

What We Learned from the Fourth Annual December Holidays Survey

By Micah Sachs and Edmund Case

Introduction

One of the most significant flashpoints in intermarriages between Jews and Christians is the so-called “December dilemma,” the confluence of Hanukkah and Christmas. In October 2007, we conducted our fourth annual December Holidays Survey to determine how people in interfaith relationships deal with the competing demands of Hanukkah and Christmas.

The survey attracted 860 responses, 100 more than the number of responses received in 2006. Of all respondents, 546 reported being in interfaith relationships (as the Jewish partner or with a Jewish partner). Of those 546 respondents, 376 said they had raised or were raising children, and of those respondents, 285, or 76 percent, said they had raised or were raising their children exclusively as Jews. 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, although some communities report higher rates--the 2005 Greater Boston Community Study showed that 60% of interfaith families there were raising their children as Jews.

As in past years, this report focuses on the responses of the **285 survey participants who are in interfaith relationships and raising their children exclusively 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.

We chose to focus on this population for several reasons:

1. One of the goals of our organization is to empower interfaith families to make Jewish choices. We therefore want to know more about the exact dynamics of how the process of raising children as Jewish in interfaith families works, especially during potential periods of conflict, such as the December holiday season.
2. Jewish community policy-makers are focusing increasing attention on engaging interfaith families with the Jewish community with the end goal of the families deciding to raise their children Jewish. As a recent study on the American Jewish population noted, “There is increasing evidence... that more intermarried families are choosing to raise children Jewishly.”¹
3. Many studies of intermarriage have looked at intermarried Jews as an undifferentiated group and failed to make the important distinction between those

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.

intermarried couples that have chosen to create a Jewish home and those who have not. This report is one of the few to date that has looked at the behaviors of those interfaith families who are raising their children Jewish.

Because we collected a fair amount of data about Jewish people not in interfaith relationships, we were also able to make some fruitful comparisons between the intermarried raising Jewish children and the inmarried with children. We received responses from 167 people not in interfaith relationships, including 156 inmarried Jews with children.

The Report

Please note: Throughout the report, the authors make clear distinctions between the populations they are analyzing. Those populations include: interfaith families raising Jewish children, interfaith families raising Jewish children where the mother is Jewish and inmarried families with children, among other cohorts. 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.

Almost all of the intermarried respondents who are raising Jewish children² expect to participate in Hanukkah celebrations and Christmas celebrations this year: 95 percent plan to participate in Hanukkah celebrations while 86 percent plan to participate in Christmas celebrations. There are telling differences in where they plan to celebrate each holiday, however.

The great majority (93%) plan on celebrating Hanukkah at home while less than half (41%) plan on celebrating Christmas at home. But two-thirds plan on celebrating Christmas at the home of relatives (66%)--more than the number that plan on celebrating Hanukkah at the home of relatives (48%). Interestingly, more than twice the number (35% vs. 17%) plan on participating in a public Hanukkah activity than a public Christmas activity. This is surprising given the rarity of public Hanukkah activities and the ubiquity of public Christmas activities.

3. Where will you be participating in Hanukkah celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 285)	10. Where will you be participating in Christmas celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 285)
Own home	266	93	Own home	117	41
Home of relatives	137	48	Home of relatives	189	66
Home of friends	97	34	Home of friends	64	22
Workplace/off-site work party	24	8	Workplace/off-site work party	83	29
Public activity (such as menorah-lighting)	101	35	Public activity (such as tree lighting or going to see a Christmas movie)	48	17

Table 1. Location of Hanukkah Celebrations, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

The great majority of these respondents plan on doing multiple activities relating to the celebration of Hanukkah in their own home. Ninety-three percent plan on lighting the menorah, 89% plan on giving gifts and 87% plan on making or eating Hanukkah foods.

² Respondents were only considered Jewish if they reported that they were Jewish and no other religion, and respondents' children were only considered as being raised Jewish if they were reported as being raised Jewish and no other religion.

The minorities that are planning to celebrate Hanukkah with friends or relatives plan on doing a similarly high level of Hanukkah activities:

4. Which of the following are you planning on doing in the following places:	Own home (% of 285)	Home of relatives (% of 285)	Home of friends (% of 285)	Workplace/ Off-site work party (% of 285)
Light menorah	93	41	31	14
Give gifts	89	21	22	8
Put up Hanukkah decorations	69	9	5	8
Sing/play Hanukkah music and songs	71	16	16	12
Eat/make Hanukkah foods	87	43	32	13
Watch Hanukkah movies	19	1	1	1
Tell the Hanukkah story	56	9	8	9
Play dreidel	70	21	16	8

Table 2. Hanukkah Behaviors in Various Locations, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

The picture is somewhat reversed for Christmas activities. Sixty-five percent plan to give gifts at the home of relatives (vs. 47% giving gifts at their own home) and 52% plan on eating and/or preparing Christmas foods at the home of relatives (vs. 28% planning on eating/preparing Christmas foods at home). Overall, around a third of respondents plan on putting up a Christmas tree, hanging stockings, playing Christmas music or eating Christmas foods. However, the great majority of those who say they are celebrating Christmas in their own home (table not shown) plan on participating in these activities. Across the board, few participate in the more religious behavior of telling the Christmas story:

11/12. Which of the following are you planning on doing in the following places:	Own home (% of 285)	Home of relatives (% of 285)	Home of friends (% of 285)	Workplace/ Off-site work party (% of 285)
Decorate a Christmas tree	37	23	4	2
Put up a Christmas tree	38	15	2	0
Hang stockings	33	19	1	0
Give gifts	47	65	23	17
Put up other Christmas decorations	30	13	1	2
Sing/play Christmas music and songs	30	26	11	5
Eat/prepare Christmas foods	28	52	16	16
Drink egg nog	16	15	7	5
Watch Christmas movie(s)	29	13	1	0
Tell the Christmas story	6	5	0	0

Table 3. Christmas Behaviors at Various Locations, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

The lack of religious content in the respondents’ celebration of Christmas can also be seen by their low level of attendance of Christmas religious services (18%), which was the same percentage reported last year:

13. Which of the following public Christmas-related activities do you plan on doing? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 285)
Attend Christmas religious services	52	18
Attend a tree-lighting	28	10
Watch a Christmas parade	29	10
Attend a Christmas-themed concert, play or performance	30	11
Go to movie theater to see a Christmas movie	22	8
Bring kids to Santa at the mall	35	12

Table 4. Public Christmas Behaviors, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

This lack of religious Christmas activity jibes with the respondents’ views of the religious nature of their holiday celebrations. Only 6% of respondents participating in Christmas see their Christmas celebrations as religious, compared to 27% of respondents participating in Hanukkah who see their Hanukkah celebrations as religious. Eighty-five percent of those participating in Christmas celebrations see their Christmas celebrations as secular in nature:

6. If you plan to participate in Hanukkah celebrations this year, please rate the religious nature of your celebrations.	Count	% (of 270)	14. If you plan to participate in Christmas celebrations this year, please rate the religious nature of your celebrations.	Count	% (of 244)
5 – deeply religious	5	2	5 – deeply religious	3	1
4 – fairly religious	68	25	4 – fairly religious	12	5
3 – half secular, half religious	132	49	3 – half secular, half religious	21	9
2 – mostly secular	52	19	2 – mostly secular	39	16
1 – entirely secular	13	5	1 – entirely secular	169	69

Table 5. Level of Religiosity of Hanukkah vs. Christmas, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

While some in the Jewish community are concerned about religious syncretism—the blending of two religious traditions—these respondents have little taste for blending the holidays. Sixty-six percent say they will keep the holidays separate and fully 85 % say they will keep the holidays separate or mostly separate:

1. If you plan to participate in both Hanukkah and Christmas celebrations this year, will you blend your holiday celebrations, or kept them separate?	Count	% (of 285)
5 – keep separate	188	66
4 – keep mostly separate	54	19
3 – blend moderately	16	6
2 – blend significantly	3	1
1 – blend completely	2	1
Not applicable	22	8

Table 6. Level of “Blending” of Hanukkah and Christmas, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

The respondents are not particularly concerned that participation in Christmas celebrations affects their children’s Jewish identity. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents who are participating in Christmas celebrations think it will not affect their children’s Jewish identity:

35. If you are participating in Christmas celebrations, do you think that your participation in Christmas celebrations affects your children’s Jewish identity?	Count	% (of 243)
Yes	51	21
No	190	78
Not applicable	2	1

Table 7. Perspective on Whether Participating in Christmas Celebrations Affects Children’s Identity, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Who Are Participating in Christmas Celebrations

Those respondents who are participating in Christmas celebrations explain their participation in Christmas celebrations to their children in a variety of ways. Nearly three-quarters (72%) cite respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish parent’s extended family, 63% cite respect for the non-Jewish parent’s traditions and half (53%) cite open-mindedness/tolerance. Very few (7%) say participating in Christmas celebrations is an opportunity for their children to make up their own mind about what religion to adopt:

37. If you participate in Christmas celebrations, how do you explain or talk about your participation in Christmas celebrations to your children? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 243)
Respect for the non-Jewish parent's traditions	152	63
Desire not to upset the non-Jewish parent	18	7
Respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family	175	72
Desire not to upset the non-Jewish parent's extended family	26	11
Open-mindedness/tolerance	129	53
Desire to expose your children to different faith traditions than your own	81	33
Opportunity for your children to make up their own mind about what religion to adopt	16	7

Table 8. Explaining Participation in Christmas Celebrations to Children, Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Who Are Participating in Christmas Celebrations

These respondents cite a variety of reasons why they are not concerned that celebrating Christmas will affect their children's identity:

Children are not such fragile creatures that they cannot understand that two kinds of religions and celebrations exist simultaneously. Thinking that participation in Christmas celebrations will negatively affect your children's Jewish identity is akin to thinking that hearing another language will hurt their language skills.

Christmas is more of a secular, U.S. cultural observance--and really a time for the family to be together since everything is closed. As a child, my parents (both Jewish) would typically give us some presents (leftover from Hanukkah) so we also had something at the same time as our non-Jewish friends...

Our children attend Jewish day school and we have a Jewish home. Our children know their daddy is not Jewish and that we go to their grandparents house to help them celebrate Christmas but that they do not celebrate the holiday. They know that their Jewish identity is supported by their father for whom it was important that they identify in one religion only. Our house is not religiously ambiguous and the things we tell our children about who they are are unambiguous, for our children the choice was made for them by both their parents before birth, which we believe gives them important parameters/boundaries to their religious identity.

Celebrating xmas w/friends & family strengthens my kids' identities as Jews, as it gives them a place to explain our family decision. They love that they know so much about the Bible (OT, of course) whereas my birth family *never* reads the Bible.

However, a small minority reported concerns over the impact on their child’s identity of participating in Christmas celebrations:

I can't deny that there will be some confusion here, but we are doing our best to separate the holidays and clarify that Christmas is Dad's family's holiday.

Role of the Woman in Heterosexual Couples

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the mother’s religious background has a more significant influence over the children’s religious behavior than the father’s religious background. Although our cohort of respondents only includes those who are raising their children exclusively Jewish, it is still instructive to compare the behaviors of heterosexual couples where the woman is Jewish vs. couples where the man is Jewish.

There are differences in Christmas behaviors. While 90% of the couples where the woman is not Jewish plan on celebrating Christmas, only 83% of the couples where the woman is Jewish plan on celebrating Christmas. The same pattern holds true when looking at celebrating Christmas at the home of relatives; 73% of non-Jewish-woman couples plan on celebrating Christmas at the home of relatives vs. 62% of Jewish-woman couples. Significantly more of the couples with a non-Jewish woman plan on celebrating Christmas at home vs. couples with a Jewish woman (53% to 31%).

Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Jewish			Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Not Jewish		
10. Where will you be participating in Christmas celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 161)	10. Where will you be participating in Christmas celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 103)
Own home	50	31	Own home	55	53
Home of relatives	100	62	Home of relatives	76	73
Home of friends	37	23	Home of friends	20	19
Workplace/off-site work party	44	27	Workplace/off-site work party	34	33
Public activity (such as tree-lighting or going to see a Christmas movie)	32	20	Public activity (such as tree-lighting or going to see a Christmas movie)	13	13

Table 9. Location of Hanukkah Celebrations, Heterosexual Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Where the Woman Is Jewish vs. Where the Woman Is Not Jewish

Further, Christmas behaviors at home are significantly more prevalent among non-Jewish-woman couples. Little more than a quarter of Jewish-woman couples plan on putting up a Christmas tree (27%) while more than half (51%) of non-Jewish-woman couples plan on putting up a Christmas tree. There are significant gaps in the prevalence of putting up Christmas decorations (16% of Jewish-woman couples vs. 47% of non-Jewish-woman couples), singing/playing Christmas music and songs (21% vs. 42%), eating/preparing Christmas foods (17% vs. 42%) and hanging up stockings (25% vs.

43%) as well as a significant gap in gift-giving for Christmas (39% vs. 55%). The only behavior that is equally common among both cohorts is watching Christmas movies (26% vs. 33%).

Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Jewish			Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Not Jewish		
11. Which of the following are you planning to do in your own home? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 161)	11. Which of the following are you planning to do in your own home? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 103)
Decorate a Christmas tree	47	29	Decorate a Christmas tree	48	47
Put up a Christmas tree	44	27	Put up a Christmas tree	53	51
Hang stockings	40	25	Hang stockings	44	43
Give gifts	63	39	Give gifts	57	55
Put up other Christmas decorations	26	16	Put up other Christmas decorations	48	47
Sing/play Christmas music and songs	34	21	Sing/play Christmas music and songs	43	42
Eat/prepare Christmas foods	28	17	Eat/prepare Christmas foods	43	42
Drink egg nog	19	12	Drink egg nog	20	19
Watch Christmas movie(s)	42	26	Watch Christmas movie(s)	34	33
Tell the Christmas story	4	2	Tell the Christmas story	10	10

Table 10. Christmas Behaviors at Home, Heterosexual Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Where the Woman Is Jewish vs. Where the Woman Is Not Jewish

Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Jewish			Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Not Jewish		
13. Which of the following public Christmas-related activities do you plan on doing? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 161)	13. Which of the following public Christmas-related activities do you plan on doing? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 103)
Attend Christmas religious services	18	11	Attend Christmas religious services	30	29
Attend a tree-lighting	16	10	Attend a tree-lighting	11	11
Watch a Christmas parade	15	9	Watch a Christmas parade	12	12
Attend a Christmas-themed concert, play or performance	15	9	Attend a Christmas-themed concert, play or performance	12	12
Go to movie theater to see a Christmas movie	16	10	Go to movie theater to see a Christmas movie	5	5
Bring kids to Santa at the mall	17	11	Bring kids to Santa at the mall	17	17

Table 11. Public Christmas Behaviors, Heterosexual Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Where the Woman Is Jewish vs. Where the Woman Is Not Jewish

There are also significant differences in the two groups' level of participation in Christmas activities at the home of relatives.

Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Jewish			Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Not Jewish		
12. Which of the following are you planning to do in: Home of relatives	Count	% (of 161)	12. Which of the following are you planning to do in: Home of relatives	Count	% (of 103)
Decorate a Christmas tree	29	18	Decorate a Christmas tree	31	30
Put up a Christmas tree	16	10	Put up a Christmas tree	23	22
Hang stockings	19	12	Hang stockings	32	31
Give gifts	100	62	Give gifts	74	72
Put up other Christmas decorations	14	9	Put up other Christmas decorations	20	19
Sing/play Christmas music and songs	32	20	Sing/play Christmas music and songs	37	36
Eat/prepare Christmas foods	73	45	Eat/prepare Christmas foods	65	63
Drink egg nog	19	12	Drink egg nog	20	19
Watch Christmas movie(s)	21	13	Watch Christmas movie(s)	16	16
Tell the Christmas story	3	2	Tell the Christmas story	10	10

Table 12. Christmas Behaviors at Home of Relatives, Heterosexual Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Where the Woman Is Jewish vs. Where the Woman Is Not Jewish

However, the religious activity of telling the Christmas story is highly infrequent in both groups (2% vs. 10%). Further, even among non-Jewish-woman couples, less than a third (29%) attend Christmas religious services. This suggests that even for non-Jewish-woman couples, their Christmas celebrations are not religious in nature.

While there are some significant differences in the Christmas behaviors of the two kinds of couples, the Hanukkah behaviors of the two groups are nearly identical. Nearly all participate in Hanukkah celebrations at home, roughly half participate in Hanukkah celebrations at the home of relatives and about a third participate in Hanukkah celebrations at the home of friends:

Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Jewish			Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Not Jewish		
3. Where will you be participating in Hanukkah celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 161)	3. Where will you be participating in Hanukkah celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 103)
Own home	149	93	Own home	97	94
Home of relatives	78	48	Home of relatives	50	49
Home of friends	53	33	Home of friends	37	36
Workplace/off-site work party	16	10	Workplace/off-site work party	8	8
Public activity (such as menorah-lighting)	59	37	Public activity (such as menorah-lighting)	39	38

Table 13. Location of Hanukkah Celebrations, Heterosexual Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Where the Woman Is Jewish vs. Where the Woman Is Not Jewish

The great majority of both Jewish-woman and non-Jewish-woman couples light menorahs, give gifts, eat/make Hanukkah foods, play dreidel and put up Hanukkah decorations at home:

Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Jewish			Respondents in an Interfaith Couple Where the Woman Is Not Jewish		
4. Which of the following are you planning to do in: own home	Count	% (of 161)	4. Which of the following are you planning to do in: own home	Count	% (of 103)
Light menorah	148	92	Light menorah	98	95
Give gifts	141	88	Give gifts	93	90
Put up Hanukkah decorations	111	69	Put up Hanukkah decorations	71	69
Sing/play Hanukkah music and songs	114	71	Sing/play Hanukkah music and songs	77	75
Eat/make Hanukkah foods	137	85	Eat/make Hanukkah foods	93	90
Watch Hanukkah movie(s)	26	16	Watch Hanukkah movie(s)	26	25
Tell the Hanukkah story	89	55	Tell the Hanukkah story	62	60
Play dreidel	109	68	Play dreidel	76	74

Table 14. Hanukkah Behaviors at Home, Heterosexual Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children Where the Woman Is Jewish vs. Where the Woman Is Not Jewish

Christmas Behaviors of Inmarried Jewish Couples

Probably the most surprising result of the survey was the prevalence of Christmas behaviors among inmarried Jews. Even those not in interfaith relationships participated in Christmas behaviors to a surprisingly high extent. Looking at inmarried Jewish respondents with children (a cohort of 156 respondents), we find that 44% plan to participate in Christmas celebrations this year, which includes workplace parties and public events. Few plan to participate in Christmas celebrations at home, but slightly less than a quarter of these respondents plan on celebrating at the home of relatives (21%) or at workplace/off-site work party (21%). Sixteen percent plan to celebrate at the home of friends:

10. Where will you be participating in Christmas celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 156)
Own home	4	3
Home of relatives	33	21
Home of friends	25	16
Workplace/off-site work party	34	21
Public activity (such as tree lighting or going to see a Christmas movie)	9	6

Table 15. Location of Christmas Celebrations, Inmarried Jewish Families Raising Children

Some of this can be explained by the fact that a third of the inmarried respondents are converts or in a relationship with a convert. Sixty-three percent of conversionary inmarried families with children plan to participate in Christmas celebrations, compared to a third of non-conversionary inmarried families with children. Conversionary families tend to participate in Christmas at the home of relatives (50%). This suggests that conversionary families don't abandon the Christian side of their families, while rarely celebrating Christmas (6%) in their own home. As might be expected, among non-conversionary inmarried families, the Christmas celebrations that do take place happen at the home of friends (18%) and work functions (20%):

Respondents in a Conversionary Inmarried Couple			Respondents in a Non-conversionary Inmarried Couple		
10. Where will you be participating in Christmas celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 54)	10. Where will you be participating in Christmas celebrations? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 102)
Own home	3	6	Own home	1	1
Home of relatives	27	50	Home of relatives	6	6
Home of friends	7	13	Home of friends	18	18
Workplace/off-site work party	14	26	Workplace/off-site work party	20	20
Public activity (such as tree-lighting or going to see a Christmas movie)	3	6	Public activity (such as tree-lighting or going to see a Christmas movie)	6	6

Table 16. Location of Christmas Behaviors, Conversionary Inmarried Families with Children vs. Non-conversionary Inmarried Families with Children

Christmas Movies

Interestingly, regardless of how you slice the population, a significant portion of respondents plan to watch Christmas movies. We asked about six of the most popular Christmas movies: “It’s a Wonderful Life,” “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas,” “A Christmas Story,” “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” “Frosty the Snowman” and “Elf.” Sixty-two percent of intermarried respondents raising Jewish children plan on viewing one of those films, while 38% of inmarried Jewish respondents with children plan on viewing one of the films. About a third of intermarried respondents raising Jewish children plan on watching “It’s a Wonderful Life,” “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas,” “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” or “Frosty the Snowman,” while easily the most popular Christmas film among inmarried respondents with children is “It’s a Wonderful Life” (30%).

Intermarried respondents raising Jewish children			Inmarried respondents raising children		
17. Do you plan to watch any of the following movies this holiday season?	Count	% (of 285)	17. Do you plan to watch any of the following movies this holiday season?	Count	% (of 156)
It's a Wonderful Life	94	33	It's a Wonderful Life	47	30
The Grinch Who Stole Christmas	105	37	The Grinch Who Stole Christmas	15	10
A Christmas Story	62	22	A Christmas Story	13	8
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	99	35	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	14	9
Elf	33	12	Elf	6	4
Frosty the Snowman	87	31	Frosty the Snowman	14	9
None of the above	107	38	None of the above	96	62

Table 17. Plans to Watch Popular Christmas Films, Intermarried Families Raising Jewish Children vs. Inmarried Jewish Families with Children

Conclusions

The great majority of interfaith couples raising their children as Jews plan on participating in celebrations of both Christmas and Hanukkah.

Some observers of intermarriage have cast a skeptical eye on this trend, arguing that interfaith families can't raise their children as Jews and celebrate Christmas, but the results of this survey suggest that they are doing so.

We found that interfaith families raising Jewish children who participate in Christmas celebrations make clear distinctions between the holidays and are giving clear priority to Hanukkah over Christmas, as both a family celebration and a religious holiday. The vast majority celebrate Hanukkah at home, while less than half celebrate Christmas at home. Two-thirds celebrate Christmas at the home of relatives, suggesting that Christmas is largely centered around the extended family rather than the immediate family.

While these families do not observe Hanukkah in a deeply religious way, their participation in Christmas celebrations is almost entirely secular. Very few of these families expect to tell the Christmas story or attend Christmas services at church. More than half tell the Hanukkah story.

The vast majority of these families plan on celebrating Hanukkah by lighting the menorah, giving gifts and eating Hanukkah foods, and most plan on singing or playing Hanukkah music, putting up Hanukkah decorations and playing dreidel. Less than half have Christmas trees at home or even plan to give Christmas gifts at home.

Despite the high level of participation in some kind of Christmas activity, these families feel comfortable that celebrating Christmas won't negatively impact their children's Jewish identity. For most of them, participating in Christmas is simply a matter of respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish family. Very few see participation in Christmas as an opportunity for their children to make up their own mind what religion to adopt. This suggests that these families are serious about their commitment to raise their children in one faith.

These trends are more pronounced in heterosexual interfaith families where the woman is Jewish; in heterosexual interfaith families where the woman is not Jewish, Christmas is more frequently celebrated at home. However, despite the greater frequency of Christmas behaviors among couples where the woman is not Jewish, these families participate in just as many Hanukkah activities as couples where the woman is Jewish—while simultaneously participating in very few religious Christmas activities. This suggests that while the typical non-Jewish woman in an interfaith relationship may be more committed to her religious tradition than the typical non-Jewish man in an interfaith relationship, non-Jewish woman raising Jewish children are still very concerned with exposing their children to Judaism and limiting their exposure to Christianity. Indeed, the non-Jewish-woman couples exhibit slightly greater frequencies of doing almost all Hanukkah activities at home, which may suggest that they work harder at raising Jewish children.

While some observers of intermarriage argue that exposure to Christmas sends a confusing message to children of intermarriage, many inmarried Jews participate in Christmas celebrations, whether it's at the home of non-Jewish relatives, at the home of non-Jewish friends or at workplace Christmas parties. Nearly half of the inmarried Jews with children in our survey say they plan on participating in Christmas celebrations.

This seemingly high level of participation in Christmas activities is largely due to families where one partner is a convert. Nonetheless, a third of non-conversionary inmarried families still participate in Christmas celebrations. Just because a Jewish person is inmarried doesn't mean he or she is insulated from participating in Christmas.

Appendix: Demographic Information

Of the 860 respondents to our survey, 285 said they are in an interfaith relationship and raising their children Jewish and no other religion. The majority (73%) identify themselves as Jewish:

19. What is your religion? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 285)
Jewish	209	73%
Catholic	36	13%
Protestant	27	10%
Other Christian	9	3%
Muslim	0	0%
Hindu	0	0%
Agnostic/Atheist	7	3%
None	5	2%
Other	10	4%

Table 18. Religion of Respondents in Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

Because respondents were able to check multiple religions, some respondents identified themselves as Jewish and something else. Excluding those who identified themselves as Jewish and something else, 69% of the respondents consider themselves exclusively Jewish.

Their partners were a mix of Jewish (35%), Catholic (25%), Protestant (16%) and other religions.

25. What is your spouse's religion? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 285)
Jewish	99	35%
Catholic	71	25%
Protestant	46	16%
Other Christian	25	9%
Muslim	1	0%
Hindu	0	0%
Agnostic/Atheist	28	10%
None	11	4%
Not applicable	0	0%
Other	23	8%

Table 19. Religion of Spouses of Respondents in Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

The great majority of the respondents were female (84%).

18. What is your gender?	Count	% (of 285)
Male	47	17%
Female	238	84%

Table 20. Gender of Respondents in Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

The great majority of respondents in interfaith relationships raising their children Jewish were in heterosexual relationships. Sixteen percent of respondents identified their partner as being of the same gender.

Three-quarters were between the ages of 30 and 49.

31. What is your age?	Count	% (of 285)
Under 20	0	0%
20-29	9	3%
30-39	115	40%
40-49	98	34%
50-59	46	16%
60-69	15	5%
70 and over	2	1%

Table 21. Age of Respondents in Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children

Two-fifths have children 3 or younger. Sixty-three percent have children 8 or younger.

33. What is the age of your children? Please check all that apply.	Count	% (of 285)
0-3	116	41%
4-5	56	20%
6-8	71	25%
9-12	76	27%
13-17	52	18%
18-30	47	17%
30 and over	17	6%

Table 22. Age of Children in Interfaith Families Raising Jewish Children