a primary shaper of individual identity. Jewish identity was nurtured in communities in which Jews spoke Jewish languages, consumed distinctive food in ritualized milieus, prayed using ancient, religiously significant texts, and based much of their behavior on biblical and rabbinic literature and social prescriptions. Although Jews often borrowed much from (and gave much to) the cultures around them, a richly particularistic Jewish flavor suffused daily lives.

Physical and intellectual contact with non-Jewish neighbors was limited in most of these Jewish societies prior to emancipation. In historical Jewish communities, with notable exceptions in Spain and Italy, few Jews enjoyed systematic Western education before the eighteenth century.

Lacking other outlets, the intellectual lives and perspectives of Jews were organized around sacred study and worship. These Jewish societies were profoundly albeit unevenly transformed during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with advancing waves of social change leading to the emancipation of the Jews in France, Germany, and England and considerably later in Eastern Europe. Gradually, the gates of Western educational and occupational opportunity opened to Jews, providing access to modernity. Emancipators offered Jews the chance to emerge from their pariah status and, through education, to become part of humanity at large.

Nevertheless, although Jews were freed through emancipation from the physical walls of the ghetto and the experiential limitations of the shtetl, boundaries between Jew and non-Jew remained to be conquered. Jews and non-Jews alike perceived and talked about essential physical and psychological distinctions that demarcated Jews from their host societies, but often disagreed as to whether these differences were congenital or societal in origin. Some Jews, especially in Western Europe, took the route of apostasy, converting to Christianity as their price of admission into truly Western status. In these settings, outmarriage was an important strategy for reinforcing their acceptance into Christian society. In Russia and Eastern Europe, some of the brightest young Jews abandoned religion, and worked to destroy racial and religious boundaries between peoples by devoting their energies to secular ideological social movements, including communism. Some atheistic Jews were primarily involved with other Jews who shared their worldview; others found non-Jewish mates in their social activism enterprises. Many Jews internalized negative images of Jewishness, and saw the erosion of ethnic boundaries as highly desirable.

For American Jews, the most striking decline of boundaries occurred after the physical voyage westward. While early twentieth-century America also had its share of anti-Semitism, as the decades passed and Jews climbed up socioeconomic and educational ladders, the differences between Jews and their Christian neighbors paled. Although intermarriage rates were relatively low for decades, intermarriage had an important symbolic significance in these immigrant communities, and American literature, drama, and film portrayed the interethnic, interfaith romance as a paradigm for personal opportunities in the United States. Later, a sequence of historical events and trends, including the arrival of “greener,” non-Jewish, foreign-appearing immigrants, the acculturation and suburbanization of

large portions of the Jewish community, World War II and its aftermath, the growth of the Equal Rights Movement and the celebration of ethnicity and multiculturalism in the late 1960s, and the impact of Israel in erasing images of Jews as weaklings and wanderers, each played important roles in decreasing American perceptions of objectionable Jewish difference.

Paradoxically, as Jews became more and more accepted as white, middle-class Americans, their distinctive identity as Jews also became more and more acceptable. Thus, in important ways, the two-centuries-old promise of emancipation came to its fullest fruition in the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Jews in the United States, unlike Jews in France, Germany, and England, are not required to take on the protective coloration of secularization or nondifferentiation as a ticket to acceptability. Jewishness is admired in many American societies.

The permeable boundaries and multicultural ethos of contemporary American Jewish life, while they have emerged gradually, represent a new and challenging chapter in Jewish history, and one for which the past offers few clear precedents. In the United States today Judaism as a faith tradition has been strikingly Americanized, creating commonalities and bridges between Jews and non-Jews who occupy the same socioeconomic, educational, geographical, and political milieus. Contemporary American Jews routinely coalesce American and Jewish ideas, incorporating American liberal values such as free choice, universalism, individualism, and pluralism into their understanding of *both* Jewish *and* American identity. Indeed, not only have American Jews created a coalesced American Judaism, they have also created a distinctly Jewish notion of what defines the “true” America, in their own image.⁷

The Study of Intermarriage

Within America’s open society, with ethnoreligious distinctiveness waning,⁸ large numbers of Jews have for decades been defined as much by what they were *not* as by what they were. Thus Robert Bellah wrote in 1987, “It is part of Jewish identity and the maintenance of the boundaries of the Jewish community to deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.”⁹ Peter Medding further suggested that, “paradoxically, as the religious aspects of Judaism have become relatively less central to the core of Jewish identity, and shared feelings have become more important, being *not* Christian has

taken on greater salience as a defining element of Jewishness.”¹⁰

Is “not being Christian” still a defining characteristic of the religious identity of children growing up in mixed-married households? This is just one of many questions we face in our attempt to understand American Jewish families today. The 1990 NJPS corroborated, on a nationwide basis, trends previously reported in diverse city studies of Jewish populations in recent decades, especially regarding rising rates of mixed marriage and declining proportions of conversion. In the decade following the startling findings of the 1990 NJPS, numerous pieces were written commenting on the outmarriage rate among recent marriages, but there have been relatively few in-depth research publications on intermarried households.

A few suggestive studies by Bruce Phillips, Egon Mayer and Rela Geffen, Peter Medding and others have raised intriguing questions. Phillips revisited a 1990 NJPS cohort, and provided useful analyses of some trends leading up to mixed marriage. He also presented a typology of six different types of mixed-married households. Phillips suggested that the amount of Christian influence in mixed-married households can be quantified, and that households can be classified according to the proportions of Judaism or Christianity making up their religious identity.¹¹ An earlier study by Peter Medding et al. proposed a simpler version of the same concept, which Medding called “segmented identity.” The authors of that study, based on aggregated data from eight studies of metropolitan American Jewish populations in the 1980s, suggested that while Jews who had grown up in weakly identified inmarried households might well feel ambivalent about Judaism, they did not feel that they were Jewish and something else, religiously. In contrast, Medding et al. hypothesized, the children of mixed-married households construct a dual religious identity.¹²

Both Medding’s and Phillips’s typologies are useful bases for the construction of new research efforts. However, the quantitative nature of their studies limits their usefulness. As our interview data make dramatically clear, the elements or “segments” of personal and familial identity are difficult to quantify, because human behavior and attitudes are affected by subtle, intertwined factors and influences. For example, how does one “compute” the threshold for Christian influence in terms of the impact on religious identity? Children of mixed marriage growing up even in a primarily—but not exclusively—Jewish-identified household are often profoundly influenced by Christian observances and attitudes in the homes of

family and friends, which on some level they feel is part of their own birthright. Conversely, children growing up in homes nearly devoid of Jewish content are occasionally drawn powerfully toward Jews and Judaism, under the most unlikely circumstances. For them also, our interview data show that the concept of partial birthright is an important aspect of the psychological process.

Recent work by Rela Mintz Geffen and Egon Mayer draws on focus group discussions with members of mixed-married households. Mayer and Geffen found that “interfaith couples revealed subtle psychological and conversational mechanisms distancing themselves from problematic aspects of both traditions.” Geffen and Mayer’s “study report” on their series of focus group discussions is intriguingly impressionistic, although it calls for a more systematic approach.¹³

In addition to statistical surveys and qualitative sketches, other publications on the subject range from policy planning suggestions from the vantage points of particular organizations or wings of American Judaism, reports by counselors, social workers, and other practitioners in the field, autobiographical and journalistic presentations, and self-help books. Each of these is important for its particular purpose and audience.¹⁴

In addition to the limited number of studies that focus directly on mixed-married populations, there are of course several recent broader studies of the Jewish community that include useful observations. Steven M. Cohen, in *Religious Stability and Ethnic Decline*, notes that rates of intermarriage climb steadily from older to younger populations of American Jews. Cohen’s quantitative data show that “whereas mixed marriage is clearly associated with some diminished religious involvement (e.g. beliefs, practices) it is far more associated with diminished Jewish ethnic involvement (tribalism, peoplehood, Israel, friends, institutions).¹⁵ Bethamie Horowitz, in a quantitative and qualitative study of Jewish identity in the greater New York area, ranked her subjects on a continuum from “really indifferent about being Jewish” to the highly identified “Orthodox” in seven groupings. However, Horowitz’s sample included only 12 percent who were the products of mixed-married households (compared, for example, to 29 percent who were raised by only one parent, due to divorce).¹⁶ Ariela Keysar, Barry Kosmin, and Jeffrey Scheckner, in *The Next Generation: Jewish Children and Adolescents*, present powerful and disturbing evidence from the 1990 NJPS that “secular Jews are seriously opposed to raising their children in the Jewish religion” even when two Jews are mar-

ried to each other, but especially so when a secular Jew is married to a non-Jew.¹⁷

The available body of research tells us about the behavior of diverse Jewish households, but provides little usable information about the nature of ethnoreligious identity construction in mixed-married households. A minority of American Jewish families participate in densely Jewish societies, with their built-in processes of cultural transmission. The freedom and openness of American society has made the construction of familial Jewish identity a much more self-conscious and voluntary enterprise than ever before. To understand these processes requires qualitative research that sheds light on life as it is actually lived in mixed-married families. This report on the Listening to Learn project is among the first systematic, qualitative, geographically diverse, comparative analyses of family dynamics and their impact on ethnoreligious identity construction in mixed-married households. We utilize quantitative methods to organize and present the large patterns we observed, and we list some of the quantified findings of our study below. Nevertheless, our focus is on the human element, and we have worked to provide nuanced information about the attitudes, behaviors, values, and religious identity construction of mixed-married families.

The analysis of interview data in chapters 2-6 places concerns and experiences of our informants in the foreground. Nevertheless, the constant backdrop to the discussion is an awareness of what these data mean for issues of Jewish continuity. One of the primary tasks of this report is explicating the juxtaposition between individual experience and communal concerns. For example, the demonstrated commitment that most of our informants expressed about empathy and fairness toward their non-Jewish spouses and their extended families may inspire admiration when one looks exclusively at relational dynamics. However, this laudable concern for spousal fairness frequently is the vehicle for introducing increasing levels of Christian activity into Jewish homes. From the standpoint of Jewish continuity, familial compassion might be perceived as directly in conflict with the religious integrity of the household. Although indisputably painful, an exploration of these personal and communal values conflicts is an inescapable and ongoing aspect of this report, and indeed of the whole subject of mixed marriage in the contemporary American Jewish community.

2. DECIDING ON RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

How do couples determine the religious character of the homes they will create? What factors enter into their decision? Listening to Learn participants surprised us with many of their comments. One of the most startling was the unanimity with which both inmarried and mixed-married informants made it clear that Jewishness is still regarded as “different” in multicultural America.

“When I decide how Jewish I want to be, I am really deciding how different I want to be,” said one inmarried Jewish husband. The idea that Jewishness and Judaism are perceived as “different” or “other,” despite a multicultural American ethos that celebrates ethnic and religious differences, was articulated repeatedly by mixed-married, inmarried, and conversionary respondents. This sustained and widespread perception of otherness had a profound impact on decisions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Secularized Christian customs, ceremonies, and activities are seen as normative American culture, our informants suggested, while anything Jewish is regarded as a deviation from the norm. American Jews signal their own feelings about Jews and Judaism most powerfully in the decisions they make for and about their children. Participant ambivalence about Jewishness was directly tied into concerns about how much Judaism to insert into their children’s lives. For example, when informants remembered the Jewishness of their own childhood with mixed feelings, or if they perceived hypocrisy within the religious lives of friends and family, these feelings prompted Jewish parents to minimize their children’s exposure to Judaism. However, Jewish respondents usually reserved these high standards for Jewish activities, and seldom applied equal rigor to secularized Christian activities. Thus, while few Jewish informants complained about problems in general Christian culture, such as, for example, the commercialism surrounding Christmas celebrations, many had a lot to say about material-

ism and hypocrisy within Jewish societies. It was not unusual, for example, for mixed-married Jews to criticize the materialism they witnessed in synagogues or to complain about the emphasis on gifts at bar mitzvahs.

Parents who encouraged their children to participate in Jewish activities, or to receive Jewish education, sometimes worried that they were promoting behavior that might isolate their children from the broader American society. Thus one Jewish husband prevented his children from beginning their Jewish education “too soon,” in order that they should not develop a “ghetto mentality” and be unable to converse with a broad variety of Americans:

I would think that around ten, maybe later, I would think seriously about Hebrew education in preparation for bar mitzvah. Likewise for my daughter. But in between, I think it's healthy for him to understand that there's a whole world out there and that he has a choice whether to include himself in the whole world or segregate himself. So the way I see it is, surround yourself with whoever it is you may wish to associate with, and if you wish to associate with a combination of Jewish people and non-Jewish people, so be it. If you want to just associate with Jewish people, fine, or if you want to associate with just non-Jewish people, fine. But that it should be up to you, and you should have the ability to converse with people of all types, and accept them. And I'm not sure people who stay with what I would call a ghetto mentality, surround themselves exclusively with one type of group, has that knowledge or that ability to converse....

Deciding How to Raise the Children

Many mixed-married couples spent a lot of time, even before marriage, wrestling with decisions about the religious character of the family they hoped to create. Background literature about mixed-married couples, primarily drawn from the experiences of workshop leaders and outreach workers, argues that many couples do not begin to wrestle with complicated issues around the religious/ethnic nature of the household until they are contemplating a family. We began the interviewing process with the

hypothesis that we too would find this pattern. However, the majority of both Jewish and Christian informants in this study recalled that family faith issues were discussed while dating, as soon as the relationship grew serious. This was true both of first- and second-marriage situations. One Jewish partner described the premarital negotiating process:

Well, it was never about my religion versus his religion. It was more conversation about—you have to understand this is both of our second marriages, and the whole point of us, if we are even thinking about getting married, is that we are not going to make the same mistake twice. So we need to get everything on the table and then work backward. So the biggest controversy, obviously, was how would we bring up the children. It wasn't a controversy, but it was a conversation. That's how we got started.

The partner with the strongest religious background and/or beliefs usually wanted the children to be raised in his or her faith. However, frequently Jewish spouses wanted their children to be raised as Jews even when they did not have particularly extensive knowledge of Judaism and/or patterns of religious involvement. In those cases, the more religiously involved Christian partner insisted that the Jewish partner upgrade his or her involvement with Judaism if the family religion was going to be Judaism. In other words, although the determination that the household religion would be Jewish came from the Jew, the determination that the household would have a more intensive involvement with religion came from a non-Jewish parent who was concerned that the children should have a full and rich religious life:

My philosophy is I only know one religion, and if I am going to be their mother, I can only bring them up Jewish. Plus in fact I don't believe in Catholicism. So if I believed a little bit in Catholicism, I would think about it. But there is just—you don't do that. So he was actually very good about it. I mean, I don't know. I have been very lucky. It wasn't that he didn't challenge me, but his response was, "I'll tell you what—I have no problem with you bringing the children up

Jewish. However, that means bring them up Jewish. Don't just say they are Jewish. I want them in Hebrew school, I want bar and bat mitzvahs. I want them to be married in a temple. I want them to understand the Jewish culture. And if you can hold up to that end of the bargain, then great."

Although many of the Jewish informants described themselves as teenagers and college students to whom Judaism was not particularly important, many found that when faced with the possibility of creating a primarily non-Jewish household their Jewishness was more central to their identities than they had imagined. Often the Jewish partner issued an ultimatum, declaring at some point prior to marriage that he or she would not marry the non-Jewish partner unless the children were raised as Jews:

Then, I said, "Look. If we're going to think about this, we need to take some steps." And, this thing evolved and we thought this very early on, because there was no opportunity for compromise as far as I was concerned. I wasn't going to have kids with Jewish and Moslem kind of thing. I don't think that works. It might work for some people, but I just kind of see religion as you've got to pick one and if you're called to the Torah, you're called to the Torah as a Jew—not as a Jew and something else. Maybe you could do a Jew and a Buddhist. I don't know that much about it.

Many informants said this discussion took place "when we first were dating and it became clear that we were both serious." This was equally true when the Jewish spouse was a woman and when the Jewish spouse was a man. The non-Jewish father of two Jewish toddlers described a process typical of this cohort:

We met in 1989 in a Beach House in West Hampton. We went out off and on for about four years. When we got serious, we started to discuss religion. She said the kids had to be Jewish. She felt so strongly—I knew I had to compromise, because that was the way it was going to be.

Having discovered that religious identity was one of the first compelling issues in their lives together, many couples described the process of determining in which religion they could comfortably raise their children. Their discussions were lengthy, requiring patience, research, experimentation, and thoughtfulness on both sides. Sometimes the non-Jewish partner needed to reevaluate Christianity to determine how much it mattered, such as the woman who reflected, “I really wanted Chad to find out for sure whether or not he had any ties to Catholicism. And, in fact, he didn't. Which I kind of knew, but I think he needed to find out for sure.”

The fact that Judaism is the wellspring of Christianity was important for some informants, especially those with some Jewish or Christian textual background. Because Judaism and the Hebrew Bible were among the sources for early Christianity, some Christian spouses felt that they were not really abandoning their own religious traditions when they raised Jewish children. One Jewish wife spoke about her husband:

Well actually it was Cary who said, “You know the Old Testament is part of my religion, and the New Testament is part of my religion but not part of yours,” and he said, so I would feel, we both agreed that both couldn't raise them Jewish and Catholic. I read a book called *Mixed Blessings* and that was enough for me. You give a kid a religion, not both and he was the one who actually said I don't feel very uncomfortable raising them Jewish. He said he wouldn't feel uncomfortable with Judaism because it really is part of Catholicism and the Old Testament. And he said that there would not be a whole lot that would make him uncomfortable, but I told him everything about Catholicism would make me uncomfortable. So that was discussed. And he has stuck to that completely because we are raising him Jewish.

In other families, it was not until children were born that the issue of the religion of the household was discussed.

Most often, the spouse who didn't feel strongly about his or her religion had the fewest mixed feelings about seeing children raised in another faith—at least when they discussed their children's faith in the abstract. As we will later explore more fully, decisions about how children should be raised sometimes underwent revisions later on, when parents felt differently

about the decision as they observed their children celebrating holidays that they themselves did not celebrate, and learning languages and prayers that they did not utilize. Such spouses were often surprised by the strength of their own feelings. Informants described being overwhelmed by their feelings, in conversations that sometimes took place before and sometimes after children were born. The realization that they really cared how their children were raised came as a revelation to them:

I always kind of told myself it wasn't an important thing. But then we got married, and talked about having children and I suddenly realized that it was important to me, which I know happens to a lot of people. And we had what could have been a dilemma, an obvious dilemma. But we talked about it, and she is not religious at all. And we both agreed that the children should have a religious identity and we decided to raise them to be Jewish.

Other couples studied about both religions and what raising children in those religions might feel like. Some went so far as to audition clergy about their decision:

But as far as religion goes, we actually interviewed rabbis and priests for ourselves. We came to the conclusion that we would most likely be bringing the child up Catholic.

INT: And how did you make that decision?

We made it because my wife is more actively Catholic than I am actively Jewish. It doesn't matter to either of us which way as long as there is a definite path. That is basically the way I see it.

Negotiating Dual Religious Identities

Husbands and wives in mixed-married families often feel they are involved in an ongoing process of negotiating and juggling “yours, mine, and our” religious identities. Concerns about these issues become especially focal in the yearly cycle of religious holiday observances, during the time period when formal religious schooling may be initiated, when the family makes

decisions about institutional affiliations, and when individuals encounter joyous or sad life-cycle events.

One of the most striking aspects of our interview data was the empathy of spouses whose religion held the primary position in the household toward those whose religion was relegated to secondary status, especially when Judaism was the official family religion. Jewish spouses who had insisted before marriage that their children must be brought up as Jews often became more and more concerned as the years passed that they were not being “fair” and had “taken too much away” from their spouses. This guilty anxiety often became a vehicle for introducing or reintroducing Christian symbols into the household.

For example, one Jewish husband said he felt grateful that his non-Jewish wife had been “very good about sharing” the enterprise of creating a primarily Jewish home. He said he was also happy that “she has helped me compromise in terms of sharing her religion,” especially as regards “certain holidays, like Christmas, being able to celebrate that as a holiday, not so much as religious holiday, but a social holiday.”

Similarly, the Jewish wife of a non-Jewish husband who has been so well accepted by his Jewish in-laws that he has taken over the Jewish father-in-law’s lucrative business, said she feels badly that she has “deprived” her husband of a Christmas tree at home:

I don’t want to be rigid. Now I make Christmas and Easter dinner for my mother-in-law, and the whole family goes to help friends decorate their Christmas trees. This year I bought a poinsettia for Cary—and also I bought it because it matches the kitchen. I don’t think buying a poinsettia makes me any less Jewish.

In order to make sure that her husband’s Christian faith tradition is honored, she and her “raised Jewish” children attended at least one candle-lit service during the year:

We used to go to the Unitarian church for that, but now our temple has a collaborative candle-light service the night before Thanksgiving in the Old North Church. It is beautiful. Also, I think it is important for my daughter to relate to her

father's religion. She knows she's Jewish. I want her to understand what Christianity and Christmas are too.

Almost all of the non-Jewish spouses were described by themselves and their Jewish spouses as cooperating with the Jewish pieces of their children's lives, driving them to religiously related activities, if necessary, and facilitating such things as Hanukkah celebrations and other family events. Many had very positive things to say about Jewish culture, especially what they perceived as attractively warm Jewish family units. They liked the family orientation of many Jewish rituals, and the weekly and yearly cyclical structure.

In contrast to the positive things they said about Jewish culture, many of the non-Jewish spouses also spoke of aspects of Jewishness that they disliked or resented. Although they cooperated with the Jewish logistics of their children's lives, many grew to resent being "shut out" of important aspects of their children's lives. Few of them wanted to learn Hebrew—some had tried!—but they disliked the fact that their children were learning a language they did not know. Since they no doubt would not have had the same resentful feelings about their children learning French, Spanish, or Italian, it is clear that in these cases Hebrew has attained a symbolic salience, and may represent the whole package of religious dislocation that they feel but do not often articulate.

On an ideological level, many non-Jewish spouses said they resented what they perceived as the exclusivity of Judaism as a religion. Significantly, few said they had been treated coldly in synagogues, Jewish institutions, or Jewish social settings. Their notion of the exclusivity of Judaism was related to ideas about Jews as "the chosen people." Thus, they talked about Jews as a group "wanting to be separate" or "wanting to be different," but, even when pressed, they insisted that they personally had not been excluded in any way.

A few non-Jewish spouses spoke disparagingly about "legalism" or "too much attention to details, instead of larger, more important ethical issues." One man who had taken over his Jewish father-in-law's business heatedly criticized an acquaintance who avoided eating pork. "Why do Jews have to invent laws about not eating pork," he demanded. "Why don't they pay attention instead to the express, literal word of God in the Bible." When asked what it was he thought the express literal word of God in the Bible consisted of, he simply repeated, "They should pay attention to the

express, literal word of God in the Bible.” Another man said he could never become a Jew because “Jewish culture has never produced an original thinker. Any Jewish philosophy is derivative.”

Several of the non-Jewish spouses said they disliked organized religion in general. They said that religion was important in raising children because it gave them structure and a moral framework, but that adults were probably better off without religion. They said they were waiting until their children “are old enough to understand what’s wrong with organized religion,” and then they were going to share their reservations with their children. For many of them, this desire to tell adolescent children that they don’t really need religion was related to stories of their own “emancipation” from their religious faith at some point during adolescence.

Conversion Evokes Mixed Responses

Listening to Learn included interviews in inmarried households as well as families in which one spouse was a Jew by choice, providing useful comparisons with data from interviews in mixed-married households. It was particularly intriguing, for example, to look at the way mixed-married families handled relationships with extended family, as compared to conversionary households that also had Christian relatives.

Attitudes toward conversion were the most obvious area for comparison between mixed-married and conversionary households. Among the mixed-married participants in our disproportionately Jewish-identified sample, nearly two-thirds of non-Jewish spouses said they had never considered converting to Judaism, and nearly one-third said they had considered converting but had abandoned the idea. While converts to Judaism often spoke glowingly and in great detail about their spiritual journeys into Judaism, attitudes toward conversion were very negative among many non-Jewish spouses in mixed-married households.

The divide between converted and non-Jewish spouses also illuminated the ineluctable importance of personal difference in responses to similar stimuli; for example, non-Jewish spouses often spoke bitterly about the Jewish family’s pressure on them to convert, while spouses who had chosen to convert to Judaism saw similar pressures as evidence that the family really wanted them to be completely part of the family. It is also likely that these differing attitudes toward memories of previous familial

pressures to convert are at least partially a function of outcome, arising out of a desire for self-justification. Thus, whether born-Christian spouses decided to convert or not to convert, it was important to them to reduce personal feelings of dissonance related to their decisions.

Informants recalled the decision to convert as feeling momentous:

Well, it was important to Harry and it was important to his mother. I can recall thinking, how could I handle not having Christmas? How strongly do I believe in Jesus that I can't kind of think that, well, maybe he was just an exceptionally good person? I thought that sort of thing. As far as the culture and all, I had seen a little bit of it and that part of it I thought was good. I thought at that time that it was very important that we be of the same religion because of children. I knew that the children were going to be whatever I was, at least by the Jewish faith actually. I'm not even sure what it was by proxy.

INT: Why did you feel that it was important that you go through the same religion?

I just felt that for us, as a family it was important to be the same. I thought it would be easier for the children because there would be questions.

Although some spouses did decide to become Jews after years of marriage (one husband converted for their twenty-eighth wedding anniversary!) many non-Jewish spouses strongly insisted that conversion to Judaism would be a betrayal of some essential core of their psychic being. Some non-Jewish spouses said they considered themselves "probably more Jewish than anything else," but didn't want to take the formal step of converting. However, a larger proportion of the Christian spouses considered the option of conversion as out of the question.

Many non-Jewish spouses had attended classes because they wanted to know something about Judaism so they could relate to their children's schooling. Typical was one non-Jewish husband who noted that his wife would have been happy for him to convert. However, although he did "attend very enjoyable classes in Judaism for six months on New York's upper West Side," in the end, "I told Joyce I wouldn't convert. I

wasn't into learning Hebrew. I didn't want to be something different, I just wanted to learn more about what my children would become."

Non-Jewish spouses like these said they felt that their ethnic and religious identity—not being Jewish—was a defining and unchangeable part of their selfhood. Unlike mixed-married couples in earlier decades, today there are fewer gender differences in negative attitudes toward conversion. Christian women, far more likely to convert in the past, now also often resist conversion for themselves even when they are raising Jewish children. Women's reasons for not wanting to convert seem very similar to those of Christian men: they see conversion as a betrayal of some innate aspect of their identity. One Protestant wife expressed her willingness to raise Jewish children, but not to become Jewish herself:

It was more important to Jim, and when we first started dating, Jim said, you know I am Jewish. He put things on the table in the very beginning that he wanted to have Jewish kids and that was fine by me, but by the same token, I had said, "I can't convert because to me religion isn't something you take off like a pair of shoes and put back on." I mean, one of Jeremy's uncles said, "Why don't you just convert? It's easy to change your religion." Even though I am not religious, I was technically brought up as a Christian, believing in Jesus Christ, and it would seem hypocritical to me to be doing that, more like a convenience thing than really, truly believing it. So I couldn't do it in good conscience.

Nevertheless, spouses who continue to think of themselves as essentially Christians, albeit nonpracticing, seem receptive to the idea of conversion for their children when necessary. The practice of a non-Jewish spouse supporting conversion to Judaism for a child or children was quite striking. Thus one mother talked about the possibility of conversion for her nine-month-old daughter, whom she and her husband both consider Jewish:

Jenine is Jewish. We have made that choice. She is going to be brought up with the Jewish religion, going to temple. I mean, she has had a naming for her. We haven't had a conversion, because technically she is not Jewish because I am

not Jewish, but Jeremy will probably do a conversion ceremony just in case she wants to marry someone who it matters to in the future. I tell Jeremy we should do it soon, because I would rather have her not have to remember—not that I wouldn't want her to remember it, but it would be easier for her not to have to go through that as a twenty-five-year-old adult.

Most informants in their interviews did not connect their decisions about the ethnoreligious nature of their households to the religious credentials of the officiant who performed their wedding ceremonies. In nearly all of our cases of mixed-married spouses raising Jewish children, when the Jewish spouse made an unequivocal declaration that his or her children must be raised as Jews, the non-Jewish spouse agreed.

Raising Children as Jews in a Mixed-Married Household: Gender Matters

According to the 1990 NJPS, about one-third of mixed-married couples report that they are raising their children as Jews. Among our informants, we oversampled such families, and nearly two-thirds said they were raising at least some of their children as Jews. However, we found that what it means to “raise the children as Jews” varied dramatically among these households. In some households, the two parents continue to attempt to reproduce the social structures of their own religious backgrounds. In others, both parents cooperate in the attempt to reproduce one unified social structure. Thus, within some households putatively raising the children as Jews, many Christian behaviors are part of the family calendar, making them quite similar in behavior to households described as raising the children “in both faith traditions.” In other households, in contrast, families created a nearly exclusive Jewish character, and Christian celebrations were limited to participation with friends and extended family members outside the nuclear-family home.

The gender of the mother makes a powerful difference in the nature and extent of Jewish connections in the household. In mixed-married households, having a Jewish mother is positively related to almost every aspect of Jewish identification, including raising the children as Jews.

Nearly three-quarters of Jewish mothers reported they were raising their children exclusively as Jews, compared to slightly less than half of non-Jewish mothers. None of our Jewish mothers had agreed to raise their children exclusively as Christians, compared to one out of ten Jewish fathers. Families who said they were raising their children in “neither” religion comprised 3 percent of our Jewish mothers, but 8 percent of our non-Jewish mothers. Households splitting siblings into two religious groups—some Jewish and some non-Jewish children—were reported by 7 percent of Jewish mothers and 14 percent of non-Jewish mothers. Only among those saying they were raising all their children in both religions was there virtually no difference between Jewish and non-Jewish mothers, 17 and 19 percent respectively.

Universally, informants said that they arrived at decisions by “talking things out.” Some spouses reflect that they have a bias toward their mate’s religion, either for ideological reasons or because they have always gravitated toward persons of the other faith, as one Christian husband commented:

You know, on the assumption that it’s not a bad idea to have a clear foundation to start with. And on my own analysis that Judaism was less dogmatic, and certainly less structured in the Reform form of it than the other available religions. And I had dated many Jewish women.

However, decisions are not always made based on reasoned consideration. Informants also said that personal commitment to a given concern, or charisma, or force of personality or character, sometimes can win out over discussion and compromise. When asked how the couple decided on religious issues in the household, one young Jewish man, who spoke of himself as still infatuated with his mannequin-attractive “Boston Brahmin” wife, thought out loud about the issue of circumcision. His wife objects to circumcision because she sees no compelling reasons to do it, and thinks there are health and emotional reasons not to do it. The Jewish husband said:

If it [a yet-to-be-born child] is a boy, she won’t want to circumcise him, and I will. I know I’m going to lose this one, because she cares about this a lot. I’m not willing to go to

the mat on this issue. I'm not willing to fight with her that much.

Decisions about affiliation are often affected by considerations about the way in which the synagogue or institution treats non-Jewish spouses. Thus one Jewish spouse reflected, "If it was just me, I would probably join a Conservative temple because I am more used to having more Hebrew in the service. That's how I was brought up. But in deference to Catlyn, I mean, Reform temple certainly is appropriate."

Some Christian spouses agreed to raise the children as Jews because they were not particularly fond of their own religious tradition. In some cases, such spouses thought very highly of Judaism and Jewish culture. In other cases Christian-raised spouses actually disliked organized religion altogether. Especially when they had received an intensive religious education that they disliked, they saw Judaism as the lesser of two evils. One particularly eloquent father who was raised as a Catholic expounded on Judaism as a religion with a less obsessive burden of guilt, because Judaism, unlike Catholicism, didn't teach children that someone had died for the sins they had yet to commit. Nevertheless, he felt Judaism has more than enough guilt to lay on a child:

INT: And, do you plan on introducing her to any of your own personal history in Catholicism?

You know, she's got plenty of it in Judaism. She really does. I mean, maybe it sounds like a broken record to some extent, but I've taken the idea of like, you know, someone dying for sins and I've kind of reduced that to some kind of ridicule [sic] for me. It seems an unnecessary part of the guilt. I mean, there's a whole lot of guilt in organized religion all through the Old Testament. You don't have to look too far for it.

Circumcision is a form of guilt. All these concepts that—these humbling yourself in front of God's concepts, they're all very real in Judaism.

But in Catholicism, this whole concept of there being someone born in a fashion that he was born and then, raised and dies for our sins, you know, a life of torture and

persecution in my name, I—that's a whole different game.
That's a whole different ball game.

Frequently when non-Jewish spouses—especially fathers—had agreed to raise their children as Jews, and harbored strong feelings against organized religion, they said they looked forward to the time when their children would become adolescents so they could share their negative feelings about religion with them.

Mixed-Married Households with Two Religions

Well over one-quarter of our participating families described themselves as creating households that incorporated two faith traditions, either raising all their children with two religions (19 percent) or raising some children in one religion, other children in another religion (9 percent). What does it mean to raise children “with two religions”? Parents who opt for this approach often do so because neither partner is willing to concede the religion of the children or to insist that the children be raised only in his or her faith. Having made the decision to give their children two religions, couples typically give them double religious education, double holidays, and double life-cycle ceremonies, as several informants elaborated:

She did have a formative Jewish education here. And she has had a Catholic education prior to her communion. So she has had a pretty good taste of both so far. It goes with the concept that we're working on this together. And we've proven to each other that we are, by doing the baptisms and doing the bris and all the Christmas trees, the ceremonial for both high holidays.

Another couple described their holidays as follows:

Well, we do Hanukkah and Christmas together. So we have a Christmas tree and we have Hanukkah, we do that at the same time. We bring them up in both religions but very tenuously I would think. I think Cheryl is much more interested in the Jewish side of it than I am in the Christian side

of it. I'm really not religious at all. So the children get both, double presents, which they love. Then we go and visit grandma and grandpa. They get the religious instruction there over the meal—what's it called, seder or something?

Parents deciding to raise their children in two faith traditions often were not sure if the children would maintain two religions throughout their lives, or if they would instead choose one over the other at some point. Many expressed anxiety about the feasibility of expecting children to do either:

Clara considers herself a spiritist Christian thing, but not Catholic. And I don't know how she's going to give them that in an organized way here. So I'm not sure. I don't think we've come up to a good resolution of that. We'd like to give them both, and let them choose over time, although we recognize that that's hard to do, and that they end up—it ends up being a difficult path.

In the two-religions paradigm of mixed-married household, there is typically an energetic attempt to practice two religions on a fairly regular basis, with a calendar year alternating Jewish, Christian, and American holidays, as will be further elaborated in the next section. For many, the following vague ecumenism defines the family's approach:

I would describe that as they are not being raised with any religion, but to the extent that we can, we're trying to give them a joint Jewish/non-Jewish identity. It's hard to say Jewish/Protestant, because there's nothing really culturally—well, there's Christmas we observe. Actually we do things at Easter too. And so I guess, yeah, I guess Jewish/Protestant identity.

In some “two-religion” households, few holidays are celebrated, and “identity” is perceived much more a matter of ethnicity and ethical behavior than religious celebrations:

Geez, as a religion. Oh, boy. I mean I'd say they're being raised with good Judeo-Christian ethics, morals, values. But I kind of put that in a different category as opposed to religion.

Others wondered about the whole enterprise of defining ethnoreligious identity:

We kind of have this semiofficial agreement that we're a-religious, and we're not trying to bring up our kids with any particular religion. But there's this whole ambiguity of, what is Judaism? What does being Jewish mean?

Some parents conscientiously try to blend the two religions together in their presentations to their children, creating a self-conscious ideological amalgam of Judeo-Christianity deliberately modeled on "more than one religion."

Many parents who decide to raise their children in two faith traditions feel that their decision shows a sense of "balance" and "fairness" that takes the sensitivities of each of the parents into account. For such parents, these interpersonal values were at least as important as any specific religious teachings:

I think our kids know who they are. I think they know that they are Jewish and that they are one of the few kids, few Jewish kids that also fully celebrate Christmas. And we as a couple feel that there has been some attempt at balance in the relationship, balance in the family. We chose not to send our kids to private Jewish school, largely because of this; to keep the balance in the family and show concern about both parents.

Many parents say that by raising their children with two religions they are giving them a "special gift":

Both of us have a separate religion. Neither of us is a practicing participant of one. Neither of us really have been

practicing other than family things and community things. So, yes, we talked about it. What we talked about was having enough around the house during religious times of the year, so that Christopher would [inaudible] of all of those things so that when he becomes old enough, he'll be able to choose. Since that time, we've talked to him about what's possible. We haven't reached a final conclusion.

The conviction that children with two religious cultures are fortunate was voiced even by couples from strongly divergent backgrounds, such as a Catholic Latino husband and an Israeli wife:

We've decided to raise them in both religions now, yeah. Will we come into some problems explaining Jesus Christ? Yes, and that's why I'm going to do my research in intermarried schools and see what it is exactly, and how it is exactly they do it as to not completely confuse the children. But I think for both my husband and myself—well, I'll speak for myself—religion is tradition. And both of us bring in—I bring in a lot of Israeli life and he brings in a lot of Spanish life and Spanish culture. And we just have it all here. And I think it's really nice.

In one out of ten of our participant households, some children were raised as Jews, while other children were actively raised in another faith tradition. In the great majority of cases, this pattern was followed in blended households, in which a child or children from a first marriage are already being raised as Catholics or Protestants, and the parents continue with their Christian upbringing, while raising children of the second marriage as Jews. In these households, some children have confirmations, while other children have bar/bat mitzvahs. Thus one mother proudly described her Catholic daughter's life-cycle celebrations, each of which took place while she gestated two Jewish sons:

She made all her sacraments when I was pregnant. I was pregnant with Joey when she made her first communion. I was pregnant with Jerry when she made her confirmation.

Sometimes children raised in these yours-mine-and-ours households decide for themselves that they wish to transfer into the religion of other siblings. The parents are much more surprised when children decide to switch to Judaism than they are when the children choose Christianity:

My wife is Catholic. Our daughter is being raised Catholic, the two boys are being raised Jewish. There was a point in time where our daughter was a member of Temple Teens. She had considered converting.

Many parents raising children in “two religions” are actually uncomfortable with religion in general. When their children express an interest in a more intensive involvement with one or another religions, the parents are often perturbed. To them, vague rather than intensive involvement is preferable, since they believe it leaves later options open. Despite this discomfort, when children demand religious involvement, parents often oblige. However, as the following interview illustrates, parents often manage to signal an unsympathetic attitude toward religion to their children:

She wanted to go to a church. She has one good friend who's African American and goes to church. And that one other family I told you about, the mixed marriage, he goes to church. And not that they particularly wanted to send him because they're not religious either, but it just so happened that a friend of [his] was going and he started going with a friend. And she's very good friends with this kid. So she saw her friends going to church, and she said, “I want to go to church.” So at one point I said, “Well if that's what you want to do, then we'll look around.” So we went to a Unitarian church.

I guess from what I've heard, there are a lot of kind of different views at Unitarian churches and some are a little bit more churchy than others. And this one was not the least bit churchy. I didn't think they ever once mentioned the word “God” and they never called anything a prayer. It was all—I don't know—it was all sort of nice and about peace and love.

And I thought, if she really wanted to do this that I didn't want to put her in a position where she looks at both religions and has to make a choice. I think that's a hard thing for a child to do and it's asking a child to, in a way, favor one parent over another. So I thought that this might be a good compromise if it was something that she really wanted to do, because it's, at least in this particular place, this is very much a place where there are a lot of mixed marriages, and it very much put both Jewish and Christian cultures on the same level. You can celebrate Hanukkah and Christmas as if they're all part of the same thing. Then it's not something where the child has to make to a choice. So anyway, the end of the story is we went once and she was completely bored and never asked to go again.

Given the fact that, in the parents' eyes, this particular church's excellence consisted of its avoiding the mention of God or prayer, concentrating instead on "peace and love," it is perhaps not surprising that the visiting child did not find anything compelling, and was too bored to pursue further religious experience.

In some households, the parents decided beforehand to raise all the girls in the mother's religion and all the boys in the father's religion so that each parent would feel that he/she had children following in his/her religious tradition:

It seems like we celebrate everything except Kwanza. There is always a holiday going on. And the kids know, well Carolee of course believed in all the holidays that Catholic children believe in. But we decided when I was pregnant that the baby would be brought up Jewish because I was able to bring up my firstborn child in my religion, and it was very special and very important to me that I get to do this with her. And he should have that as well with his first child.

In still other households, decisions about how to raise the children are not completed until the children are born, or even until they have grown into their school-age years. For many parents, the true difficulty of deciding

on a religious direction for children was based on the fact that the parents themselves could not resolve their ambivalent feelings:

I don't feel really comfortable going to like a Unitarian church or anything like that. But I would feel hypocritical if I didn't, I was going to send him to do something that I wasn't willing to participate myself. Well, we just haven't really gotten serious about planning it yet, and but if Christine keeps up she will probably get her into some kind of religious program, or I don't know.

Parents raising children with both Christian and Jewish traditions have their own organization, called "Dovetail," which publishes self-help materials, has a website, and holds periodic conferences. The most recent conference, held in June 2000 in Louisville, Kentucky, focused on the subject of children, "But What Am I? Children and Interfaith Families." Workshop discussions looked at life-cycle events ("Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, Eucharist/Lord's Supper"), spiritual lives of couples, ethnicity and culture, and interfaith grandparenting, among other subjects. Participants were offered a variety of religious worship services, including a "Jewish Sabbath Evening Service" on Friday night and "Jewish Sabbath Morning Service" on Saturday morning, and a choice between a "Protestant Service," "Roman Catholic Mass," and "Interfaith Service" on Sunday morning. It is interesting that no interfaith service was offered on Friday night or Saturday morning. This programming difference may signal that Sunday morning is a normative time for worship, during which persons of all faiths may pray, whereas prayer on Friday night and Saturday morning is distinctive to persons of the Jewish faith, and those of other faiths who wish to pray would be joining the Jews in prayer.

Teens from Mixed-Married Households Talk

In our focus groups with teenagers in New Jersey and Denver, we found that many teens from mixed-married families described fluid religious boundaries. Many of these teens live in a world in which religious identity is fungible, as one teen described a divorced mother who was raised Catholic, for a time wished to be a Mormon like one of her children, con-

sidered conversion to Judaism, but now has a Catholic boyfriend and is leaning toward rejoining that religious group:

My mom, she was raised Catholic. Then she decided that she wanted to be Mormon, which is what my brother is. Then she decided that she liked Judaism. But now her current boyfriend is Catholic, and she's going toward Catholicism.

But when she was Christian, we would just do those sorts of, like we wouldn't, we would do Easter, but like the secular.

INT: Would you go to church on Easter?

No, we would just do like the egg hunt, the candy, and that good stuff.

INT: And at the same time would you also do Passover?

Yes.

Against the background of these fluid religious boundaries, the family has celebrated the major religious festivals of both Judaism and Christianity. For this teenager, religion is clearly a matter of choice, and a choice that can be made and changed as frequently as one desires.

Other teenagers described homes basically devoid of religious observance:

We actually don't do anything for Hanukkah either, because my dad was raised Catholic, and my mom and the rest of the family are Jewish. And we don't want to celebrate one holiday or the other. So what we have is we have a generic holiday gift giving where it's just not attached with any religion at all, but we figure that's what the sort of holiday is giving gifts.

INT: And when do you usually do it?

In December whenever we can get the whole family there.

INT: And does your extended family participate in that?

No. Most of my family lives on the East Coast, but

my sister, and her boyfriend, and usually if my brother can come out, and then my mom and dad.

In households with fluid religious boundaries, children are often sent a clear message that religious choices are not too serious or momentous:

INT: So it sounds like your family had to make a lot of different decisions at different points about how to celebrate things, and different decisions. How were those decisions usually made?

What we liked the most. Like it was decided that I lead Passover services three years ago because my dad was tired of it. My mom felt that she didn't know enough about it. And I was like "Let me." And it was awesome. Just leading services, the first time I led services was with my dad, and it was amazing.

However, as the conclusion of this last quotation illustrates, children sometimes find religious expression powerful and meaningful despite the casualness of the religious environments that surround them. And because many parents wish to be "fair", and do not wish to decide for their children which faith is to provide the religious structure for their lives, many mixed-married couples cooperate in providing their children with dual religious experiences—and thus the option for "choosing" one or the other or both religious for themselves:

Well, I think I mentioned my mother is Catholic, my father is Jewish. And we—like in December we celebrate—we have Hanukkah, you know, we light the candles, say the prayers, and so forth. You know, for Christmas we have—we get a Christmas tree like every year, or every other year, you know, put up Christmas lights like around the windows.

INT: Do you go to church on Christmas, or services at all?

Yes. We go. Typically my mother will go with us to, you know, whatever services we go to.

INT: And does your dad go too?

Yes. But like for Jewish services, my mother goes with us during the year, and so then for Christmas and for Easter, we'll go with her to her church.

Ironically, Jewishness is perceived by some teenagers as preferable to Christianity and also preferable to secularism or atheism precisely *because it is different*. Thus, although for the majority of the children of mixed-married families Judaism may be less appealing because of its marginality, for some teens it is Judaism's distinctiveness that makes them lean toward committing to a Jewish destiny:

I would definitely say I'm Jewish, because at least where I am, there's so little diversity, because we have a lot of Christians, we have a lot more atheists, and people who just don't have a religion. And I have plenty of Chinese friends who, they just—they love hearing about religion. It's somewhat of a status symbol, I guess, in my school. It's kind of weird.

INT: To be Jewish, or to have some religious—

To have some kind of religion that's other than Christian or atheist. And of course I do get a little bit of anti-Semitism from that. People who say they're joking, but it goes a little far there. It's a bit worrying, but nothing you can't handle. Just kind of knowing that people—I don't know. People actually talk to me because I'm Jewish. It's really strange.

3. CELEBRATING THE SEASONS

Festivals of Sameness

One popular, if paradoxical, trend in American culture today is the celebration of ethnoreligious differences as testimony to the sameness of all Americans. Americans share the experience of deriving from diverse, particularistic heritages, and the contemporary liberal ethos simultaneously accentuates and transcends differences. Valorizing the differences that unite, liberal Americans are fond of emphasizing commonalities that seem to span ethnic and religious boundaries.

Striking evidence of this ethos of unification through difference is found in department store decorations, magazine illustrations, and in a new species of greeting cards now proliferating in stationary shops, exemplified most directly in the "Mixed Blessings Greeting Card Company." One card, for example, shows children who have respectively lit the solstice-based lights of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwaanza holding hands in front of their tribal candelabras. The message inside this card prays that the season of lights will "unite us all." These pictures, illustrations, decorations, and cards convey the impression that the messages of all religions are the same, it is only the packaging that differs. Significantly, this message has found a home outside of the United States as well. In the secularized Israeli city of Haifa, which prides itself on its progressive intergroup relationships, Jews, Christians, and Muslims celebrate the "Holiday of Holidays" each December, producing posters and other artwork that also emphasizes the similarities of transreligious holidays of lights.

Despite these popular messages that blur religious differences, only a tiny minority of inmarried American Jewish families celebrate non-Jewish holidays. The incidence of Christmas celebrations in inmarried Jewish households has actually declined over the past few decades, probably as a

result of the increased acceptability of Jews and Judaism in mainstream American settings.

However, in mixed-married households, in dramatic contrast, the intermingling of holidays from the faith traditions of both parents is one of the most prevalent characteristics. Most mixed-married families report some connection to both Christmas and Hanukkah, to both Passover and Easter. How these dual connections are handled depends on the way the household has designed its religious identity.

The great majority of mixed-marrieds incorporate substantial Christian celebrations into their family life. In our sample of predominantly Jewish-identified mixed-married households, nearly nine out of ten families talked about participating in Christian activities of some sort during the year. Christmas celebrations were the most frequently reported Christian activity in mixed-married families, with Easter celebrations second. Among mixed-married households, 50 percent celebrated Christmas at home but didn't go to church, and 16 percent also went to church in addition to home festivities. Another 16 percent said they only celebrated in the homes of extended family members.

In contrast, among conversionary households, 9 percent celebrated Christmas at home but didn't go to church—no conversionary families in our sample went to church, and 54 percent celebrated in the homes of extended family members. Among inmarried households in our study, 4 percent had Christmas celebrations at home. Easter celebrations at home without church were reported by 42 percent of our mixed-married households; another 12 percent also went to church; and another 12 percent celebrated only with extended family members. In comparison, among conversionary households in our study, 7 percent had home Easter celebrations without church, and 15 percent participated in Easter celebrations with extended family.

In holiday celebrations, as in other aspects of family religious life, the gender of the Jewish parent made a difference. In households with a Christian mother, Christmas was celebrated at home in three-quarters of the households, and in church as well as home in 22 percent of the households. In mixed-married households with a Jewish mother, the percentage celebrating Christmas at home was 72 percent, but fewer than 1 percent went to church. In mixed-married households with a Jewish mother, 20 percent had no Christmas celebration in their home; but with a Jewish father, only 1 percent had no Christmas celebration in their home.

Hanukkah and Passover celebrations were almost universal among our mixed-married participating households. Other Jewish holidays were celebrated far less frequently. Holidays other than Hanukkah and Passover were celebrated in 55 percent of mixed-married participating households raising all the children as Jews, 28 percent raising children as both Christian and Jewish, 22 percent of those raising some of their children as Jews and some as non-Jews, 14 percent of those raising children as neither Jewish nor Christian, and in none of the households raising their children as Christian.

Passover seders, at least some of the time, were reported by virtually all of the mixed-married couples, both those raising their children “as Jews” and those with dual faiths or no religion. All except for those who declared they had no Jewish presence in their households reported Hanukkah celebrations, including candles, presents, and potato pancakes (latkas). Eighty percent spoke about some type of High Holy Day observance, most frequently a holiday meal, and sometimes temple attendance and/or fasting on Yom Kippur by the Jewish spouse and school-age children.

Mixed-married households were much less likely to include synagogue attendance in their Jewish holiday celebrations than were inmarried or conversionary households. Among mixed-married informants, one-quarter said they sometimes attended synagogue as part of their Jewish holiday observance, compared to half of conversionary informants and 46 percent of inmarried informants.

In mixed-married households that defined themselves as unambiguously Jewish, children were likely to attend High Holy Day temple services with one or both of their parents, since a majority of non-Jewish spouses attend such services with their Jewish spouses and children, at least occasionally. Jewish-raised children in mixed-married households almost always had a Hanukkah celebration in their own homes, with candle lighting and presents, and sometimes latkas or dreidel (Hanukkah top) playing.

While some mixed-married households that defined themselves as “Jewish” had Christmas trees and/or wreaths in December and Easter dinner and egg hunts in the spring, in other households’ Christian holidays were often celebrated away from home, with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or friends, at least in the early years of family life. There were interesting differences in how home holiday observances were reported. In more than one case, Jewish fathers reported having Christian holidays only

in the homes of grandparents and other extended-family members, while their teenage children reported that these festivities were sometimes held in their own homes.

There were also dramatic differences in attitudes toward Christian holiday observances early in the marriage and after the passage of years. Jewish spouses, especially Jewish mothers, often began by establishing household rules about delegating Christian holiday celebrations to non-Jewish relatives. However, informants in their forties, whose parents were sometimes losing the ability to host a holiday gathering, reported that holiday celebrations previously situated away from home had become their responsibility. Thus boundaries delineating the informant household as “Jewish” and the in-law household as “Christian” blurred, and “Jewish” families with school-age children found themselves taking on increasing responsibility for Christian celebrations. By this point the Jewish spouse had often softened his/her resistance to the introduction of Christian practices into the household. As one Jewish woman described it:

I love my mother-in-law, and she just can't do it any more. So now it's my pleasure to make Easter dinner for her and her family. I even make them a ham, because it means a lot to them. Except one year Easter fell on Passover, so I had them over for Easter dinner but I didn't make the ham.

In households that defined themselves as two-faith families, Jewish and Christian holidays were unabashedly juxtaposed and celebrated side by side, sometimes even together. Thus, in one household in which the daughter was being raised as a Catholic and the son as a Jew, the Catholic mother and her daughter placed ashes on their foreheads at the appropriate time, and the whole family had a seder, and also went to Easter Mass and had an Easter dinner with bunnies and an egg hunt. In a particularly poignant demonstration of the intermingling of faith traditions, in this particular family the son attended a community Jewish day school.

Christian Holidays Described as “Fun,” While Jewish Holidays Are “Religious”

Many Christian spouses in this study described the Christian holidays as

(1) American, (2) fun, (3) basically secular, and (4) manifestly normative. In contrast, the Jewish holidays were frequently described by Christian spouses as confusing, troublesome, too somber or too religious:

We celebrate Easter, which is a completely nonreligious holiday ... it's Easter eggs and bunnies ... it's completely a-religious and it's just a fun type thing. Then we do a seder. It's a pretty formal seder.... But you know, you go through a whole book, and everybody is complaining the whole way about going through the whole book....

And we do something on Rosh Hashanah. I always get a little bit confused about those holidays and what we're supposed to do, because it's less obvious than at the seder. Although it's getting a little bit clearer.... Don't do really much of anything on the Day of Atonement. Can't think of the name right now.... I need to keep track of when Yom Kippur is....

And then Christmas and Thanksgiving. Christmas looks like pretty much the average American Christmas. So it's got a Christmas tree. It's got lots of presents. Juliet has put her foot down recently that we not have lights outside the house. So there's kind of an interesting dynamic there. My kids kind of want to put some nice lights on the outside. And Juliet is saying, well, let's don't go to that extent, kind of a public display or something.

He described himself as totally comfortable with Christian rituals, which he said had been “cleansed of any religious meaning”:

When we do the Christmas tree it's fun, it's nice. There is some ritual to it. But there are all these intrinsic—I don't know—all the Christian practices in Christmas, let's say, there's something about them that make them intrinsically kind of a fun thing, because Christmas trees are pretty.

In contrast he reflected on his discomfort with many of the Jewish elements in his daughters'—and his—life, which seem to him (1) emblematic of minority status, (2) specific to the Jewish people and culture, (3)

spoken in a foreign language, (4) overly serious in tone, and overall (5) dissonant with the normative Christian customs of the land:

Jewish culture versus Jewish religion has come to a point ... where I have kind of had my qualms about how far to go.... And there is an asymmetry generally, I think, of the minority religion, and how much of the majority religious influence it can handle, or rather my wife and her friends can handle, versus me, a majority religious person, and how much of the minority religion I can handle. And there's kind of an assumption, I shouldn't put it that way, but there is in fact a real distinct asymmetry that Jewish religious things are passed off.

...I think partly it's the sobriety or just the emotional attitude that we take to those different things. Let's take a seder. The seder is much more religious. I mean, it's talking about the Jewish people, and there are very specific things you say. It's not just in the foreign language which is kind of interesting and different, but it's calling upon you to practice and be a good Jew, and here's what you should remember... Basically it's an extremely religious activity with a lot of good food.

Among the families in which children were being raised in both faiths, Christian holiday celebrations also included such events as attending Mass or other church services, and included as one family goal reading from the New Testament description of Jesus in the manger in order to "put religion back into the holiday"—this in a household in which Jewish observances were described as "religious" and Christian observances as "just cultural." Similarly, households described as having "no religion" included some form of Christmas and/or Easter celebration, including occasional visits to church, which characteristically were viewed as being "cultural" rather than "religious." In addition some Christian spouses were irritated by a dearth of familial public Christian festivities, and those spouses who were raising their children as Jews often felt that they gave in to their Jewish spouses, religiously, much more than the Jews gave in to them.

What is the sociological significance of the widespread celebration of Christian holidays and ceremonial occasions in mixed-married house-

holds, in striking contrast to the lack of such celebrations in inmarried and conversionary households? One important answer to this question grows out of our informants' insistence, in all three types of households, that "Jewish is different."

The fact that inmarried and (to a slightly lesser extent) conversionary Jewish households avoid Christian holiday celebrations in their own homes is a powerful testimony to their willingness to be different. Despite a heavily advertised Christmas shopping season that now begins early in November, despite strong cultural messages that all religions are really the same, despite reported Jewish acceptance of actual or potential intermarriages among friends and family members, men and women in households with a single, Jewish religious identity still seem to agree with Bellah's statement, "It is part of Jewish identity and the maintenance of the boundaries of the Jewish community to deny that Jesus is the Christ."¹⁸

The eschewing of Christian activities in the home still seems to be the bottom line for most American Jews, the religious boundary line beyond which lies amorphous, undifferentiated secularized-Christian Americana. However, given demographic trends, this attitudinal and behavioral stance may be a transitional phenomenon. We do not as yet have enough data to predict the impact on communal and religious life when adults who have grown up in households not characterized by this visceral avoidance of Christian observance become a substantial percentage of the greater American Jewish community.

4. SACRALIZING LIFE-CYCLE EVENTS

Measuring religious attachments to Judaism, for decades demographers of the Jewish community focused on the performance of particular ritual activities. However, recently it has become apparent that moments that transform personal life, such as birth, marriage, and death, and ceremonies that mark personal rites of passage, such as bar and bat mitzvah, loom much larger in the maps of meaning of contemporary Jews. Indeed, the sacralization of life-cycle events is probably the most significant aspect of religion to most Americans, regardless of religious or marital status.

Interview data indicate that many experience communal life-cycle ceremonies as manifestations that their personal transitions are important to friends, family, and community. They say that in a religious setting, such ceremonial events make them feel that their personal transitions are connected to historical Jewish communities and to some concept of divinity, however they perceive the relationship between themselves, the Jewish people, and God. It is thus not surprising that Jewish families, including many mixed-married couples, strive to find modes to bring family and community together to mark their important life passages in some ceremonial way.

Inmarried and conversionary Jewish couples usually build upon venerable Jewish formulas, and mixed-married couples are also often interested in adapting these ceremonies for the particular needs of their family groups. In one of the most ancient of Jewish traditions, infants are initiated into the covenant of the Jewish people through the *brit milah* (ritual circumcision) for boys; today, many infant girls are named and/or welcomed at newly popular *shalom bat* ceremonies. These events are extremely meaningful to the parents, siblings, and extended families. Since most growing children become fascinated by pictures and stories of themselves, one may even say that these initiation events eventually have meaning for

the children themselves. As children enter puberty, American bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies have pride of place in Jewish family life, absorbing the entire family in elaborate planning and compelling young adolescents to engage in months of preparation. In addition, stable rates of Jewish education in general, and rising rates of Jewish education for girls, are closely tied to the ubiquitousness of bar and bat mitzvah in American Jewish communities.

Marriage

American popular culture presents Jewish families as preoccupied with marriage, and this perception is strongly linked to historical fact. The blessings recited at each life-cycle event underscore the prominence of marriage in traditional Jewish communities. For centuries, in traditional communities governed by rabbinic guidelines, marriage was a strong desideratum, encouraged by both religious dictates and social pressure. Jewish religion and social culture have not until relatively recently been especially tolerant of unmarried adults, and traditional Jewish texts presented the married household as the only productive status for Jewish men and women. Significantly, while children were regarded as one important goal of marriage, the creation of a companionate, Jewishly functioning household equaled fertility as a cultural ideal. Fertility was important not only for its own sake but because it comprised the first step in the task of raising children so that they too would grow up to marry other Jews and create their own “faithful households in Israel,” to quote the traditional Jewish wedding language. As marriages were consecrated by the recitation of special blessings and the reading of the *ketubah*, the Jewish marriage contract, under the *huppah*, the wedding canopy, “from generation to generation” was not an abstract concept, but a concrete formula for familial and communal functioning.

For many contemporary American Jews, weddings with a traditional Jewish flavor are very desirable. This was not always the case: In America during the first half of the twentieth century, traditional Jewish wedding customs were familiar only to Jews, and were not uniformly popular even in the Jewish community. Acculturated Jews often discarded traditional Jewish wedding behaviors in favor of Western wedding mores. American Jews, like their Christian neighbors, incorporated legions of

bridesmaids in matching dresses, and often preferred wedding melodies by Mendelsohn and Wagner to anything from Jewish culture. Within the past few decades, in contrast, Jewish music and foods have become part of the wider American cultural heritage. Americans have become familiarized with lively klezmer wedding music. Jewish wedding dancing and foods are commonplace images in such popular commercial films as *Goodbye, Columbus* and *Private Benjamin*, and in numerous television programs. Having a wedding with a pronounced Jewish flavor is perceived as appealing by many, and not in the least inimical to being an acculturated American.

Being married under a *huppah*, reciting Hebrew blessings, breaking a glass and calling out *mazel tov* were described by large numbers of our informants as ritualized moments that they wished to incorporate into their own marriage ceremonies. Mixed-marrieds, like other American Jews, are apparently very influenced by the Jewish social and cultural emphasis on the sacralization of marriage. It mattered to many of them—or perhaps to their families—that clergy participated in their marriage ceremonies. More than half of our mixed-married informants had been married by clergy: one-third by a rabbi, 18 percent by a rabbi together with a priest or minister, and 8 percent by a priest or minister alone. Fewer than half, 42 percent, were married by a justice of the peace or family friend.

Mixed-married couples often went to considerable effort to locate Jewish clergy who were willing to perform or participate in the performance of their wedding ceremonies. In the process, they learned about what considerations went into rabbinic decisions whether or not to perform mixed marriages, as illustrated in the following saga:

And then by word of mouth, and I forget how we found, but there are two rabbis in the United States that will do a marriage, a Jewish marriage ceremony including the forbidden sentence which is “according to the laws of Moses and Israel,” which is the bit that the rabbi would leave out if it was an interfaith marriage. But we found two of them. We found one and he’s a wild guy. He’s a hippy. He lives in Malibu. He does his annual High Holidays. And he is the funniest guy. And he said, “yep.”

INT: So he would do a totally Jewish ceremony even though she wasn’t Jewish?

Right. He said are you going to have Jewish children, are you going to raise them Jewish? We said yes. He said are you going to live a Jewish life? We said yes. He said fine. So he married us. We went to California for our wedding and had a wonderful wedding with all the trimmings. My parents were still alive. They came. My wife's grandmother came from England. It was good. It was the last big hurrah for our family. It was the last good portrait of my family. And it was great.

Several informants talked about rabbis who had counseled them as well as performed the ceremony. Sometimes the advice given by these rabbis held the door open for dual-religion households:

We got married in their greenhouse and we had a justice of the peace who really would have done better as a used car salesman. But he did most of the officiating. But we found a Reformed [sic] rabbi who was willing to come and participate in a way that he felt comfortable with. We had gone around to a lot of rabbis who said a) we're not going to marry you, and b) we're not even coming.

We found a Reformed [sic] rabbi who was really great. And we met with him a couple times beforehand. So, we said, "We're going to have to get a third religion, right, because I can't still keep mine, and she can't keep her religion," and he said, "You're out of your mind. Take one of the two, or keep both of them, but you don't really need a third religion." And I thought he was actually pretty smart.

Not uncommonly, informants talked about having two separate wedding ceremonies in two different religions. In most of these cases, Jewish families attended both ceremonies:

We had two ceremonies. We had a church ceremony and then we had a traditional Jewish ceremony.

INT: Who conducted the church ceremony?

A priest. It was in a church.

INT: And what was that like?

It was beautiful. And due to the curiosity of my family and her family the place was packed. We had 500 people there.

INT: Due to curiosity?

I would say so. The Jews go to church and see a wedding.

INT: And the second ceremony?

Was in the reception hall.

INT: And that you said was Jewish? Who conducted that?

A rabbi. An interfaith rabbi did marriages there.

INT: What was that wedding like?

That was a traditional Jewish wedding with prayers and breaking the glass. And prayers. Wine. Very traditional. We had skull caps.

INT: And how many people attended that one?

Three hundred people that went to the reception.

INT: Was this the same day.

Yes, but two ceremonies.

Sometimes one or the other family had negative feelings about the match. These feelings were often expressed in response to wedding arrangements:

It was conducted by a Reform rabbi in the restaurant underneath an archway so we could call it a chuppah. So we had a civil ceremony first. Her mother wanted a Catholic wedding, even though she wasn't really Catholic. I didn't really like the idea, but I went along with it. I think they worked really hard, and Clara got really stressed on making this whole big wedding for her mother. And as Clara tells it, her mother cried the whole time and really was a burden on Clara and wasn't very helpful. So I went back, did the civil ceremony. A day or two later, I had the religious ceremony.

For those informants who wanted some type of religious auspices for their wedding, some eventually "settled for" a minister, rather than not having any religious character at all:

I don't think there were people in Denver who married interfaith. Or rabbis in Denver that married interfaith. And we searched around and we found a licensed minister or whatever who could perform weddings in the state of Colorado. And, interestingly enough, he had gone through the same thing himself like seven, eight years prior to that. And that's what got him interested in being able to get licensed to do was that he was Jewish and his wife wasn't. And he couldn't find anyone to marry them.

Forty-two percent opted for a judge or justice of the peace, or some other non-sectarian officiant or friend:

I clerked for a judge in Colorado and he was also a guy that knew Christine's dad and a guy that I still consider him a friend and he presided over our wedding. So, he's like an African-American judge presiding over, you know, a wedding of a Jew and a non-Jew. It was a pretty informal wedding ceremony.

The fact that a majority of mixed-married participants sought out some type of clergy or religious presence to be involved in the officiation of their wedding ceremonies is significant, and probably specific to American culture. Recent Gallup and other polls demonstrate the religiosity of Americans, compared to other Western cultures. Ninety-six percent of Americans claim that they believe in God, for example, compared to 61 percent of respondents in England and 70 percent in Canada.¹⁹ This American cultural preference for religious rather than secular approaches no doubt has an influence on the American Jewish preference for religious rather than secular life cycle ceremonies.

One can usefully compare our mixed-married couples' preferences for weddings with clergy to the situation in Israel, where liberal couples sometimes deliberately flee to Cyprus or the United States to be married by a justice of the peace, so that they do not have to fulfill elaborate rabbinic demands. In the United States, in contrast, even the most liberal couples believe that it is their *American* right to be married by clergy if they prefer,

and some are outraged by rabbinic refusal to perform such ceremonies.

In the households we studied there was a correlation between who performed the ceremony and how the couples later constructed their family's ethnoreligious identity. However, it would be a mistake to try to reconstruct a cause-and-effect relationship from these facts alone. For example, couples who had both minister/priest and rabbi officiating had by far the most Christian lifestyles. More than half of the couples married by both a priest or minister and a rabbi reported church membership, three times more than reported membership in a synagogue alone. There is no way to say that dual officiation "caused" this disproportionately large percentage of Christian identified households. It is more likely that conflict over creating an exclusively Jewish household, or a frank commitment to a two-religion household, caused these couples (and their families of origin) to opt for two types of clergy at the wedding ceremony.

Birth Ceremonies

For many mixed-married couples religious issues do not become particularly intense until their first child is born. Such couples often assume that their romantic feelings for each other can conquer religious differences—until they find that they really care about the birth ceremonies prescribed by their respective religions. While many mixed-married couples had discussed religious birth ceremonies for their children prior to their birth, not all of them had straightened out the logistics of their religious and affiliational lives enough to determine how to handle these early life-cycle events. Thus, one couple talked about the fact that they had not committed to a religious path at the time when birth ceremonies would have been appropriate:

When Carl was born we really hadn't made any decisions about how we were going to raise our family, our kids. And by the time Jaqlyn was born two years later, we were a little more committed to raising the kids Jewish, but we hadn't really arrived there. So, it's something that friends of ours who are a mixed couple actually did have a *bris* for their son. But at that point, we didn't even realize we could do that.

Not surprisingly, there was a positive correlation between marriage officiation and birth ceremonies for children. There were also striking correlations between marriage officiation and the children's religion. Once again, it is important to state that the marriage officiation and the children's religion may both have been influenced by the same background factors, rather than the officiation having a causative relationship upon the religion in which children would later be raised. Dual officiation by both a rabbi and a priest or minister, on the other hand, was inversely related to the likelihood of subsequent children being raised as Jews.

Those who had both types of clergy also tended to raise their children in both religions: Among informants who had rabbis together with priests or ministers, 63 percent were raising their children in both religions, 13 percent were raising them exclusively as Christians, and 25 percent were raising them exclusively as Jews. This information is critical, in light of the recent American Jewish Committee Public Opinion Survey 2000, which showed that American Jewish parents want a rabbi to participate, even if that means sharing the officiation with a priest or minister. If the parents who want rabbis to participate together with Christian clergy feel that some rabbinic presence, even in a mixed setting, is associated with the resulting household being more likely to raise their children as Jews, our data indicate the opposite.

Bar and Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation Ceremonies

Bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies in American communities today have a symbolic resonance that is somewhat different from that in historic Jewish communities. While the bar mitzvah in traditional communities was often a comparatively low-key affair, officially marking the passage of an adolescent boy into full adult religious responsibility, contemporary American bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies convey the impression that the celebrant is now joining the "club" of Jewish identification. Conversely, when an individual has not had a bar/bat mitzvah, he or she often feels somewhat less bona fide as a Jew. This feeling has been significant in the proliferation of adult bat mitzvahs in communities across the United States.

This contemporary symbolic valence helps to explain the popularity of bar/bat mitzvah events among our mixed-married informants, at least in their planning stages. More than one-fifth of mixed-married informants had

already given their son and/or daughter a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony, and another 63 percent said they were planning such an event. Although the majority of mixed-married couples reported that they were aiming to give their children bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies, many of them were also critical about such events.

It was common for both Jews and non-Jews to speak harshly about materialism in the Jewish community, and these critiques were often focused on Jewish institutional or life-cycle events. One Jewish man commented that, if it were up to him, his sons would not have bar mitzvahs, but his Christian wife insisted that their “Jewish” upbringing must include some religious content:

Recently, my older brother’s son was bar mitzvahed and, you know, I just see so much hypocrisy in religion in general, that I would feel like kind of a hypocrite. My bar mitzvah wasn’t a particularly enriching experience, and I’m not sure that any thirteen-year-old boy’s ever has been other than they got lots of really cool Cross pens.... Cecilia’s position is that unless I can become more involved in Judaism, then it’s not fair for me to expect our kids to be, and I’m not sure that I’m willing to make that commitment.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that, for many American Jewish parents, giving one’s children a Jewish education and a bar/bat mitzvah is one of the most significant ways of expressing one’s own Jewish commitments. This is true of those mixed-married households that give their children Jewish educations, just as it is of inmarried and conversionary households.

Indeed, the symbolism of bar /bat mitzvah in a mixed-married family is often profound, given the cultural “meaning” of these occasions in America. The bar/bat mitzvah event becomes a graphic demonstration to the extended Jewish family and community that the Jewish partner has indeed “produced” a Jewish child, and has thus been faithful to the historic concept of creating a Jewish household.

5. RELATING TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Marriages affect not only the man and woman who decide to link their destinies, but also their parents, siblings, extended families, and friends. Conversely, the decisions of individuals concerning whom and when to marry are influenced in some obvious and many more subtle ways by their relationships with family and friends over the years.

As noted in our preface, attitudes among American Jews toward the possible intermarriage of their children have shifted profoundly over the past few decades. These changes were powerfully illustrated when we asked our informants to describe their teenage friendship and dating patterns, the attitudes of their parents toward their friends and dates when they lived at home, and the responses of their parents and extended family when they decided to marry their present spouses. We found major differences between the homes remembered by mixed-married Jewish spouses and the homes remembered by inmarried Jews. The majority of mixed-married informants said they received no parental guidance as to the persons they might date or marry. In contrast, a minority of inmarried Jews said their parents never talked about interfaith dating and marriage. Instead, inmarried Jews said parents discussed these issues with them, and clearly articulated why it mattered to them that their children marry Jews and establish a Jewish home. Similarly, a minority of our mixed-married informants said their parents had expressed ambivalent or negative feelings about their choice of a spouse with a different religion, while most said their parents were positive and accepting. Although these data certainly do not indicate a direct cause and effect relationship, they do indicate differences in familial environment that may contribute to romantic and marital choices.

We also asked informants to discuss the impact of extended family members over the course of their marriage. The stories they told reflected

human relationships that often deepened as the years passed. Both sets of grandparents and extended-family members often functioned as religious enrichment resources, especially when they lived nearby.

During the teen years, in college, and later during married life, friendship groups also played pivotal roles in our informants' ethnoreligious identity development. For many mixed-married informants, friends from another religious group were precursors to their choosing a spouse from that group. Many non-Jewish informants, for example, had been drawn to Jewish friends in high school and college, and had interesting things to say about aspects of Jewish culture and family life that were attractive to them. For our Jewish informants as well, an early attraction to the world outside their Jewish family and/or community was often later underscored by the choice of a non-Jewish spouse.

Parents and Dating Patterns

Observers of the American Jewish community often attribute the rise in mixed marriage to the overwhelming pattern of Jewish youth attending colleges, and graduate and professional schools away from home. The assumption underlying this perception is that teenage Jews do not date non-Jews when they are under parental supervision, and it is only when they leave home that they initiate romantic relationships with Christian partners. However, most Jews married to non-Jews who participated in our study said they had mixed friendship groups and dating partners while they lived at home, under their parents' supervision.

Among mixed-married informants, 62 percent said their parents had made no comments to them discouraging them from marrying outside the faith. This absence of parental communication vis-à-vis dating and marriage was more pronounced among Jewish men married to non-Jewish women (67 percent) than among Jewish women married to non-Jewish men (51 percent).

Where parents did attempt to guide their children, however, there was a positive relationship between parental guidance and the type of marriage entered into. One-third of both inmarried and conversionary participants said their parents had strongly discouraged them from marrying out of the faith, and another 29 percent of inmarried and 17 percent of conversionary households said their parents had mildly discouraged them. Only 38

percent of inmarried participants said their parents had not commented on dating, marriage, and religion. Interestingly, although American parents often say they are nervous about advising their children on dating practices because they fear a backlash, negative reactions to discouragement of mixed marriage was reported in fewer than 5 percent of cases (3 percent of Jewish men married to non-Jewish women and 9 percent of Jewish women married to non-Jewish men).

Perhaps most typical, informants remembered indirection in parental comments:

My parents never, never drove us in one direction or another. Never talked about who we should date, who we should marry. If I had to guess, I think my father—it would have meant more to my father that I married a Jew than my mother. I think it meant a lot less to my mother. She always said grow up and be what you want, be happy. And her Jewish connection just was not there. With my father, though, I think—I think my father, if you pushed him, he would have said he would have preferred that—within the tribe, but he never did say it. But you knew he felt it.

Others commented that their parents hadn't said much about their dating because they didn't date in high school.

Perhaps surprisingly, even when informants had contemplated college choices, few of their parents made it clear that they wanted their children to attend schools where they could meet and marry Jews, or that marrying Jews was an important family priority.

Socioeconomic issues were unpleasantly linked to ethnoreligious considerations according to some informants, who said that their parents' standard "speech" about dating Jewish girls was heavily tied into a kind of bourgeois package that included the Jewish girl, her parents' money, professional career direction, etc. According to these respondents, this Jewish-girl-as-a-middle-class-norm undercut the significance of a Jewish marriage as a value in and of itself. As one respondent put it, by marrying a Jewish princess he could become himself a "crown" prince:

You know, the standard parental thing. How did they express it? My mother was sort of a social climber, so she was

always—she always had this fantasy of finding some, you know, wealthy Jewish princess or something, I think. That would sort of—what’s the word—serendipitously elevate her status somehow. Marry a crown.

Another described his parents’ directives as a Jewish version of the all-American dream:

I knew what they wanted. They wanted me to be a doctor and they wanted me to marry a Jewish girl and they wanted me to have two-and-a-half kids and have a picket fence and probably live in another two-family house right next door to their house.

In comparison, unmarried respondents recalled their parents speaking to them about Jewish homes and Jewish values in very direct ways that were not linked to economic and social mobility issues:

They were visibly pleased for me to have a Jewish girlfriend, bring her to dinner, bring her to Friday nights. And as it was, it had become pretty clear pretty quickly to anybody I dated that I couldn’t go out Fridays, couldn’t do much of anything until Saturday night. And that always means because I’m Jewish and my dad wouldn’t let me out on those days and so on and so forth. Those things never lasted too long.

In contrast to these families in which resistance to interdating was part of a multifaceted, Jewishly active environment, according to many respondents, parental *laissez faire* attitudes that were commonplace about their dating patterns extended to the prospect of mixed marriage as well. Indeed, even when parents were unhappy or agitated about an upcoming mixed marriage, they did not openly encourage as yet unattached siblings to date Jews exclusively:

I had been given the “We love whoever you bring home, but if they’re Jewish, then that’s great too” speech several times. Having cousins who married not Jewish certainly

didn't make things any easier, because every time another one would do so, it would mean that my brother and I were going to get the speech again. But there was no kind of prohibition or anything like that. My brother married a non-Jewish woman. That was—it became a bigger—well, she's actually half Jewish, but not observant at all. That became a bigger deal toward the—as their wedding approached. And kind of the same thing happened with my sister, who married a non-Jewish man. And the tension around that really grew around planning for the wedding and the ceremony and what it would be like. So it was clear that it was a preference, but it wasn't anything that they were going to push anybody on. It was never—no one ever argued, or said shouldn't you date someone else.

Family Reactions to the Mixed-Married Couple

Because parents had not made an issue of interdating, their dissatisfaction with the prospect of their offspring marrying a non-Jew often came as a surprise to the son or daughter in question:

My father wasn't pleased with my getting more and more serious with her. My grandmother wasn't happy. Everybody was unhappy about that. They all thought she was a nice girl and they liked her and all that but she wasn't Jewish.

INT: So what did they say?

Well my father came out and said why can't you just, why the hell do you have to do that, why can't you find somebody who is Jewish. Everybody else didn't say anything but I heard about it afterwards, years later that they were unhappy, they liked her but they were unhappy.

In households that had always directly discouraged marriage outside the faith, after mixed marriage two-thirds of parents continued to express negative feelings, or at least ambivalence toward the mixed-married household. However, among those who had never commented to their

children one way or the other about marriage outside the faith, two-thirds were warmly accepting of the mixed-married couple.

For both Jewish and non-Jewish families, the parents of the bride and groom were far less likely to object to the choice of a spouse from another faith tradition if the marriage seemed “late” to them, and they were worried that their adult child would never marry. Thus, among informants who had married between the ages of 26 and 30, 7 percent of their families were negative about their marriages, one-third were ambivalent, and 61 percent were accepting. In contrast, among those who had married between the ages of 36 and 40, no negativity was reported among their families, 18 percent were ambivalent, and 83 percent were positive and accepting. Families were also less likely to object when the mixed marriage was a second marriage.

Among our participants, as in the 1990 NJPS data, mixed marriages generally involved somewhat older marriage partners than did inmarriages. In some cases, the mixed marriages took place later because partners met each other somewhat later in life. In other cases, the mixed marriage itself was an issue: the mixed-married couple had been going together or living together and took some time to decide that they wanted to proceed with marriage, despite the fact that they could not agree on a single religion in the household.

In the case of a first marriage of a child in his or her twenties, both Jewish and non-Jewish parents sometimes expressed concerns or objections before the marriage. In some cases, Jewish parental pressure during the dating years resulted in a more definitively Jewish character for the eventual household. In other cases, however, the non-Jewish spouses were thoroughly alienated by Jewish pressure.

Harsh words uttered by either side of the family were remembered and quoted many years after, often to illustrate the bigotry of the spouse’s family. An Episcopalian woman from an artistically creative, liberal household bitterly recalled her future brother-in-law commenting, “Well, now I’m going to tell Mom and Dad the bad news.” “That was what they thought of me—I’m bad news! It doesn’t matter what I am as a person!” she said, with considerable anger. Although she cooperates in raising her converted-into-Judaism children as Jews, she feels no motivation to become Jewish herself.

Many participants came from families in which mixed marriage had already become the family pattern. One Christian wife commented, for ex-

ample, “Two of my husband’s three sisters are married to—well, actually they are both Catholic, their husbands are Catholic. Then he has one other sister who is married to someone who is Jewish. So it’s not a burning issue for his family.”

It was not unusual for marriage to a non-Jew to be perceived by the Jewish parents as vastly superior to marrying a fervently Orthodox Jew. For example, a young man who had married a woman from a “seriously messed up WASPy family,” recalled that his father was traumatized when his sister’s Jewish marriage resulted in ultra-Orthodox life in Israel. Consequently, his father was not nearly as upset as he would otherwise have been when he brought home his very non-Jewish bride.

Often, although the proposed mixed marriage causes short-lived initial discord in one or both families, the arrival of children melts hostilities. As a successful businessman who grew up in a “strict” Christian home remembers, at first “My mother was very upset that my children would be Jewish.” But once the children actually were born “they love the children and they love Joyce.” His wife’s Jewish parents, initially unhappy about her marrying a non-Jew, also relented when the children were born and “invited me into the family business.”

The Impact of Having Children

Informants described having children as the single most transformative event of their lives, “bigger than changing religion, changing your job, getting married.” As one woman put it:

It was the first time I’d ever really taken care of anyone, because I’ve never had siblings. I can’t believe I’m responsible for someone. I said to myself, You know, I’m not a kid any more. I’d better get my act together here. I was already in business when I had my first child. But all of a sudden, there was an unconditional love that, you know, you had to keep saying to yourself. I know I love my husband a lot, but this is unbelievable. I remember coming home from work feeling like I was like on a cloud. It was like every day was Christmas Eve.

Many insisted that having children had caused them to value themselves and their own lives more profoundly than ever before:

Boy, priorities. Before I had her, I felt like I was in a way disposable. Like I remember thinking, oh, if I ever was like in a coma, just pull the plug or that sort of thing. Whereas now it's like, oh no, you'd have to do everything you can including keeping me in a vegetative state forever just in case I came out so I could be back with my child. Raising her is this amazing—I mean I have this amazing job and this amazing relationship with her that I've never had anything like it before. It's just awesome. Responsibility, but also just part of my life.

Many informants said that having children led them to focus on religious identity in a new way, that children made them feel “more Jewish,” or “more Christian,” or just more interested in religion per se.

Not infrequently, having children gave informants new insights into their own parents, sometimes making them feel more attached to them. Parental involvements, previously experienced as interference, became reinterpreted as helpfulness:

Again, my mother, she was planning to come and help me, which made me a little nervous because while I certainly appreciated her, I was not sure how it would be having my mother live with me and help me take care of a baby. But I'd never taken care of babies very much. I had almost never babysat. It's just not something that I did. So I really thought I needed her help. And she was terrific, especially then when I had twins. I really didn't quite know what I was doing. But she was just great. She stayed for about five weeks and really—but she was really smart.

Becoming a parent made many informants more interested in renewing relationships with their own parents and with in-laws. Despite the much-discussed geographical separation that allegedly characterizes American and American Jewish life, extended families—parents, grandpar-

ents, siblings, and cousins—play a significant role in mixed-married families.

Family Relationships Over the Years

Negative familial feelings about mixed marriage often subsided (or at least were expressed less often) as the years passed. About 40 percent of informants said their families still expressed some ambivalence after the passage of time. Not surprisingly, ambivalence later in marriage was most common among those families who had been ambivalent in the first place. In 16 percent of cases, overt disapproval about mixed marriage persisted for decades after the marriage, and even after the children were born. One New England man described the bitter feelings he was subjected to as a child growing up, observing the Methodist minister grandfather who despised his Jewish mother:

Yes. My grandfather is actually a Methodist minister. So he definitely came from a not Jewish family.

INT: And how was your grandfather—how did he feel about your Dad marrying a Jewish woman?

He hated my mother. I would assume, since they got married because my mother was pregnant; at the time that was what you did—I would assume that he felt that my father was trapped into marrying her and trapped into converting because my mother's family was very, very traditionally Jewish. So he was very bitter about it for a very long time.

INT: And do you remember as a child hearing things? Are there stories that you heard from your parents, or do you—

A lot of this is what I've pieced together. Now we would go there for Christmas, and my cousins would all be getting toys from Santa, and I'd be getting gifts from the dog because my Mom felt bad. From the dog, from our dog, because she was well, she can't get gifts from Santa. Like that's just outrageous.

INT: So in other words, your mother wouldn't let

the grandfather give—

Absolutely not. My grandparents were not allowed to give me gifts from Santa. But I did get gifts from the dog.

INT: Integrity has its price.

Exactly. Exactly. It was always this really surreal experience. It was just different. Like I knew it wasn't part of me. It was sort of like going there to celebrate my grandparents' holiday. It didn't have anything to do with me.

Despite the vividness of this description of familial conflict, among our participants relatively few spoke of parental disapproval of the mixed-married household persisting even after children were born. However, several talked about “subversive” acts by extended-family members. One Jewish wife who clearly “laid down the law” forbidding Christmas wrapping paper or Easter bunnies and eggs commented that her mother-in-law and sister-in-law repeatedly brought such items into her home. When she objected, they chastised her for being “mean” and “depriving” her children of “innocent fun.”

Grandparents are widely used as religious enrichment resources, to reinforce both the Jewish and Christian character of the household. The holidays, especially Passover and the High Holy Days, are typically times spent with Jewish grandparents or more Jewishly involved siblings. Similarly, Christmas and Easter are often spent with grandparents or aunts, uncles and cousins. In both cases the atmosphere of familial festivity reinforces positive feelings about the holiday involved, and serves as an aspect of informal religious education.

Sometimes the couple described themselves as ameliorating conflicts about the religious character of the household by transferring their religious activities to the homes of grandparents or other relatives. Sixteen percent of mixed-married participants said they usually celebrate Christmas outside their own home. Thus they can speak about their own households as “Jewish” or “no religion,” as the case might be, because their religious activities take place at another location. Even conversionary households sometimes use this strategy. While some conversionary households rigorously exclude all signs of Christian holidays, demanding that Christian grandparents wrap gifts in nonsectarian or Hanukkah paper, others participate in extended-family Christian celebrations.

However, as the years pass, the locus for both Jewish and Christian holiday celebrations tends to shift away from the aging grandparents to the mixed-married household itself. Couples who for many years depend on a grandmother or more religious sister to make the Passover seder eventually find themselves making the seder, either because the mother is unable to deal with the work, or the sister moves away, or some other family development. Many described their satisfaction that they were able to take over this family observance, and could change it to suit their preference: a seder that was shorter, or contained less Hebrew, or included more non-Jewish friends.

Similarly, Christmas and Easter dinners often began as a trip to the Christian in-laws, but later in the family's history became part of the mixed-married household's calendar year. A particularly common scenario was that the Jewish wife of a Christian man, at first regarded with suspicion by his family, develops a warm relationship with her mother-in-law. As the mother-in-law ages, and often is widowed, the Jewish daughter-in-law willingly takes on the hosting of the two holiday dinners. She feels that she is doing a good deed for her husband and his family, and that it is not a religious event but rather an opportunity for the family to get together. Moreover, she is often already feeling guilty about how much she has asked her husband to give up, so her making the holiday dinners becomes a way of making amends to him, and making their relationship more "fair."

The Impact of Friendship Circles

Many statistical studies have suggested that friendship circles are an important key to religious and ethnic identification. We found that friends did indeed exert great influence, both upon mixed-married parents and upon the children they were raising. Since most mixed-married couples tend to socialize with religiously diverse groups, their children's friends, in turn, also reinforce mixed religious messages:

Celeste, one of Ursula's best friends, goes to Sunday school and they talk about Jesus. She talks about Jesus a lot. So she talks to Ursula and Ursula tells us; she is curious. Her friend is also from a religious mixed marriage right across the road. The father is Jewish and I think the mother is

Catholic. He goes to some Protestant Sunday school or something. For a short time, we took her to this interfaith thing but she didn't like it much and we didn't like it. We used to go every Sunday for a few weeks but it didn't really work out too well.

Studies of ethnoreligious identity construction have often been limited by the fact that they focus upon current friendship circles. In our study, we asked informants to describe their sequential friendship circles and dating patterns in high school, then in college, and finally at the present time. Most Jews who married non-Jews reported that they had mixed or mostly non-Jewish friends in high school. In contrast, Jews who married Jews were far more likely to have had mostly Jewish friendship circles both in high school and in college.

Given the influence of Jewish friendship circles, it would seem strategic for those parents who are concerned about inmarriage to establish homes in places that have Jewish children for their own children to befriend, to initiate family activities in environments that attract other Jews, and to encourage their children to attend colleges that have greater rather than lesser Jewish population density. Remembering the comments of many study participants that they worry about "ghettoizing" their children, however, it is not clear that such strategies will appeal to large proportions of the American Jewish community. While many Jewish communal values can easily be reconciled with American values, this may be an area where communal considerations may be perceived as "tribal" or "isolating," placed in the context of liberal American ideals.

Family, Community, and Religion

Our mixed-married informant sample was atypical of the national sample of mixed-married Jewish households in two ways, as noted in our preface: First, they were twice as likely as the national sample (1990 NJPS) to say that they were raising their children as Jews. Second, while the national sample reported that mixed-married households were much more likely to experience stress and eventually divorce, a large proportion of the informants who agreed to participate in the Listening to Learn research study appeared to have devised effective strategies for conflict resolution. Hus-

bands and wives seemed empathetic to the experiences of their spouses, and concerned to respond proactively to any stress their religious differences might generate. In addition, while some extended-family units were marked by continuing lack of acceptance, intolerance, and open friction, this pattern was an exception to the larger picture of increasing warmth over the years.

One vantage point informing this study is an exploration of the psychological dynamics within Jewish mixed-married households. Viewed through this lens alone, many of the participating couples present a very positive picture. However, in studying family dynamics in mixed-married households we are also interested in the impact of such households on the broader Jewish community. Through the lens of concerns about Jewish religious and cultural continuity, the relationships our informants described have very different implications. Thus behaviors and attitudes in mixed marriages often mean something very different to the individuals and families involved than they may to American Jewish communities now and in the future.

To review just one evocative example, when a Jewish woman who has raised her children as Jews for a decade decides, out of love for her husband and her aging mother-in-law, to establish a new yearly family routine in which she herself prepares a ham and hosts the extended family's Easter dinner—"except for one year when Easter came out on Passover!"—her behavior reflects qualities of compassion and consideration that are highly desirable for healthy family life. However, in terms of the ethnoreligious identity construction of her family and the informal religious education of her children, bringing Easter dinner into her home conveys dual religious messages. Our data show that, influenced by American values of ecumenism and multicultural intertextuality, as well as by familial affection, most Jewish partners in mixed marriages do not maintain consistent religious boundaries.

6. RECOLLECTING THE PAST

Although our study focused on the family dynamics when men and women negotiate the ethnic and religious character of the household they are creating, we found that we received the most extensive, thoughtful answers from participants if we began the interview with a conversation about their parents, their family of origin, and their social milieus during their teen years. For many informants, the first cluster of questions—“Tell me the story of how you grew up. Where did you live? What did your parents do? How many siblings did you have? What was your school like?”—opened the floodgates of memory.

Spouses Remember

In line with data from the 1990 NJPS, the mixed-married Jews in our study had received little or no Jewish education. Some, from both affluent and poor families, were sent to Christian schools. For example, one man from a poor family went to a Catholic school in a working-class New England town, and a woman from a wealthy Manhattan home went to Episcopalian private schools. The few Jews with extensive Jewish backgrounds who married non-Jews insisted that their children convert to Judaism during infancy, and vigilantly guarded the Jewish character of their households.

Jewish informants recounted diverse recollections about their high school years: a shy or painful adolescence; being “always different than the rest of my family”; “always rebellious” against what they described as the constraining norms of their communities or families; feeling angry that their religious/ethnic identity made them feel unpleasantly distinctive. Some were still resentful about anti-Semitic remarks as they were growing up. One woman, for example, remembered being self-conscious about the kind of

sandwiches she brought to school—on challah or whole wheat bread instead of white bread, and hating being different and being ridiculed.

Some felt uncomfortable about negative cultural stereotypes of Jewish and non-Jewish personality traits. One Jewish woman analyzed why she preferred non-Jewish men as romantic partners:

You asked why I didn't date Jewish men growing up.... I think it has to do with my perception growing up that Jewish men were viewed by others as weak and by my own family experience. I think my parents, as immigrants, wanted to be fully integrated into the cultural life of the country, even though they maintained a Jewish identity. I remember feeling insecure with my Jewish identity while growing up. Also, my mother always seemed to dominate her relationship with my dad, and I recall thinking that he was a weak man and I was so disappointed by that fact that I extended that feeling to other Jewish men.

Among non-Jews married to Jews, strikingly suggestive patterns emerged. In this sample group, a substantial number of non-Jewish spouses said they had been drawn to the warm families of their Jewish spouses. In contrast, more than half of the non-Jewish informants reported that their own families of origin had some of the following characteristics: cold and distant; divorced parents; "dysfunctional" family; alcoholic parent(s); excessive mobility. Non-Jewish spouses who talked of their own dysfunctional families often articulated admiration for the close-knit families they encountered among their Jewish spouses. As one put it, "Jewish families may be controlling, but at least they care where you are."

What Draws Couples Together?

Participants most frequently talked about physical and psychological attractiveness as their primary motivators in finding dating partners: "I liked girls who were pretty and smart," said most men; "I looked for men who had a good sense of humor, and were smart and interesting," was a common comment by women. The control group of inmarried couples were distinguished by the fact that many of them had specifically sought out

Jewish dates, unlike the mixed-married cohort. Among the mixed-married and most of the conversionary participants, in contrast, most had already dated non-Jews before dating the particular non-Jew whom they married. More of the mixed-married couples in this sample than the inmarried control group lived together before marriage for many years.

Contrary to popular impressions, Jews who married non-Jews in the past two decades have statistically tended to be less accomplished educationally and occupationally than Jews who marry other Jews. In the 1940s and 1950s, Jews who married non-Jews were often the most ambitious and accomplished, and marriage to a non-Jew was an important step in acculturation. Today, according to many recent city studies and the 1990 NJPS, all other things being equal, Jews with high status education and occupations are more likely to marry other Jews.

This statistical fact was illustrated qualitatively by siblings we studied. In Jewish families in which only one sibling had married a non-Jew, that sibling often (but not always) had less secular education and a lower status and less lucrative job than siblings who had married Jews. The spouses of many of these mixed-married Jews grew up in families with lower educational and socioeconomic profiles than those of the Jewish families. In these households, both Jews and non-Jews spoke disparagingly about the “snobbism” and “elitism” in Jewish social circles, claiming that the mixed-religion social circles he or she preferred were “more open,” “more genuine,” and “more interesting.”

However, a large and significant minority of Jews marrying non-Jews have distinguished and even high-profile educational and occupational track records. Those children of Jewish leaders who marry non-Jews are often part of this high-status minority. Because their lives are sometimes in the public eye, high-status mixed-married couples have influenced public perceptions of the typical mixed-married household. For example, the *New York Times* often runs stories in its society pages about marriages between high-achieving professional couples who come from very different faith traditions, such as Judaism and Hinduism, reporting on their colorful, eclectic marriage festivities that reflect the disparity in their religious backgrounds. While high-achieving mixed-married couples were also represented in our study, it is important to keep in mind that a larger proportion of outmarriages are not characterized by this high-status profile.

Interestingly, Jewish and Christian spouses spoke both about the “gap” between their backgrounds—and also about how much they had in

common. For example, one Christian husband whose mother was an Episcopalian, English-born woman married to a midwestern man of German-English stock whose ancestors had been in America since the 1700s, said he and his wife thought his mother had a lot in common with his Holocaust-survivor mother-in-law. He laughed as he remembered their initial perception of their familial commonalities:

Well, at the time, ironic as it sometimes seems to us now, we thought we had identical backgrounds. And we had—and both of our parents and ourselves shared a view of the world that seemed very much in sync. She came from a well-to-do German family who actually through the war had an extremely different background and set of experiences than my family. But nonetheless, the general theme seemed to be well-to-do intellectuals, and each succeeding generation is successively poorer....

He explained that his wife no longer feels that their family backgrounds are identical:

The commentary I get now is that we weren't as warm as other families were, that we didn't communicate well. We were uptight WASPS who didn't confront issues. And in fact, that's true. We didn't confront issues.

It was only after they had been together for years, said his Jewish wife, that she realized how different were their family's "styles." Still, although she commented ironically on the sharp, psychological directness of her family versus the relentlessly cheerful indirection of her husband's household, she never spoke about the other enormous differences between her own itinerant childhood as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and her husband's childhood as a midwestern WASP.

Other non-Jews recalled being attracted to the intellectualism they remembered seeing among Jews they encountered. Some non-Jewish spouses had long gravitated toward Jewish friendship circles, as well as Jewish dates, and some remembered seeking out Jewish friends as early as their high school years. One man spoke of discovering Jewish friends and his own intellectual capacities during his junior year of high school; after

that point, he said, his new Jewish friends replaced the friends he had during his freshman and sophomore years, “who were, I am sorry to say, primarily into drugs and bad, loud music.” For non-Jewish spouses such as these, the essence of Jewishness was perceived to be “excitement about the world of ideas, talking with enthusiasm about political and intellectual things.”

Evaluating Their Choices

Several Jewish informants candidly told researchers they had many regrets about their mixed marriages. Some said they would advise couples to marry within their own faith. One woman explicitly said that she had married a non-Jew because she wanted children, and she thought marriage to a non-Jew was preferable to artificial insemination and single motherhood. However, she found herself very lonely in this marriage of convenience, and often wondered about the choices she had made:

I say, it was a mistake, on some level, that I married someone that was not Jewish because clearly that matters in my life; but, at thirty-five, I didn't know that I was going to marry someone Jewish and I knew I wanted to have kids, and I knew I was sort of at the end of that part, and I knew that I—at that point I felt, and I would still say I feel that it was better to have kids as part of a family than to try to do artificial insemination or something else and be a single Jewish parent.

So, at that point, I thought that a mixed marriage with a clear commitment at the outset that it was my intention to raise a Jewish family, and I am not going to fool you, and I was very up front, was better than the possibility of not raising a family at all. So, I made a compromise and I knew exactly what I was doing.

Now, I didn't quite know about the other emotional things about my husband. Those were surprises, but I knew what compromise I made when I married the non-Jew and that piece of our relationship has left me lonely in the ways I thought it would. If we were more connected in other ways,

that would be the only loneliness and I bargained for that. So, I got exactly what I expected in the Jewish piece.

None of that was a surprise and it has the downfalls I expected it to have, but Chris does Kiddush with us on Friday night, and has learned Kiddush and knows the *motzi* (prayer over bread) but he never comes to shul (synagogue). He hates organized religion. He hates any organized religion. He goes to church to hear the Bach music, but this is a man who doesn't believe in—he is a man who believes in ultimate freedom, his own individual what he chooses, but any religious system that has obligations doesn't make sense to him, externally imposed.

As our mixed-married participants described the homes they had grown up in, and their teenage and college years, the overwhelming importance of interpretive framework—the “eye of the beholder”—became apparent. These differences in perceptions were often applied to ethnoreligious groups. For example, Jewish intellectualism appeared to some informants as a basis for snobbish elitism, but to others as a liberation from mediocrity. For one intellectual Christian boy who grew up in a blue-collar, fundamentalist environment, rebelling against his family's narrowness in high school through drugs and rock music, his discovery as a high school junior of intellectual Jewish friends and their book-reading families was a revelation that changed his life. This young man joined what he perceived as a mainstream world of Jewish intellectualism; later, finding a Jewish wife was an outgrowth of this cultural “conversion.” In contrast, for a Jewish boy who grew up in a working-class family that pushed its children to acquire higher education and move up socioeconomic and cultural ladders, the vibrant, rough-and-ready, primarily non-Jewish world of manual labor was a liberation. In the world of his Catholic wife, whom he met while bartending, his background and values made him several cuts above the typical male. In this world he felt mainstream rather than pressured and marginalized, as he did in Jewish circles.

Similarly, personal characteristics of Jewish and non-Jewish men and women, often colored by cultural stereotypes, were differently perceived by informants with diverging religious backgrounds. The woman who had painful memories of enduring teasing about her challah sandwiches in high school was typical of Jews with negative associations with

Jewish food, in which foods perceived as being distinctly Jewish attain symbolic significance, representing all that they dislike about Jewish “difference.” (Creative artists such as Philip Roth and Woody Allen have capitalized on the widespread resonance of these negative associations with Jewish food.) Just as food had negative associations for some of our mixed-married informants, Jews of the opposite sex were perceived as less appealing than non-Jews, viewed through the lens of negative cultural stereotypes. In contrast, non-Jews of the opposite sex were often viewed through the positive cultural stereotypes promulgated in literature, film, and popular culture. Ironically, many of the same stereotypically “Jewish” personal and familial characteristics that seemed unappealing to Jews seemed quite appealing to non-Jews. For mixed-married couples, perhaps more so than for inmarried couples, it is often true that “opposites attract.”

7. THINKING ABOUT MIXED MARRIAGE AND THE JEWISH FUTURE

Two of the most important findings of the Listening to Learn research project are that the ethnoreligious character of families (1) resist categorization and (2) are not static. Some recent studies have tried to quantify the extent to which a family might be considered predominantly Jewish or predominantly non-Jewish. These typologies are basically accurate, as far as they go. However, they seem to share an implicit assumption that there is a formula for a given amount of Christianity that can be absorbed in a household without shifting the complexion of the family from Jewish to something other than Jewish.

However, human beings and family environments do not operate according to some precise chemistry. We know of no reliable threshold of Christianity, beyond which—but not before—Jewish identity is compromised. Children growing up in households that incorporate both Jewish and Christian observance and belief, whether those households describe themselves as “Jewish,” “both Jewish and Christian,” or “no religion,” become accustomed to the juxtaposition of two faith traditions.

Children of two Jewish parents may also experience Jewish and Christian observance side by side in their neighborhoods and schools, but they know that their personal heritage includes only one of these, Judaism. Children of mixed marriage experience the juxtaposition—and sometimes the merging—of Judaism and Christianity in their family lives, feeling that both of these traditions are equally part of their birthrights.

The American construct “Judeo-Christian tradition” is not an abstraction for many children of mixed marriage. While some of these children will eventually chose to become exclusively Jewish, the great majority of the children of mixed marriage bring their Judeo-Christian outlooks with them into their new homes and communal life.

Change and Reevaluation

Moreover, individuals and families go through ethnoreligious evolutions, responding to internal and external changes in their own lives, and in the families and various communities around them. Our study has shown that many, perhaps most potential marital partners in interfaith relationships explore questions of household religion as soon as they perceive their relationship to be “serious” and heading toward marriage. Whether these first negotiations take place before marriage, or when the couple contemplates or embarks on childbearing, many sensitive issues are involved. Some couples decide to raise children with two faiths, some with no faith, some with both, and some with one faith only.

Later, the birth of a child, the death of a parent, a shake-up in the workplace, the divorce of a friend—any of these events can and do precipitate spiritual responses and reevaluations of decisions on the religious character of the home. In some cases, these lead to a deepening attachment to Judaism and to the Jewish community. In other cases, the resoluteness of early decisions as to the Jewish character of the household gives way to a variety of new negotiations. For mixed-married couples who have decided to raise children as Jews only, it is difficult to maintain an exclusively Jewish household environment.

These nearly inevitable Christian aspects of mixed-married family life stand in contrast to families in which the born-Christian partner has become a Jew by choice. In conversionary households, Jews by choice usually feel that they and their households are unambivalently Jewish. Jews by choice often announce to their own Christian parents and siblings: “We are a family. Please don’t send our children Christmas presents or Easter baskets.” In mixed-married households that have pledged to raise their children as Jews, however, it is much more difficult for parents to maintain an unambivalently Jewish profile. As long as one spouse does not consider himself or herself to be a Jew, it is hard to exclude Christian rituals, ceremonies, and culture from family life.

As time passes, even in mixed-married households that consider themselves completely Jewish, commitments to a single religious choice frequently become more ambivalent. Jewish spouses feel increasingly guilty about depriving non-Jewish spouses of their religious customs. Inculcated with American ideals of “fairness” and “compromise,” Jewish spouses

sometimes reintroduce Christian observances they had previously rejected.

While many non-Jewish spouses cheerfully participate in their Jewish children's holiday celebrations, a substantial proportion find themselves feeling increasingly resentful about the fact that their children are growing up in a faith tradition different from theirs. Even when they say they have been warmly received by family members and synagogue communities, non-Jewish spouses often find themselves longing for their own traditions in their own households. Some report that they are disturbed by their children's use of Hebrew in household and holiday prayers—and yet they have decided that they do not wish to learn Hebrew themselves. Some say they harbor deep distaste for organized religion, and look forward to the day their children are old enough to share these feelings.

In addition, the impact of extended family often increases as the years pass, especially if the family units all get along well. As grandparents age, those Jewish-oriented mixed-married households that had previously excluded Christian observances often become the locus for Christian holiday celebrations. Jewish wives willingly take on the preparation and hosting of Christmas celebrations and Easter dinners, as a sign of affection and concern for their non-Jewish in-law family. Adolescent children grow close to extended-family members on the basis of many factors, including their own personality and intellectual and extracurricular interests. Non-Jewish grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins become admired role models for many raised-Jewish children in mixed-married households.

Again, the comparison with conversionary households is useful. Although conversionary families also have a full set of Christian extended-family members, their relationship to them is different. They face their beloved Christian family with unambiguously Jewish eyes. As one Jew by choice commented:

We tell our children that grandma and grandpa's holidays belong to them only, just like a person's birthday belongs to them only. So we'll go there to visit before or after Christmas, not on Christmas, that's not our holiday. And if grandma gives them a goody bag to take home, well that's like taking a goody bag home from someone else's party. We can have the goodies, but the party doesn't belong to us.

In mixed-married households, in contrast, the duality of the family's religious character, and the shift from Judaism to Judeo-Christianity, often increase as a natural aspect of the deepening of human relationships.

Communal Responses

There is no doubt that the dramatic increase in the proportion of mixed-married households has already had a profound effect on communal psychology among both Jews and non-Jews. On a very positive note, the acceptance of Jews and Jewishness in American culture is surely due, at least in part, to the fact that numerous Christian families include Jewish members. Conversely, most American Jewish families include some mixed-married members. Jewish communal laypeople and leaders alike are concerned about the occurrence and ramifications of mixed marriage in their own families. Their concern is not based on "racism," as is sometimes alleged, but on familial and communal issues of continuity, popularly articulated in the question, "Will my grandchildren be Jewish?"

American Jewish leaders frequently engage in lively discussions about appropriate communal responses to the increase in mixed marriage. These responses can be divided into two broad categories: (1) arguments that the community should emphasize inclusiveness and outreach, on one hand, and (2) arguments that the community should emphasize the internal intensification of Jewish identity, on the other.

In analyzing the implications of these two potential communal strategies, it is useful to place them into the unique context of Jewish life in America at the turn of the twenty-first century. In terms of their secular education and occupational achievement, their patterns of family formation, and their relationship with their synagogues and Jewish organizations, American Jews behave and think like other Americans in the same socio-economic brackets. Jews today have incorporated many American values not only into their daily secular lives but into their notions of Judaism as well. Concepts such as individualism, free will, and egalitarianism are considered by many American Jews to be "Jewish" concepts. Aspects of Jewish texts and traditions that are dissonant with American values and attitudes are ignored, while those that seem to harmonize with and support a particular type of Americanism are emphasized. Not only have American Jews created a coalesced American Judaism, they have created a distinctly

Jewish vision of what defines the true America. The American hybrid preferred by Jews provides a comfortable fit for Jews and Judaism. Thus, negotiating values on both sides of the hyphen, American Jews have created a coalesced conception of America, in their own image.²⁰

One important coalesced American Jewish value is inclusiveness. American Jews pride themselves on their empathy for, and feelings of solidarity with, all people of goodwill, perhaps because Jews historically have frequently been vilified as “exclusive” or “clannish,” and because Jews have suffered historically by being excluded, not only in Europe, but in the United States until relatively recently as well. As a result, the tribal passages in the Hebrew Bible or Jewish liturgy, and the historical Jewish concept of a “chosen people,” make many American Jews uneasy. Although some still retain a feeling that there is an essential core of Jewishness that makes Jews more comfortable with each other than with non-Jews, this attitude is far more prevalent among older American Jews than among their children and grandchildren.

This American Jewish predilection for inclusiveness is important in analyzing communal responses to rising rates of mixed marriage, since it makes inclusiveness feel more “comfortable” to most American Jews than exclusiveness. When unprecedentedly high rates of mixed marriage are placed in the context of American Jewish patriotism, and the delight and pride American Jews feel about their perceptions that Jewish tradition harmonizes with American ideals, the stage is set for the powerful appeal of the “inclusivity and outreach” message.

Recently, popular publications urging the most inclusive approach to mixed marriage have proliferated. A very small sampling includes *The Half-Jewish Book: A Celebration*, *The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews & Christians*, *The Interfaith Family Guidebook: Practical Advice for Jewish and Christian Partners*, and a new guide for interfaith romances, *What to Do When You’re Dating a Jew: Everything You Need to Know from Matzoh Balls to Marriage*.²¹ About this last publication, the *Forward* reports that Prof. Egon Mayer, director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, says:

What To Do When You’re Dating a Jew makes “an important contribution to what’s needed out there. Being for or against intermarriage “is like being for or against the

weather,” he said. “It’s a demographic and social reality.”
(*Forward* online 11/16/00).

The inclusiveness and outreach approach, perhaps most consistently voiced by publications of the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI), cites the large percentage of mixed marriages revealed by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) to insist that mixed marriage is an inevitable consequence of living in our contemporary open American society. In a JOI pamphlet written by Jewish communal leader David G. Sacks, for example, readers are told that mixed marriage is a phenomenon as fixed and unavoidable as “cycles of the sun and the tides.” The pamphlet then assures readers that high rates of intermarriage, “this simple demographic fact alone,” means that individuals need assume no burden of responsibility for the trend.²²

However, ironically, the very NJPS data cited to claim that mixed marriage is inevitable clearly show that mixed marriage does not occur on a random basis. Instead, they reveal that inmarriage and mixed marriage occur according to clear patterns. Inmarriage is closely correlated to three factors: (1) Jewish education, both formal and informal, that is intensive and continues through the teen years; (2) a Jewishly connected home that provides multifaceted Jewish experiences in family settings; and (3) Jewish friendship circles. Each of these alone, and exponentially all three of these together, dramatically predispose an individual to marry a Jew and to establish a new Jewish family.

In light of the findings of our study, the JOI presentation of the facts surrounding mixed marriage is noteworthy for what it avoids. In speaking of the children of mixed marriage, for example, the JOI pamphlet asserts that they “are all Jewish to some degree.” What is not stated is that the children of mixed marriage usually have a divided or dual religious identity, and are frequently *not* Jewish to some degree in addition to being “Jewish to some degree.” The authors do not find it necessary to specify why it should be desirable for groups of people to be a little bit Jewish, except that they believe that any element of Jewishness may enhance the possibility of increased Jewish activity at some later date. However, they do not deal at all with the religious and communal effects of this adulteration of religious identity.

Moreover, in this literature, Jews involved in exogamous relationships are portrayed as fragile and naïve, in the most romantic possible light:

Parents of the intermarried need to take special care not to “poison” the natural openness of the young couple to family history by openly or subtly emphasizing the young couple’s curiosity about family history through the sharing of stories that invite admiration, empathy, and emulation.... Open to them the treasure trove of your own family memories, be it in conversations or letters. These may well be the first heirlooms with which they will “Judaize” their own new nest.²³

According to this approach, having Jewish ancestors is similar to other white European ethnic derivations, as described by Mary Waters. As Waters puts it, ethnic white Americans “do not give much attention to the ease with which they are able to slip in and out of their ethnic roles. It is natural to them that in the greater part of their lives, their ethnicity does not matter.”²⁴ In this “isn’t our family charming” approach, being Jewish carries no more historical weight or meaning than having a Scotch-Irish grandfather and an Italian grandmother. These familial pregenerators are potential sources for warm, fuzzy echoes from the past, but they have no impact on familial commitments and destiny.

In yet another approach to incorporating non-Jewish partners into Jewish families and communities, Israel Minister of Justice Yossi Beilin has called for secular conversion. Beilin, who recently published a book on the subject, explains that such converts would be joining “the Jewish people, which is not necessarily based on the Jewish religion.”²⁵ In Israel, secular Jewish converts might well speak Hebrew, serve in the Israeli army, and participate in the nonreligious culture-wide celebrations of the Jewish holidays throughout the year, as well as participating in Israeli patriotic commemorations such as Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day), Yom HaZikaron (Holocaust Remembrance Day), and Yom HaAtzmaut (Israeli Independence Day). Thus a secular conversion to Jewishness in Israel might well signal involvement in Jewish destiny and Jewish cultural activities. It is hard to imagine, however, what a secular conversion might mean in the United States. As Steven Cohen has definitively demonstrated, for younger American Jews ethnicity has largely lost its salience, and Jewishness is perceived as a religious identification.²⁶

Another very important American Jewish value is egalitarianism. Although historical Jewish societies were stratified into numerous hierar-

chies, including gender hierarchies, many American Jews believe that religiously based social inequality is unacceptable, even repugnant. In part because of this coalesced American Jewish preference for religious egalitarianism, and in part because of the demographic fact that large numbers of Jewish men had married non-Jewish women, the American Reform movement rejected the principle of matrilineal descent, declaring that either patrilineal or matrilineal descent could make a child Jewish. Thus, according to the Reform movement's decision, the children of either a Jewish father or a Jewish mother could be considered Jews. This decision was hailed by many as more "fair" and just, since it did not discriminate against Jewish men in favor of Jewish women.

The findings of the Listening to Learn project, however, demonstrate that the cultural and religious impact of a Jewish mother in a home is greater than that of the father. The likelihood that children will be raised completely as Jews, rather than partly as Jews and partly as non-Jews, and the type and extent of Jewish education received by children, as well as terms of holiday observances and social networks, depend greatly on the gender of the Jewish parent.

It should also be noted that the principle of matrilineal descent favored and privileged Jewish women as wives, giving them somewhat of an advantage in the marriage "market." This was an important factor, because Jewish women in the United States today are delegitimated and disadvantaged by the negative stereotypes prevalent in contemporary American media, film, literature, and popular culture.²⁷ These stereotypes are deeply "nonegalitarian" in that they target Jewish women far more than Jewish men. The fact that Jewish women have lost the protection afforded by matrilineal descent and yet are still subject to American cultural negative stereotypes contributes to rising rates of mixed marriage.

Ultimately, American Jewish communities will create their own list of priorities, either through a process of thoughtful deliberation or through default and indecision. The model of outreach and inclusiveness places the highest priority on expanding the size of the Jewish community, at all costs, even if that means inclusion of Christian observances, images, ideas, and cultural attitudes. The inclusive model is currently attractive because of its "political correctness," since it avoids boundary maintenance and judgmentalism—except against those who themselves seem to be passing judgment.²⁸

The alternative communal strategy for dealing with the challenges of rising rates of mixed marriage is sometimes called “inreach.” It calls for focusing communal will into the intensification of a broad spectrum of identifiably Jewish cognitive and experiential opportunities for Jews of all ages. The inreach model is opposed by some because it calls for painful re-allocation of communal resources and difficult assessments as to what comprises authentic Jewish activities and attitudes.

Moreover, such an emphasis would almost inevitably be accompanied by some shrinkage in terms of computable Jewish population size. Serious economic and political ramifications accompany a reduction in the number of persons who can be counted as Jews, and some observers are frightened at the prospect of a smaller Jewish community.

However, if the communal goal is the preservation and revitalization of Jewish identity among individuals and families, inreach presents a most effective approach. Proponents of inreach argue that it helps make existing Jews more Jewish by creatively and dramatically expanding Jewish educational opportunities and reinforcing those experiential aspects of Jewishness that derive from authentic historical Judaisms. Many who favor the inreach approach also urge a strong, proactive attitude toward conversion in cases of mixed marriage. Noting that conversionary households usually have strong Jewish connections, inreach-and-conversion advocates point out that once a born-Christian has formally become a Jew, many of the ambiguous aspects of the mixed-married household are alleviated. Moreover, children raised in conversionary households can say and feel, as do the children of inmarried Jews, “both of my parents are Jewish.”

Children of unambiguously Jewish households have a single religious identity. Although their identities are shaped in many ways by American values and mores, Jews with a single religious identity are in a position to enter into dialogue with historical Jewish traditions. Because they are raised with only one ethnoreligious birthright, they are also in a position to transmit what they cherish most about Jewishness to future generations.

NOTES

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4. Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 170.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

6. *Ibid.*

7. See Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Jewish Life and American Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 13.

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16. Bethamie Horowitz, *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity* (New York: UJA-Federation of New York, June 2000), p. 95.

17. Keysar, Kosmin, and Scheckner, *Next Generation*, p. 53.

18. Bellah, "Competing Visions," p. 228.

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22. David G. Sacks, *Welcoming the Intermarried into Your Jewish Family* (New York: The Jewish Outreach Institute, 1995; revised 2000), p. 4.

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Appendix 1 TABLES

Table 1a. Family Types, by Location (in percents except *n*)

<i>Family type</i>	<i>Location</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>New England</i>	<i>New Jersey</i>	<i>Denver</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	
Mixed-married	55	54	62	40	53
Conversionary	21	22	14	15	18
Inmarried	24	24	24	45	29
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	34	37	30	26	127

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 1b. Household Types, by Location (in percents except *n*)

<i>Household type</i>	<i>Location</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>New England</i>	<i>New Jersey</i>	<i>Denver</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	
Husband Jewish / wife non-Jewish*	28	32	38	26	31
Husband non-Jewish* / wife Jewish	27	22	24	15	23
Husband Jew by choice / wife born-Jew	13	6	0	7	6
Husband born-Jew / wife Jew by choice	5	16	14	7	12
Husband and wife Jews by choice	3	0	0	0	0
Husband and wife Jewish	24	24	24	45	28
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	68	74	60	52	254

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

*Non-Jewish spouses primarily Christian, plus one Hindu and one Muslim.

Table 2. Religion of Children in Mixed-Married Households

<i>Religion of children</i>	<i>Percentage of mixed-married households</i>
Jewish	63
Two religions	19
Split children	9
Neither	5
Christian	4
<i>Total</i>	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 3. Jewish Birth Ceremonies, by Household Type (in percents)

<i>Jewish birth ceremony</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
Yes	59	84	90	71
No	40	16	7	27
Planned	2	0	4	2
<i>Total</i>	101*	100	101*	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

*Rounding error.

Table 4. Christmas Celebrations in Mixed-Married Families, by Location (in percents)

<i>Christmas celebration</i>	<i>Location</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>New England</i>	<i>New Jersey</i>	<i>Denver</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	
Christmas with church	13	22	7	12	14
Christmas without church	80	72	66	88	75
No Christmas	7	6	27	0	11
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 5. Christmas Celebrations Among All Participants (in percents)

<i>Christmas celebration</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
With church	16	0	0	9
Home, no church	50	9	4	31
With non-Jewish family	16	54	0	20
None	18	37	97	40
<i>Total</i>	100	100	101*	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

*Rounding error.

Table 6. Easter Celebrations Among All Participants (in percents)

<i>Easter celebration</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
With church	12	0	4	8
Home, no church	42	7	2	25
With non-Jewish family	12	15	0	10
None	34	78	95	57
<i>Total</i>	100	100	101*	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

*Rounding error.

Table 7. Jewish Holidays Celebrated in Mixed-Married Families, by Religion of Children (in percents)

<i>Jewish holiday</i>	<i>Religion of children</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Jewish</i>	<i>Two religions</i>	<i>Split children</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Christmas</i>	
Passover	99	96	91	100	100	98
Hanukkah	99	96	91	86	60	95
Other Jewish holidays	55	28	28	14	0	43

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 8. Christmas Celebrations in Mixed-Married Families, by Premarital Agreement (in percents)

<i>Christmas celebration</i>	<i>Premarital agreement</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Agree to be Jewish</i>	<i>Neither is religious</i>	<i>Both ambivalent</i>	<i>Agree to be Christian</i>	<i>Did not discuss</i>	
Christmas with church	7	33	0	33	17	10
Christmas without church	72	67	100	67	83	78
No Christmas	21	0	0	0	0	12
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 9. Jewish Celebrations in Mixed-Married Families, by Premarital Agreement (in percents)

<i>Jewish celebrations</i>	<i>Premarital agreement</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Agree to be Jewish</i>	<i>Neither is religious</i>	<i>Both ambivalent</i>	<i>Agree to be Christian</i>	<i>Did not discuss</i>	
Holidays with family	56	100	100	100	73	71
Holidays with family and synagogue	44	0	0	0	27	29
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 10. Hanukkah Celebrations Among All Participants (in percents)

<i>Hannukah celebrated</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
Yes	96	98	100	97
No	4	2	0	3
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 11. Passover Celebrations Among All Participants (in percents)

<i>Passover celebrated</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
Yes	98	100	100	99
No	2	0	0	1
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 12. Other Jewish Holiday Observances Among All Participants (in percents)

<i>Other Jewish holidays</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
Yes	42	89	78	60
No	58	11	22	40
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 13. Religion of Children, by Religion of Mother (in percents)

<i>Religion of children</i>	<i>Religion of mother</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Jewish</i>	<i>Non-Jewish</i>	
Jewish	72	49	59
Two religions	17	19	18
Split children	7	14	11
Neither	3	8	6
Christian	0	11	6
<i>Total</i>	99*	101*	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

*Rounding error.

Table 14. Shabbat Candles, by Religion of Female Spouse (in percents)

<i>Shabbat candles</i>	<i>Religion of female spouse</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Non-Jewish</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	
Yes	18	31	24
No	82	69	76
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 15. Shabbat Meal, by Religion of Female Spouse (in percents)

<i>Shabbat meal</i>	<i>Religion of female spouse</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Non-Jewish</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	
Yes	21	32	25
No	79	68	75
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 16. College Friendship Circles Among All Participants, by Teenage Friends (in percents)

<i>Friends in college</i>	<i>Friends as teenager</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Only Jews</i>	<i>Mostly Jews</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Mostly non-Jews</i>	<i>Only non-Jews</i>	
Only Jews	50	1	3	0	0	3
Mostly Jews	33	44	12	9	0	21
Mixed	17	42	56	21	14	36
Mostly non-Jews	0	13	27	68	29	36
Only non-Jews	0	0	2	1	57	5
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	99*	100	101*

Source: Participant data sheets.

*Rounding error.

Table 17. College Friendship Circles Among All Participants, by Current Household Type and Teenage Friends (in percents)

<i>Friends in college</i>	<i>Friends as teenager</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Only Jews</i>	<i>Mostly Jews</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Mostly non-Jews</i>	<i>Only non-Jews</i>	
<i>Mixed-married</i>						
Only Jews	0	0	3	0	0	1
Mostly Jews	50	33	13	5	0	13
Mixed	50	44	55	21	10	34
Mostly non-Jews	0	22	29	72	30	47
Only non-Jews	0	0	0	2	60	6
<i>Total</i>	100	99*	100	100	100	101*
<i>Conversionary</i>						
Only Jews	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mostly Jews	0	36	14	21	0	21
Mixed	0	55	50	14	25	37
Mostly non-Jews	0	9	29	64	25	35
Only non-Jews	0	0	7	0	50	7
<i>Total</i>	0	100	100	99*	100	100
<i>Inmarried</i>						
Only Jews	75	3	8	0	0	10
Mostly Jews	25	55	8	25	0	39
Mixed	0	36	69	50	0	42
Mostly non-Jews	0	7	15	25	0	10
Only non-Jews	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Total</i>	100	101*	100	100	0	101*

Source: Participant data sheets.

*Rounding error.

Table 18. Marriage Officiant Among All Participants, by Household Type (in percents)

<i>Marriage officiant</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
Rabbi	32	74	96	54
JP	46	13	4	30
Priest/minister	6	9	0	6
Combination	16	4	0	10
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 19. Religion of Children in Mixed-Married Families, by Marriage Officiant (in percents)

<i>Religion of children</i>	<i>Marriage officiant</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Rabbi</i>	<i>JP</i>	<i>Priest/minister</i>	<i>Combination</i>	
Jewish	95	55	57	25	65
Both	0	24	0	63	20
Split	3	9	43	0	7
Neither	0	10	0	0	5
Christian	3	2	0	13	3
<i>Total</i>	101*	100	100	101*	100

Source: Participant data sheets.

*Rounding error.

Table 20. Home Influence on Dating Among All Participants (in percents)

<i>Home influence on dating</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
Discriminated against				
mixed dating	18	31	33	24
Mildly discriminated	15	17	29	18
No comment by parents	62	49	38	54
Backlash effect	5	3	0	4
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 21. Family of Origin Reaction to Marriage Among All Participants, by Household Type (in percents)

<i>Family reaction to marriage</i>	<i>Household type</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Mixed-married</i>	<i>Conversionary</i>	<i>Inmarried</i>	
Positive/accepting	62	63	83	66
Some ambivalence	30	28	7	26
Negative/resistant	8	9	10	8
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 22. Family of Origin Reaction to Marriage Among All Participants, by Household Type (in percents)

<i>Family reaction to marriage</i>	<i>Home influence on dating</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Discriminated against mixed dating</i>	<i>Mildly discriminated against mixed dating</i>		<i>Backlash effect</i>	
		<i>Discriminated against mixed dating</i>	<i>No comment about dating</i>		
<i>Mixed-married households</i>					
Positive/accepting	13	59	76	50	62
Negative/resistant	33	8	0	25	8
Some ambivalence	54	33	24	25	30
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Conversionary households</i>					
Positive/accepting	50	40	72	0	59
Negative/resistant	0	20	14	0	11
Some ambivalence	50	40	14	0	30
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	0	100
<i>Inmarried households</i>					
Positive/accepting	90	88	80	0	86
Negative/resistant	0	12	10	0	7
Some ambivalence	10	0	10	0	7
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	0	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 23. Home Influence on Dating Among Mixed-Married Jewish Spouses, by Gender (in percents)

<i>Home influence on dating</i>	<i>Jewish spouse</i>		
	<i>Husband</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Total</i>
Discriminated against mixed dating	18	30	23
Mildly discriminated	18	35	24
No comment by parents	59	25	46
Backlash effect	6	10	7
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 24. Family of Origin Reaction to Mixed Marriage Among Mixed-Married Jewish Spouses, by Gender (in percents)

<i>Family reaction to mixed marriage</i>	<i>Jewish spouse</i>		
	<i>Husband</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Total</i>
Positive/accepting	59	53	56
Some ambivalence	35	33	35
Negative/resistant	6	14	9
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

Source: Analysis of participant interviews.

Table 25. Religious Status of Participants from Cold/Distant Families of Origin, by Gender (percents of all participating individuals)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Religious status</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Non- Jew married to born- Jew</i>	<i>Born- Jew married to non- Jew</i>	<i>Jew by choice married to born- Jew</i>	<i>Born- Jew married to Jew by choice</i>	<i>Born- Jew married to born- Jew</i>	
<i>Male</i>	24	27	13	8	10	19
<i>Female</i>	36	17	33	14	4	23
<i>Total</i>	31	23	26	10	7	21

Source: Participant data sheets.

Table 26. Religious Status of Participants from Families of Origin Where Alcoholism Was Present (percents of all participating individuals)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Religious status</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Non- Jew married to born- Jew</i>	<i>Born- Jew married to non- Jew</i>	<i>Jew by choice married to born- Jew</i>	<i>Born- Jew married to Jew by choice</i>	<i>Born- Jew married to born- Jew</i>	
<i>Male</i>	4	8	25	0	0	5
<i>Female</i>	17	4	20	0	0	9
<i>Total</i>	12	6	22	0	0	7

Source: Participant data sheets.

Appendix 2

THE LISTENING TO LEARN METHODOLOGY

The Listening to Learn qualitative study of Jewish family life, a research project funded by the American Jewish Committee, was designed to deepen our understanding of households with children in which one spouse is a Jew and the other spouse is an unconverted non-Jew. The study focused on the processes and strategies that men and women employ as they negotiate the ethnic and religious character of the households they create. We conducted separate, in-depth interviews with husbands and wives in their homes and workplaces, listening to the stories of a broad spectrum of families that represent diverse paradigms of mixed-married households.

This report is based on interview data from 127 households (254 interviews), including sixty-eight mixed-married families, whom we compare with thirty-six inmarried and twenty-three conversionary families. We conducted interviews in thirty families in Denver, thirty-seven in New Jersey (MetroWest), thirty-four in New England, and twenty-six in Atlanta (plus two in Louisville, Ky.). In addition, we conducted four focus groups with teenagers growing up in interfaith families (two in New Jersey and two in Denver). Our sample includes the full range of mixed-married family types—Jewishly identified, two religions, no formal religion, overtly Christian, and principled nontheists. While most of our mixed marriages were between white Christians and Jews, our sample also included Jews married to Muslims and interracial marriages. In two cases informants grew up as Christians in the homes of secretly Jewish parents, discovering during adolescence that they were Jewish.

Our interview questions were organized around negotiations of religious identity within the family. These questions enabled us to explore:

- how couples consider, arrive at, and implement decisions about

the ethnic, cultural, religious and social organization of their households;

- how spouses express their attachment to different faiths;
- how spouses deal with tension or stress that arises out of differences over the religious character of their family;
- how parents perceive themselves as providing their children with information about or attachment to one or more religious/cultural faith systems; and
- how family experiences are shaped by external influences, such as grandparents and other extended family members,
- or by teachers, outreach workers, rabbis, and religious/cultural institutional environments. We also spent some time exploring
- how experiences in the family and community of origin predispose individuals to establish—or not to establish—an exclusively Jewish orientation when they create their own homes.

In all our deliberations, we considered the impact of gender. Observers often hypothesize that the maleness or femaleness of the born-Jewish partner affects the family dynamic. We set it as one of our goals to explore this and other aspects of gender influence.

Listening to Learn was conducted in two parts: Phase I, the pilot study, consisted of interviews in New England households. Beginning with this pilot study, households were identified by the New York survey research firm of Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), using a multiplicity sampling technique.

Multiplicity sampling techniques, often used in medical or population studies, were developed in order to study targeted cohorts within a reasonable expenditure of time and money. The screening instrument includes questions not only about the respondent but also about specific members of the respondent's immediate family. In the Listening to Learn study, screening questions were asked of the respondent about the marital status of his or her siblings, parents, and children. The respondent was then asked to provide contact information for those siblings who were appropriate subjects for the Listening to Learn research project; respondents were given the opportunity to contact said family members for permission before providing this information. This multiplicity sampling technique is useful in developing clusters of informants in differing geographical areas. It is also

useful in following a family string, and in looking at family members who have pursued very different or very similar lifestyles. As we had hoped, in several cases, siblings and their spouses became part of the interview population.

In order to facilitate the pilot study within a reasonable period of time, SRBI was provided with several Jewish community center lists. These JCC lists included numerous intermarried households, as well as many non-Jews, a large minority of Christian, and some Muslim families. SRBI was supplied with a screening protocol and instructed to locate a random sampling of households that included a born non-Jewish spouse and a born-Jewish spouse, with at least one child, within the JCC lists. SRBI also located inmarried and conversionary households that we used as control groups using the same technique.

This methodology and findings were evaluated by the team that had planned Phase I, including the P.I., consultants Prof. Sidney Goldstein, of the Brown University Population Studies and Training Center, and Prof. Len Saxe, director of Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, and the project manager, the American Jewish Committee staff, and several additional sociologists and practitioners who were called in expressly for this evaluation.

Phase I demonstrated that it was possible to use JCC lists as a basis for locating a randomized, multiplicity sampling of mixed-married households, because JCC memberships are very diverse. Within our Phase I sampling we found households that were completely unconnected to any Jewish activity, organization, or social group, aside from the JCC. Such mixed-married families—like Christian and Muslim families—join JCCs in order to send their children to preschool programs or to use convenient sports or health club facilities. We also, as expected, found a continuum of mixed-married families who ranged from religiously unaffiliated to highly affiliated.

It was important to us that our informants be representative in terms of geographical location as well as household type. We selected the locations of Metro-West (New Jersey), Atlanta, and Denver to illustrate Jewish life in the suburban New York metropolitan area, as well as Southern and Western geographical areas, respectively. In Phase II, as in Phase I, we employed SRBI to use a multiplicity sampling technique, utilizing area JCC lists. In each geographical area studied, the informant population included people who lived and worked in locations ranging from urban

neighborhoods, to suburbs with large Jewish populations, to frankly rural areas far from populations of any kind, Jewish or non-Jewish.

Comparing our informant population to data from the 1990 NJPS, we are confident that the range of the informants we studied illustrates the full, rich spectrum of American mixed-married households in terms of their religious profiles.

While participants were diverse, the study oversampled those households that described themselves as raising their children as Jews. Households purporting to raise their children as Jews are regarded by some observers as the most promising, in terms of American Jewish demography. Indeed, some have suggested that mixed-married households raising Jewish children may result in a net population gain for the American Jewish community. In our sample, 63 percent of mixed-married informants said they were raising their children as Jews, roughly double the national American average. This oversampling gave us the opportunity to explore in depth the actual ethnoreligious family dynamics in these “raising the children as Jews” mixed-married households.

This disproportionately high level of Jewish identification makes the findings of this study, especially the persistent and recurring influence of Christianity even in mixed-married families who consider themselves to be raising their children as Jews, all the more striking.

Moreover, participants in this study seemed exceptionally cognizant of the needs and concerns of their spouses. Although twice as many mixed marriages end in divorce as inmarriages, the couples we interviewed did not report exceptional levels of conflict and discord. It should be noted that both of these biases are in part a function of self-selection by our participants. It is likely that spouses in marriages experiencing tension around religious issues were disproportionately represented among those who declined to participate in this study when approached in the original screening calls.

This study explores the extent to which intermarried households constitute one or more distinctive subgroups within the larger American Jewish community and the ways in which these intermarried societies distinguished by particular characteristics. It asks whether there are clear patterns among mixed-married families that point to shared symbolic frames of reference, common norms, goals, and means for accomplishing those goals, and whether they share adaptive strategies, structures, and/or interpretations that invest their activities with particular meanings.

Interviews proceeded via an interview script with a structured series of questions, allowing for considerable latitude in the interviewing style of the informant. Initially, we began with a highly detailed questionnaire, but soon found that we actually obtained more complete information when we worked with a more conversational interviewing style. We adjusted the interview script accordingly. The interviews, approximately one to two hours per informant, were conducted primarily in their homes, although some interviews took place in informants' workplaces. Focus groups with teenagers took place at the local Jewish community centers, for logistical reasons.

Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. In addition, field notes were written up on each interview. Interviewers also filled out a demographic data sheet on each informant. The resulting written data were analyzed in three ways and form the basis for this report.

The hundreds of pages of interview transcripts were coded using AFTER qualitative research software. These coded interviews were used to generate excerpts as well as to provide a quantified, panoramic picture of the interview data. Demographic data from the written data sheets were used to create a data set, which has been analyzed using SPSS. Both the demographic data sheets and the AFTER quantification of the interviews are represented in the tables in Appendix 1.

Not least, hours were spent listening to and reading transcripts of the interviews the "old-fashioned" way. This combination of techniques enabled us to "listen" to the interviews, paying special attention to repeating patterns, and to differences in particular family types and geographical areas.

The quantification via AFTER and SPSS was important, because it enabled us to appreciate the big picture as we assessed our findings. These quantitative materials clearly demarcate the parameters and range of responses among our informant cohorts. Our reading and rereading of interview transcripts was equally important, because it gave us access to the nuances of these very personal yet representative life stories.

As noted in the preface, our analysis of the interview data proceeded from two different vantage points. On one hand, we were interested in the self-perceptions of our informants as they described and analyzed their own lives. On the other hand, we also considered the impact of their behaviors, and of the choices they had made, on the larger American Jewish community.

Appendix 3

THE RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigator

Sylvia Barack Fishman, Ph.D., directs a program in Contemporary Jewish Life in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University, and is codirector of the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women, also at Brandeis. Her new book, *Jewish Life and American Culture* (SUNY Press, 2000) explores the way American Jews negotiate the Jewish and secular aspects of their lives. In addition to numerous articles and monographs, her earlier books include *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community*, which was named a 1994 Honor Book by the National Jewish Book Council, and *Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction*. For the American Jewish Committee, she has written three feature articles in the *American Jewish Year Book*, as well as a new monograph, *Changing Minds: Feminism in Contemporary Orthodox Jewish Life*.

Project Manager

Naomi Bromberg Bar-Yam, Ph.D., received her BA in Judaic Studies from Brandeis University. She earned a masters in social work and did her doctoral work in social policy at the Heller School. She does writing, teaching, and research in the areas of Jewish Studies and maternal child health. Currently she is research associate at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.

Interviews and Field Work

Christian J. Churchill, Ph.D., received his doctorate in sociology from Brandeis University in May 2000, writing a dissertation entitled *The Calling: Bureaucracy, Technology, and Ideology in the Telefundraising Industry*. His recent publications include "Globalization and Structures of Power: A Weberian Inquiry" in *Innovations: A Journal of Politics* (vol. 3, 2000) and "The Promise of the Postmodern Sociologist" in the *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* (vol. 11, no. 3, 1998). He served as a visiting professor in the Williams College Department of Anthropology and Sociology and is currently an assistant professor of sociology in the St. Thomas Aquinas College Division of the Social Sciences.

Lila Corwin is a graduate student in the Ph.D. program at Yale University in American religious history. She graduated from Amherst College with a B.A. in religious studies and wrote a thesis on *ba'alot teshuvah* (secular women who become Orthodox). She is currently interested in researching Jews in America between the 1920s and late 1950s, analyzing their encounters with non-Jews.

Margie Nesson, M.Ed., worked for fourteen years at Jewish Family and Children's Service in Boston, specializing in interfaith couples and parents of interfaith couples support/discussion groups, planning a major conference for professionals working with interfaith families, and providing in-service training for JF&CS social workers in facilitating interfaith groups. As the assistant director of the Community Services Department of JF&CS, she led separation/divorce support groups, bereavement groups and senior adult psychosocial groups in Jewish communal housing for the elderly facilities. Margie Nesson is presently the Family Table coordinator.

Benjamin Phillips is a Ph.D. candidate in Near Eastern and Judaic studies and sociology at Brandeis University. He graduated from the University of Sydney, Australia, in 1999 with first class honors in government and Judaic studies. His research interests include religious switching to and from Judaism, Jewish identity, and quantitative analysis of the Jewish community. In addition to his work on *Jewish and Something Else*, Ben has contributed to several projects of Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies.

Rachel Rockenmacher is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Brandeis University. Rachel earned an Ed.M. from Harvard Graduate School of

Education and a B.A. from Dartmouth College. She has worked as a teacher and administrator of educational programs, and is currently writing a dissertation on perceptions of Jewish identity among young adult children of intermarried parents.

Mark I. Rosen, Ph.D., is senior research associate at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. He received his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in industrial relations, and has been a faculty member at the University of Minnesota and Bentley College, where he taught courses on interpersonal communication and organizational behavior to undergraduate and MBA students. He is the author of *Thank You for Being Such a Pain: Spiritual Guidance for Dealing with Difficult People*, a synthesis of Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist teachings on interpersonal conflict.