

What We Learned from the 2013 Passover/Easter Survey

By Edmund Case

Introduction

In February 2013, InterfaithFamily conducted its ninth 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 about interest in trips to Israel for interfaith couples; those responses will be the subject of a future report.

The survey attracted 496 responses – an 11% decrease over 2012. Of those 496 respondents, 327 said they were in interfaith relationships. Of those 327, 213 have children. Of those 213, 146, or 69 percent, were raising their children solely in the Jewish religion. Nationally, according to the last National Jewish Population Study in 2000-2001, 33 to 39 percent of interfaith couples are raising their children solely in the Jewish religion.

This report focuses on the responses of the **146 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, and the figures should not be reported as representative of all interfaith families.

We chose to focus on this population because InterfaithFamily's goals include to promote interfaith couples raising their children Jewish, and to encourage Jewish community policy-makers to facilitate that happening. We therefore want to know more about the dynamics of how interfaith couples raise their children Jewish, especially during potential periods of conflict, such as when Passover and Easter overlap. 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 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."

The Report

All but two of the 146 respondents plan on participating in Passover activities (99%). More than half plan to host a seder (54%) while 97% percent plan to host or attend one. Three quarters plan on telling the Passover story (76%), up from 66% in 2012, and 90% plan on eating matzah, up from 83% in 2012. Sixty percent plan on following the dietary restrictions for most or all of the eight days of Passover. Almost half of the respondents who are not Jewish (46%) 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 (94%), a seder plate (96%), reading from a haggadah (92%) and the hiding of the Afikoman (88%).

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.

Q2. What Passover activities do you plan to participate in this year? Please check all that apply.	% (of 144)
Hosting seder	54%
Attending seder at family's place	48%
Attending seder at friend's place	19%
Attending communal or other public seder	24%
Telling the story of Passover	76%
Eating matzah	90%
Following dietary restrictions for most or all eight days of Passover	60%
Other (please specify)	3%

Table 1. Passover Activities of Respondents

Meanwhile, 51% plan on participating in Easter activities. Relatively few plan on participating in the more "religious" Easter activities like going to church (9%) or telling the Easter story (1%). Forty percent plan on hosting or attending an Easter dinner, up from 31% in 2012, but compared with the 95% 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 146)
Hosting Easter meal	5%
Attending Easter meal at family's place	34%
Attending Easter meal at friends' place	2%
Telling the Easter story	1%
Going to church	9%
Decorating eggs	26%
Participating in an Easter egg hunt	25%
Watching an Easter-themed movie or play	4%
Other (please specify)	3%

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 60% say their celebrations of Easter will be entirely secular (down from 70% in 2012) while only 4% say their celebrations of Passover will be entirely secular. And 37% see their Passover celebrations as deeply religious or religious vs. only 5% who see their Easter celebrations as deeply religious or religious.

Overall, the great majority of respondents say they are very comfortable or comfortable (85%) with participating in Passover celebrations, compared to 45% who say the same about Easter. Meanwhile, there is a far greater level of ambivalence over Easter's arrival, with 34% saying they're uncomfortable or very uncomfortable about participating in Easter celebrations compared to 6% who say the same about Passover. Respondents who are not Jewish are three times more likely (75%) to be comfortable with Passover than Jewish respondents are with Easter (25%).

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. From 2009 to 2012, Easter also fell during Passover, but in 2008 it did not. Comparing all of the 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 vs. 45% in 2011 vs. 46% in 2012 vs. 51% in 2013). This suggests that the confluence of Easter and Passover is not causing our respondents to forgo Easter. And with the almost 100% participation rate in Passover, they are not bypassing Passover either.

Of those celebrating both holidays, a little more than half (55%) say the confluence of the holidays will not change their celebrations. Those that are changing their celebrations are adapting, with 37% saying they will not eat prohibited foods at the Easter meal and 11% saying they will eat prohibited foods at the Easter meal but not for the rest of Passover.

This year, Jewish respondents were twice as likely to avoid prohibited foods at the Easter meal (44%) than non-Jewish respondents (23%), and also more likely to plan on following dietary restrictions for most of Passover (67% vs. 46% for non-Jewish respondents). This is a change from 2012, when Jewish respondents were only somewhat more likely to avoid prohibited foods at the Easter meal (44%) than non-Jewish respondents (32%), and only equally likely to plan on following dietary restrictions for most of Passover (56% vs. 54% 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 74)
This will not affect my celebrations.	55%
I will attend an Easter meal but not eat food prohibited on Passover (such as bread).	37%
I will what is served at the Easter meal but follow the dietary restrictions for the rest of Passover.	11%
Because Easter falls during Passover, I will not attend an Easter meal.	1%
I will host or attend an Easter meal before or after Passover.	3%

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

Eighty-six percent 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 parents' traditions (62%), respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family (72%) or open-mindedness/tolerance (58%). Few explained their participation in Easter celebrations as a way not to upset the non-Jewish parent (8%) or his or her extended family (16%), and few told their children participating in Easter was an opportunity for them to decide what religion to adopt (9%). More than a third (35%) 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.

Q37. How do you explain or talk about your participation in Easter celebrations to your children?	% (of 98)
Respect for the non-Jewish parent's traditions	62%
Desire not to upset the non-Jewish parent	8%
Respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family	72%
Desire not to upset the non-Jewish parent's extended family	16%
Open-mindedness/tolerance	58%
Desire to expose your children to different faith traditions than your own	35%
Opportunity for your children to make up their own mind about what religion to adopt	9%
Other	11%

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



Demographic Portrait of Our Respondents

Of the 496 people who responded to our Passover-Easter Survey, 146 said they were intermarried or in interfaith relationships, had children and had raised or were raising their children exclusively Jewish. Of those 146 respondents, the great majority (70%) are Jewish:

Q21. What is your religion? Please check all that apply.	% (of 146)
Jewish	70%
Catholic	10%
Protestant	6%
Muslim	0%
Other Christian	3%
Hindu	0%
Agnostic/Atheist	5%
None	4%
Other	8%

Table 5. Religion of Respondents

Their partners were a mix of Jewish (36%), Catholic (22%), Protestant (13%) 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.

Q27. What is your spouse or partner's religion? Please check all that apply.	% (of 146)
Jewish	36%
Catholic	22%
Protestant	13%
Other Christian	7%
Muslim	0%
Hindu	0%
Agnostic/Atheist	12%
None	8%
Not applicable	0%
Other	11%

Table 6. Religion of Respondents' Spouses

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

Q20. What is your gender?	% (of 146)
Female	84%
Male	16%

Table 7. Gender of Respondents



Just over two-thirds (68%) were between the ages of 30 and 49.

Q30. What is your age?	% (of 146)
Under 20	0%
20-29	4%
30-39	34%
40-49	34%
50-59	19%
60-69	7%
70 and over	2%

Table 8. Age of Respondents

Thirty-five percent have children 3 or younger. Eighty-two percent have children 8 or younger.

Q33. What is the age of your children? Please check all that apply.	% (of 146)
0-3	35%
4-5	22%
6-8	25%
9-12	29%
13-17	16%
18-30	17%
30 and over	8%

Table 9. Age of Respondents' Children

Conclusions

Consistent with our past surveys, intermarried people who have decided to raise their children Jewish continue to promote Jewish activities around Passover and to de-emphasize religious aspects of Easter if they participate in Easter celebrations at all. The great majority are participating in numerous Passover activities: virtually all plan on hosting or attending a seder, 76% plan on telling the Passover story (up from 66% in 2012), and 60% plan on following dietary restrictions for most or all of the eight days of Passover.

Conversely, they continue to participate in fewer Easter activities, although somewhat more than last year. Almost half (49%) are not participating in Easter celebrations at all, but 40% plan on hosting or attending an Easter dinner, up from 31% last year. Only small to very small minorities plan to engage in "religious" Easter activities like attending religious services (9%) – which may in fact not be a religious experience for the participants – or telling the Easter story (1%).

Despite Easter falling during Passover this year, the percentage who plan to participate in Easter celebrations in some way – 51% – is not far from the 45% that said they would do so in 2008, when the holidays did not overlap.

This population describes Passover as far more religious than Easter – 60% see their Easter celebrations as entirely secular (down from 70% in 2012), compared to 4% who see Passover as entirely secular.

This year we observed somewhat more comfort with participating in Easter celebrations, reversing a previous trend, but still far more comfort participating in Passover:

- The percentage of respondents who reported being comfortable with participating in Easter celebrations was 45%; that percentage had declined from 47% in 2010 to 40% in 2011 to 32% in 2012. Among Jewish respondents, the



percentage who reported being comfortable with participating in Easter – 25% – also reversed a declining trend from 30% in 2011 to 14% in 2012.

- In contrast, the great majority (85%) of respondents are comfortable celebrating Passover; only 6% are uncomfortable doing so. The percentage of respondents who are not Jewish who reported being comfortable with participating in Passover stayed level at 75% – it had been 67% in 2011 and 78% in 2012.

This year we also observed some decline in following the dietary restrictions of Passover:

- The percentage of respondents who said they would not eat foods prohibited during Passover, even during the Easter meal, was 37% – down from 41% in 2012.
- Among respondents who are not Jewish, the percentage who said they would not eat prohibited foods even during the Easter meal was 23%, down from 32% in 2012, and the percentage who plan on following the dietary restrictions for most or all eight days of Passover decreased to 46% from 54% in 2012.

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 86% believe that their participation in Easter celebrations does not affect their children's Jewish identity, a level consistent with past years.