

What We Learned from the 2010 Passover/Easter Survey

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Abstract

While the confluence of Passover and Easter is not as culturally prominent as the so-called "December dilemma," deciding how to celebrate these major religious holidays is one of the key potential conflicts in interfaith families. In February 2010, we conducted our sixth annual Passover/Easter Survey to determine the attitudes and behaviors of people in interfaith relationships during Passover and Easter. We also asked questions about people's experiences with Jewish organizations; those responses will be the subject of a future report.

Of the 372 respondents, we focused on the 116 who were in interfaith relationships and raising children exclusively Jewish.

All of these respondents plan on celebrating Passover in some way, while half plan on celebrating Easter. Nearly all plan on attending a seder, while a small fraction plan on hosting Easter dinner, going to church, or telling the Easter story.

Introduction

In February 2010, InterfaithFamily.com conducted its sixth annual Passover/Easter Survey to determine the attitudes and behaviors of people in interfaith relationships during Passover and Easter. We also used this opportunity to ask people about their experiences with Jewish organizations; those responses will be the subject of a future report.

The survey attracted 372 responses. Of those 372 respondents, 257 said they were in interfaith relationships. Of those 257, 163 have children. Of those 163, 116, or 71 percent, were raising their children solely in the Jewish religion. Nationally, 33 to 39 percent of interfaith couples are raising their children solely in the Jewish religion, according to the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Study.

This report focuses on the responses of the ***116 survey participants who are in interfaith relationships and raising their children solely in the Jewish religion***. The report does not reflect the behaviors of interfaith couples in general, or the behaviors of all interfaith couples with children. The goal of this report is to determine how interfaith families raising their children Jewish deal with the competing demands of the two holidays.

We chose to focus on this population for several reasons:

1. One of the goals of our organization is to promote interfaith couples raising their children Jewish. We therefore want to know more about the exact dynamics of how this works, especially during potential periods of conflict, such as when Passover and Easter overlap.



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2. Jewish community policy-makers are starting to focus attention on engaging interfaith families with the Jewish community with the end goal of the families deciding to raise their children Jewish. As a 2007 study on the American Jewish population noted, "There is increasing evidence... that more intermarried families are choosing to raise children Jewishly."¹
3. There is increasing interest in what intermarried families raising their children Jewish "look like." Until recently, almost all studies of intermarriage have looked at intermarried Jews as an undifferentiated group and failed to make the important distinction between those intermarried couples that have chosen to create a Jewish home and those who have not. In 2008, Combined Jewish Philanthropies (the Boston Jewish federation) released a report² that focused on the behaviors of intermarried couples raising their children Jewish. That paper's general conclusion was that intermarried families raising Jewish children behave remarkably like inmarried Reform Jewish families with children. This report, like our previous reports on the behaviors and attitudes of interfaith couples during the December and spring holidays, is intended to flesh out a portrait of what interfaith families raising Jewish children "look like."

¹ Leonard Saxe, Elizabeth Tighe, Benjamin Phillips and Charles Kadushin, *Reconsidering the Size and Characteristics of the American Jewish Population: New Estimates of a Larger and More Diverse Community* (Waltham, Mass.: Steinhardt Social Research Institute, 2007), 29.

² Katherine N. Gan, Patty Jacobson, Gil Preuss and Barry Shrage. *The 2005 Greater Boston Community Study, Intermarried Families and Their Children: A Report from Combined Jewish Philanthropies* (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies, 2008).

The Report

Please note: Throughout the report, unless otherwise noted, "respondents" refers to respondents to the survey who are intermarried, have raised or are raising children and have raised or are raising their children exclusively Jewish. This is not a report on all interfaith couples, or all interfaith couples with children. These figures should not be reported as representative of all interfaith families.

All of the 116 respondents plan on participating in Passover activities. Just over half plan to host a seder (51%) while eighty percent plan to attend one. Taken together, all (100%) plan on hosting or attending a seder. Most plan on telling the Passover story (75%) or eating matzah (87%). A majority (56%) plan on following the dietary restrictions for most or all of the eight days of Passover. A little more than a third of the non-Jewish respondents (36%) plan on following dietary restrictions during Passover.

Seder does not just mean dinner for our respondents. The vast majority expect their seders to include food rituals like dipping greens into salt water (96%), a seder plate (97%), readings from a haggadah (97%) and the hiding of the Afikoman (89%).

Q2. What Passover activities do you plan to participate in this year? Please check all that apply.	% (of 116)
Hosting seder	51%
Attending seder at family's place	44%
Attending seder at friend's place	27%
Attending communal or other public seder	26%
Telling the story of Passover	75%
Eating matzah	87%
Following dietary restrictions for most or all eight days of Passover	56%
Other (please specify)	4%

Table 1. Passover Activities of Respondents

Meanwhile, half plan on participating in Easter activities (50%). Few plan on participating in the more "religious" Easter activities like going to church (10%) or telling the Easter story (1%). Only 41% plan on hosting or attending an Easter dinner--compare this with the 100% who plan on hosting or attending a seder.

Q9. What Easter activities do you plan on participating in this year? Please check all that apply.	% (of 116)
Hosting Easter meal	6%
Attending Easter meal at family's place	34%
Attending Easter meal at friends' place	3%
Telling the Easter story	1%
Going to church	10%
Decorating eggs	18%
Participating in an Easter egg hunt	20%
Watching an Easter-themed movie or play	2%
Other (please specify)	5%

Table 2. Easter Activities of Respondents

These respondents also see significant differences in the level of religiousness of their celebrations of Passover and Easter. Few say their celebrations of either holiday will be deeply religious, but two thirds say their celebrations of Easter will be entirely secular (66%) while none say their celebrations of Passover will be entirely secular (0%). And 45% see their Passover celebrations as tending toward the religious side of the spectrum--as deeply religious or religious--vs. only 12% who see their Easter celebrations as deeply religious or religious.

Overall, the great majority of respondents say they are very comfortable or comfortable (91%) with participating in Passover celebrations, compared to 47% who say the same about Easter. Meanwhile, there is a far greater level of ambivalence over Easter's arrival, with 19% saying they're uncomfortable or very uncomfortable about participating in Easter celebrations compared to 3% who say the same about Passover. Non-Jewish respondents are almost two and one half times more likely (79%) to be comfortable with Passover than Jewish respondents are with Easter (32%).

This year, Easter falls on the sixth day of Passover--which could potentially create a conflict, especially for those observing the dietary rules of Passover, which prohibit bread, pasta and many other common foods. Last year, Easter also fell during Passover, but in 2008 it did not. Comparing all three surveys, we find no significant difference between the percentage of respondents who said they planned on celebrating Easter (45% in 2008 vs. 49% in 2009 vs. 51% in 2010). This suggests that the confluence of Easter and Passover is not causing our respondents to forgo Easter. And with the 100% participation rate in Passover, they are not bypassing Passover either.

Of those celebrating both holidays, most (64%) say the confluence of the holidays will not change their celebrations. Those that are changing their celebrations are adapting, with 31% saying they will not eat



prohibited foods at the Easter meal and 5% saying they will eat prohibited foods at the Easter meal but not for the rest of Passover.

Jewish respondents are more likely to avoid prohibited foods at the Easter meal (42%) than non-Jewish respondents (7%), which makes sense given that many more Jewish respondents plan on following dietary restrictions for most of Passover (63% vs. 36% for non-Jewish respondents).

Q12. This year, Easter falls during Passover. How will this affect how you celebrate the holidays? Please check all that apply.	% (of 59)
This will not affect my celebrations.	64%
I will attend an Easter meal but not eat food prohibited on Passover (such as bread).	31%
I will eat what is served at the Easter meal but follow the dietary restrictions for the rest of Passover.	5%
Because Easter falls during Passover, I will not attend an Easter meal.	2%
I will host or attend an Easter meal before or after Passover.	0%
Other (please specify)	5%

Table 3. Effect of Easter on Passover Celebrations, Respondents Participating in Easter Celebrations

A full 90% of respondents said they believe that participating in Easter celebrations does not affect the Jewish identity of their children. How do interfaith families raising Jewish children explain their participation in Easter celebrations to their children? Most pointed to respect for the non-Jewish parent (63%), respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family (71%) or open-mindedness/tolerance (58%). Few explained their participation in Easter celebrations as a way not to upset the non-Jewish parent (12%) or his or her extended family (14%), and few told their children participating in Easter was an opportunity for them to decide what religion to adopt (5%). However, a third (34%) explained their participation to their children as a way to expose them to faith traditions other than their own. We did not ask what parents' reasons were for participating in Easter so it is possible there is a divergence between their motivations and what they tell their children.

Q35. How do you explain or talk about your participation in Easter celebrations to your children?	% (of 68)
Respect for the non-Jewish parent's traditions	59%
Desire not to upset the non-Jewish parent	10%
Respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family	78%
Desire not to upset the non-Jewish parent's extended family	15%
Open-mindedness/tolerance	56%
Desire to expose your children to different faith traditions than your own	32%
Opportunity for your children to make up their own mind about what religion to adopt	4%
Other	4%

Table 4. How Respondents Explain Their Participation in Easter to Their Children

We also asked several demographic questions to understand the Jewish behaviors of the respondents. Basing our questions on the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 and the 2005 Greater Boston Jewish Community Study, we asked respondents about the frequency of certain Jewish behaviors (lighting Shabbat candles, attending weekly synagogue services, etc.), number of Jewish friends and membership in religious organizations. Our respondents were very similar to the Jewish population in general as reported by the NJPS 2000-01, although our respondents are more likely to light Shabbat candles "always" or "usually" than the general Jewish population (47% vs. 28%) and far more likely to be synagogue members than the general population (76% vs. 46%).

	Respondents to our survey	NJPS 2000-01
Half or more friends are Jewish*	54%	52%
Hold/attend Passover seder	96%	77%
Light Shabbat candles	48%	28%
Light Hanukkah candles	98%	72%
Attend Jewish religious services**	31%	27%
Belong to synagogue	76%	46%
Belong to JCC	13%	21%

*The NJPS asked about "close" friends.

**The NJPS asked about attending Jewish religious services "monthly or more." We asked whether someone in your household attended weekly services at a synagogue all of the time, usually, some of the time or never. We calculated a comparable percentage by adding the responses to "all of the time" and "usually."

Table 5. Jewish Connections of Respondents vs. American Jews (NJPS 2000-01)



Demographic Portrait of Our Respondents

Of the 372 people who responded to our Passover-Easter Survey, 116 said they were intermarried, had children and had raised or were raising their children exclusively Jewish. Of those 116 respondents, the majority (76%) are Jewish:

Q14. What is your religion? Please check all that apply.	% (of 116)
Jewish	76%
Catholic	9%
Protestant	9%
Muslim	0%
Other Christian	2%
Hindu	0%
Agnostic/Atheist	2%
None	4%
Other	4%

Table 6. Religion of Respondents

Their partners were a mix of Jewish (32%), Catholic (28%), Protestant (15%) and other religions. Because respondents could check multiple religions, there is some overlap where intermarried respondents characterized themselves and their partner as Jewish, as well as other religions. This also reflects some people in conversionary couples--where both partners are officially Jewish--characterizing themselves as intermarried because of the convert's original religious background.



Q18. What is your spouse's religion? Please check all that apply.	% (of 116)
Jewish	32%
Catholic	28%
Protestant	15%
Other Christian	8%
Muslim	0%
Hindu	0%
Agnostic/Atheist	8%
None	8%
Not applicable	0%
Other	7%

Table 7. Religion of Respondents' Spouses

The great majority of the respondents were female (80%).

Q13. What is your gender?	% (of 116)
Female	80%
Male	20%

Table 8. Gender of Respondents

Nearly three-quarters (71%) were between the ages of 30 and 49.

Q21. What is your age?	% (of 116)
Under 20	0%
20-29	3%
30-39	41%
40-49	30%
50-59	15%
60-69	9%
70 and over	2%

Table 9. Age of Respondents

Thirty-nine percent have children 3 or younger. Sixty-seven percent have children 8 or younger.



Q23. What is the age of your children? Please check all that apply.	% (of 116)
0-3	39%
4-5	23%
6-8	25%
9-12	22%
13-17	11%
18-30	14%
30 and over	10%

Table 10. Age of Respondents' Children

Conclusions

Overall, intermarried people who have decided to raise their children Jewish appear to be doing a good job of promoting Jewish behavior and de-emphasizing non-Jewish behavior. The great majority are participating in numerous Passover activities. All plan on hosting or attending a seder and a little more than half plan on following dietary restrictions for most or all of the eight days of Passover.

Conversely, they are participating in far fewer Easter activities. Half are not participating in Easter celebrations at all, while 41% plan on hosting or attending an Easter dinner. Only small to very small minorities plan to engage in "religious" Easter activities like attending religious services (which may in fact not be a religious experience for the participants), or telling the Easter story.

For those that are participating in Easter, two thirds see their participation in Easter as entirely secular. Conversely, while they don't see Passover as deeply religious, they see it as significantly more religious than Easter.

At the same time, this cohort is not abandoning Easter altogether; despite Easter falling during Passover this year, half plan on participating in Easter celebrations in some way--close to the same percentage that said they would do so in 2008, when the holidays did not overlap.

The great majority (91%) of respondents are comfortable celebrating Passover but less than half are comfortable celebrating Easter (47%). The only significant difference we noted between last year's survey and this year's, however, is that there was less discomfort with celebrating Easter this year (19%) than last year (34%).

Having decided on a religious tradition for their children, the respondents rarely explain to their children that they're participating in Easter so they can make up their own mind about what religion to adopt. Most respondents say they explain their family's participation in Easter to their children as a matter of "respect" for either the non-Jewish parent's traditions or the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family, or "open-mindedness/tolerance." A full 90% believe that their participation in Easter celebrations does not affect their children's Jewish identity.