

Article

Christmas in the Room: Gender, Conflict, and Compromise in Multi-Religious Domestic Space

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Received: 5 May 2020; Accepted: 3 June 2020; Published: 9 June 2020



Abstract: Interfaith relationships offer particular potential for creating religious coexistence; they also play out very differently in domestic space than in public and civic spaces, with the result that interfaith marriage becomes an important, yet unique, site of religious cooperation, co-existence, and conflict. The article argues that examinations of interfaith families must take three factors into account, each of which involves careful attention to the particular power dynamics of the family in question. First, scholars must think about the broader context in which the interfaith family has come to exist. Second, scholars must consider that the emotional and power dynamics of domestic space often have little in common with the compromises and power dynamics of public space. Lastly, while gender is not generally a key category of analysis for thinking about interfaith encounters in public space, gender, both as it shapes power dynamics and as it drives assumptions about childrearing and domestic labor, shapes interfaith family life and requires attendant scholarly attention.

Keywords: interfaith families; public; Christian; Jewish; gender; United States

Every year, the United States fights the Christmas Wars.¹ The Christmas wars are battles over whether religious displays belong in public, civic spaces. Can you put a creche up in the town square? If so, must you put a menorah up in the town hall? These debates extend to cover questions about what counts as religion: is the evergreen tree that grows in the town square year round a religious symbol when you decorate it with lights? Why is that tree, which has nothing to do with the baby Jesus, a religious symbol? Why is that the case, when the deciduous trees are simply lit up against the winter darkness (moreover, is it possible that you carefully planted that evergreen tree to stand, alone and proud, so that you *would* have a Christmas tree in the town square? Did you do it so that you would not have to have a conversation about buying and putting up a cut tree?) Can one argue for Christmas as a secular holiday? These debates spring up in towns and cities all over the United States whenever they plan their winter lights and sometimes again in November, when the decorations go up. These problems are resolved in a broad range of ways: Cambridge, Massachusetts, hangs aggressively secular lights across the road in their squares, with dancing figures and stars, leaving them up long beyond the Christmas season. In New York City, the famous tree in Rockefeller Center is on private property, as are the famous decorations in Saks 5th Avenue. In the town next to my hometown, they realized with relief that all along, they had been decorating a tree that actually belonged to the white clapboard Congregational Church on the town green, while in my hometown a menorah stands tall, next to the tree. These debates represent the intense public work of Christmas, the dominant holiday

¹ Though I first encountered this question as an American citizen, I first encountered the term “Christmas War” in the writings of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, specifically “The Christmas Wars: Religion in the American Public Square”, (Pew Research Center 2006a), <https://www.pewforum.org/2006/12/12/the-christmas-wars-religion-in-the-american-public-square/> and “The ‘Christmas Wars’: Holiday Displays and the Federal Courts”, (Pew Research Center 2006b), <https://www.pewforum.org/2006/12/12/the-christmas-wars-holiday-displays-and-the-federal-courts/>.

of the dominant religion in the United States.² All of these solutions rest on heated debates that extend, in various forms, to how religion might show up in the public square all year—at civic ceremonies like parades or at the graduations of private, and sometimes religiously affiliated, universities that none the less have religiously pluralistic faculties and student bodies. Scholars of American religion have thought extensively and productively about what it means to navigate the territory of interfaith interactions in the public spaces of a religiously diverse society.

In the United States, there is, however, another side to interfaith interactions and another realm in which people of different religious beliefs and heritages exist side by side, in both conflict and coexistence: the home. People of differing religions eat dinner and breakfast across the table from each other. They sleep in the same beds. They have to decide, together, which holidays to celebrate and how to decorate for them. They chose where and how to marry, what religious ceremonies to use to welcome children, and how or whether to religiously educate those children. Christmas is, as it turns out, a real flash point of debate for some of them. They are interfaith families, and the patterns that govern interfaith family life—the compromises that work, the places that cause pain, and the power dynamics—are very different from those that structure public life in multi-religious societies. This article probes and exposes those differences, using the example of Christian–Jewish interfaith families in the contemporary United States to think about how scholars might approach the study of multi-religious domestic space when such space comes about as the result of an interfaith marriage.

What can the study of Christian–Jewish interfaith families in the United States from the 1960s to the present tell us about interfaith families in and of other contexts? What can my approach to studying interfaith families suggest about how someone else might study interfaith families in Canada, India, Finland, or Korea? Interfaith marriage is a key site of conflict and co-existence in the contemporary United States, where approximately fifty percent of marriages occur across religious lines. That figure represents marriages across major world traditions, which researchers such as the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life have defined as Catholicism, Mainline Protestantism, Evangelical Protestantism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and no religion (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2009; Pew Research Center 2016, pp. 33–47; The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008; Pew Research Center 2015, pp. 35–47; Putnam and Campbell 2012, pp. 526–27). Interfaith marriage poses the potential for conflict on multiple fronts. First, religious communities sometimes come into conflict with each other about how to handle the “problem” of their members marrying each other. Differences around how to handle interfaith marriage can cause tension and disrupt other forms of ecumenical cooperation. Interfaith couples, meanwhile, face judgement from their respective religious traditions. Within their extended families, they have to contend with the hopes, dreams, judgements and interference of family members for how they will organize their home, and specifically, raise their children. Lastly, the couple themselves almost always needs to determine how they will navigate their own traditions—a process that is sometimes seamless, but can often result in conflict with each other and/or with those who disapprove of the choices that the couple makes.

Interfaith families are also a prominent site and source of coexistence. Interfaith couples often have long and happy marriages. Children raised in interfaith homes often end up with skill sets associated with “third-culture kids”, which is to say that they have broader worldviews and are more culturally aware than people raised in single traditions. Finally, as political scientists Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell write, interfaith families tend to produce what they refer to as the “Aunt Susan effect.” Simply put, the Aunt Susan effect says that, because of interfaith marriage, most Americans have a relative from a different religious background than their own. As a result, even if someone was raised to view other traditions as strange, foreign, misguided, or damned, once they get to know Aunt Susan, and to discover that she is kind, compassionate, and ethical, they cannot imagine that

² For excellent work on the role of Christmas as a public celebration in multicultural societies, including but not limited to the United States, see the essays in *The Public Work of Christmas* edited by Pamela Klassen and Monique Scheer (Klassen and Scheer 2019).

she is, in fact, sinful and damned because she comes from another tradition. As a result, people who have, for instance, an uncle in an interfaith marriage with an “Aunt Susan” become more tolerant of other religions, or even move beyond tolerance to the appreciation of other religious traditions (Putnam and Campbell 2012, p. 536).

Interfaith relationships offer particular potential for creating religious coexistence; they also play out very differently in domestic space than in public and civic spaces, with the result that interfaith marriage becomes an important, yet unique, site of religious cooperation, co-existence and conflict. My work investigated Christian–Jewish interfaith family life in the United States over the 50 year period from approximately 1965 to 2015. In my own work, I focused on relatively liberal Christians (cultural Christians, members of the Protestant mainline, and more liberal or lapsed Catholics and secular or religiously non-Orthodox Jews) because I was particularly interested in people who did not expect to experience religious conflict in their relationships when they began dating—these are people who, by and large, do not believe in exclusive truth claims and in this sense, they represent both the majority of interfaith marriages in the United States and the increasingly non-affiliated population. I am a historian and an ethnographer—someone who is bound to the specifics of my example. Although I do not believe in “American exceptionalism”, I do believe that context is central to analysis. My examples are drawn from the context of the contemporary United States, with the goal of helping scholars think about interfaith marriage other than the Jewish–Christian combination and in contexts beyond the United States. Specifically, I am going to argue that examinations of interfaith families must take three factors into account, each of which involves careful attention to the particular power dynamics of the family in question. First, scholars must think about the broader context in which the interfaith family has come to exist. Second, scholars must consider that the emotional and power dynamics of domestic space, the balance of power in a marriage for instance, often have little in common with the compromises and power dynamics of public space, for instance, which religion structures the society. Lastly, while gender is not generally a key category of analysis for thinking about interfaith encounters in public space, gender, both as it shapes power dynamics and as it drives assumptions about childrearing and domestic labor, shapes heterosexual interfaith family life and requires attendant scholarly attention.³

1. The Cultural Context of Compromise

As with any interfaith exchange, the historical context in which the interfaith family sits matters, as does the historical relationship between the two religions. So, for instance, there are several reasons why the Christmas debate is such an issue for Christian–Jewish interfaith families, rooted in the historical relationship between the two traditions and in the contemporary context in which they find themselves. First, for much of modern history, many Jews (and certainly the ancestors of the majority of Jews living in the United States) have been a minority in Christian countries, where they have also experienced anti-Semitism directly tied to Christian theology and the Christian calendar (think, for instance, of the pogroms and other anti-Semitic violence happening during Holy Week because, at the time, many people believed, erroneously, that the Jews killed Christ, a belief that was supported by much Christian teaching at the time (Tapper 2016, pp. 177–78; Scheindlin 2000, pp. 98, 103–5, 139)). Second, Jews

³ Because my monograph was largely a cultural history of debates about interfaith family life, and how couples engaged with the resulting rhetoric, and because, historically, those debates assumed heterosexual families (gay marriage was not dominant part of the political landscape for much of the time that I studied), *Beyond Chrismukkah* focuses on heterosexual couples and the families that they create. Before I realized that I would shape the project in that way, I also interviewed a number of same-sex couples about their child rearing practices, but did not end up with a large enough sample before I realized that my focus on representation was going to mean a project about opposite-sex couples. Here, I am focusing on heterosexual couples in part because I am particularly interested in parsing the implications of considering interfaith marriage in conditions of patriarchy. For more on the intertwined histories of Jewish responses to interfaith family life and LGBTQIA rights generally and the marriage equality movement more specifically, see Samira Mehta and Brett Krutzsch. “The Changing Jewish Family: Jewish Communal Responses to Interfaith and Same-Sex Marriage” (currently under review but available by direct request to the authors.)

have long feared and policed assimilation, with the fear that, in order to escape anti-Semitism, because of internalized anti-Semitism, or simply because being a minority is hard and Christmas is fun, that Jews will start celebrating Christmas. In this fear, Christmas is the gateway drug to assimilation—the fun thing that will attract Jews to become Christian, a category that from the perspective of many Jewish leaders in this conversation, includes both professing Christians and a secular identity that is inflected with Christian culture and symbols more than with Jewish ones. In this fear, nothing in Judaism can compete with the fun of Christmas, and so if an interfaith family celebrates Christmas, the children from that family will end up Christian, rather than Jewish, in adulthood.⁴

The decision then, of a Christian–Jewish interfaith couple in the United States to celebrate Christmas, is set against a background of Christian supremacy, whose costs range from assimilation to genocide and is therefore more charged, in the Jewish community, than the decision of a Jewish–Hindu couple in the US to celebrate Diwali. Hinduism, its holidays and its trappings, are not the religious culture that has, historically, persecuted most Jews. Nor are most Jewish leaders worried that the pressures of assimilation will result in Jews ceasing to be Jewish in favor of becoming either Hindu or Buddhist. In addition, in the US, these religions are not the dominant culture to which Jews might assimilate, and many Western Jews are comfortable with adopting and exoticizing Hinduism and Buddhism, such that they are seen as identities that can co-exist with a Jewish identity in a family or even within an individual. The American Jewish encounter and interest in these traditions is long-standing, as scholars such as Emily Sigalow have documented, and structured by a radically different power dynamic than the Jewish–Christian relationship.⁵ In addition, some Jewish practitioners of meditation and yoga have turned them into “Jewish” practices.⁶ As a result, a yoga practice does not seem incompatible with Jewish identity, even if it includes practices that are arguably rooted in Hindu devotional practice, such as chanting in Sanskrit, even while a Christmas tree, which is less clearly tied to Christian theology, may feel threatening.

This backdrop makes it broadly more acceptable for a Hindu–Jewish interfaith couple to combine traditions than Jewish–Christian couples. Because of meditation and yoga practices, some Buddhist and Hindu symbols are present in non-interfaith Jewish homes. As my interviews with Hindu–Jewish families and Christian–Jewish families revealed, visitors to a home are likely to accept statues of gods or bodhisattvas as “art” rather than as devotional objects in ways that statues of Christian saints are not. While Christmas may be seen as an assimilationist threat, and Easter is haunted by its anti-Semitic heritage, Diwali is more likely to be treated as an interesting cultural experience, particularly if the family shows no literal belief in the deities. Even if a Hindu–Jewish couple were actually including robust Hindu education in their interfaith mix, their community would be less likely to criticize their choices than they would their Christian–Jewish counterparts. The co-existence that is possible for Jewish–Hindu or Jewish–Buddhist couples is the result of this specific power imbalance.

Significantly, context is important in thinking about the extent to which assimilation is a concern, specifically the context of the power dynamic that the traditions in play have historically had with regard to each other and that they have regarding the culture in which the family is situated. As Shreena Gandhi’s current research demonstrates, Indian Hindu immigrants to the United States have actually adopted Christmas as an American Hindu holiday. Hindus do not tend to have time off for Hindu holidays in the US and therefore have taken to using Christmas and New Year’s Day as gathering times for family, often with many of the trappings of American Christmas—namely gifts, a tree, and dinners. They adapt the holiday and its celebration, for sure, but even though Indian Hindus

⁴ For a robust description of the secular in the United States as Protestant, see (Fessenden 2013). For a historiography of how scholars of American religion have understood the idea of the secular in the United States as inherently Protestant (and for some critiques of that idea), see (McCrary and Wheatley 2017).

⁵ For more on the history of the relationship between Jews and Buddhists in the United States, see (Sigalow 2019).

⁶ For evidence of Jews who have framed yoga and meditation as Jewish practices see (Bloomfield 2004; Copeland 2020; Krucoff and Levine 2011; Brotman and Morinis 2014; Kaplan 1995; Roth 2009). For scholarly work on the incorporation of yoga into Christian communities and the power dynamics underpinning those moves, see (Jain 2017).

have their own history of interactions with Christmas, through British colonialism, that history does not seem to deter many from adopting the holiday in the US context. The historical relationship between the two traditions, and also the contemporary relationship between the two traditions, in any given geographical setting, shape the community responses that an interfaith couple or family will experience, whether tending toward conflict or accepting coexistence.

2. Home and the Concept of Religious Compromise

As we have established, the broader context in which these interfaith interactions come to exist is very important, but there are two major factors that separate the example of interfaith families from other forms of interfaith interaction. The first is that most of the decisions and compromises of interfaith family life happen in private space and in emotionally close relationships, rather than in a public or civic space. In the United States, scholars, activists, and religious leaders talk quite a bit about both religious pluralism and religious diversity; and it is important, when thinking about interfaith work and interfaith families, to remember that these terms are not synonymous (McCarthy 2007; Patel 2010, 2012; Miller 2013; Rose 2001). Religious diversity is a fact—a place is religiously diverse if there are people from many religious backgrounds there. The presence of multiple ethnic groups creates an ethnically diverse space. These terms do not, in the end, say anything about how those people do or do not get along with each other.

Pluralism indicates an attempt to work together with each other—to find common ground. As Kate McCarthy points out, however, in *Interfaith Encounters in America*, there are ground rules for how pluralism works. The ground rules are set by the dominant culture in any given context, so in the United States, the ground rules are basically Protestant (McCarthy 2007, pp. 1–14). Here, however, is how we do pluralism in the US: we all agree to be the lowest common denominator of our religious traditions in public, essentially as a way of co-existing, of minimizing conflict through compromise, but as in any power dynamic, the groups with less power compromise more. If we have an interfaith service, then, the format is essentially that of a Protestant Christian worship service, and the more unusual parts of other religions—the places where they bump into each other—are left out. If a reading from the Vedas fit nicely into a space that would normally be filled by a biblical reading, that is acceptable. Generally, devotional chanting is not. Similarly, the universal qualities of religions are emphasized and not their points of conflict—this is not a place where people generally talk about salvation only through Christ, or the chosen-ness of the Jewish people. Jews rarely arrive with a Torah scroll that they then forbid non-Jews to touch. Christians often decide that the interfaith setting is not a place to serve communion (particularly not with a closed communion table). Muslims and Orthodox Jews do not insist that the prayer space be segregated by sex—they simply adapt their participation to things that can be done in mixed-gender spaces. Interfaith breakfasts tend to avoid pork, so that the Muslims and Jews can be comfortable, or maybe avoid meat altogether, if they include a wider range of religions including Hindus and Buddhists. Mormons in interfaith settings usually do not object to the presence of coffee, but do not partake.

Concessions are made so that everyone can share space, and the assumption is that, when people go home, they can experience the full range of their own religion—no one is giving anything up by not eating bacon at the prayer breakfast, because they can have bacon in their homes. In non-interfaith worship settings, such as a synagogue or church on a normal Saturday or Sunday morning, Jews can call themselves the chosen people and Christians can read John 14:6 without causing offense.⁷ Hindus can chant and provide offerings of food to statues, without worrying about how Christians, Muslims, and Jews might feel about “idolatry.” In interfaith marriage, however, one is navigating the needs of different identities in one’s presumed homogenous religious space, and potentially taking one’s spouse

⁷ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” as translated in the (Coogan et al. 2018)

into one's worship space, where they will hear language of religious particularity with outsider ears, or, if the worship is taking place in a religious language that they do not know, such as Hebrew or Sanskrit, they may not understand some of those comments, but would be excluded by simply not having those linguistic skills, and not realizing that neither do many of the other participants.

Sometimes these are problematic and uncomfortable combinations, and sometimes they simply require negotiation. However, if one wants a kosher kitchen, one has to impose a kosher kitchen on the entire family. The rules of keeping kosher are such that a Christian spouse cannot make bacon and eggs for breakfast or a cheeseburger for dinner in the family kitchen while the Jewish partner keeps kosher, according to the stricter definitions of keeping kosher. This is something that might be parallel with the experiences of a Hindu vegetarian sharing a kitchen with someone who is not vegetarian—many Hindus do not want to eat food cooked in pans that have ever cooked meat, no matter how carefully those pans have been cleaned. There are ways around this. One couple that I interviewed during my fieldwork consisted of a Jewish woman from New York and a Protestant man from Texas. While he generally lived a pork-free existence in their home, on his birthday, she would drive to a local breakfast joint and bring home bacon that he could eat on the back porch. In addition, as with many other Jewish households, many of the interfaith couples I spoke with made distinctions between the food that they ate in the house, which followed some dietary restrictions, and what they got at restaurants, which could be anything. These were, of course, compromises, but they were also very clear exceptions to the general household rule. The food that was cooked in these houses did not include pork, shellfish or the mixing of milk and meat. Though exceptions were made for food consumed outside, the non-Jewish spouse could not, for instance, keep the ingredients for a ham sandwich in the house.

In other interfaith families, particularly interfaith families where the Christian parent came from an ethnic or racial minority, the couple agreed to raise the children Jewish, but decided explicitly not to keep kosher, because to do so would dishonor the food traditions of the Christian parent. This, for instance, was the case for two Ashkenazi women with whom I spoke, one of whom is married to an African-American man who was raised on a hog farm in the southern United States, and the other is married to a Puerto Rican man who wanted to make sure his children were steeped in Latin food traditions. For many, then, to keep kosher or not to keep kosher is a binary proposition, largely for logistical reasons. In addition, religious strictures aside, many families feel that an important aspect of family togetherness is that everyone eats the same food together, and that separate meals undermine the family table as a place of community. In these cases, everyone must follow the rules of one tradition over another.

Christmas provides another example of how public and private sometimes play out differently for interfaith families. One of the standard understandings of American pluralism is that one might share in the celebrations of one's friends, and even one's extended family, as long as one does so in the other family's space. In the case of the Christian–Jewish interfaith family, this approach was actively encouraged by the Reform movement of Judaism, which set up an outreach branch specifically to interact with interfaith couples. Not only was this the approach recommended by clergy, but it was enshrined in the prescriptive literature that the movement published. For instance, *If I Am Jewish and You Are Christian, Then What Are the Kids: A Parenting Guide for Interfaith Families* by Andrea King was published by the Union for Reform Judaism, first in 1993, but reprinted as recently as 2015. In that book, the Episcopalian author, who married a Jew and agreed to raise Jewish children, uses composite characters to espouse this point of view. She has the son of a family whose choices match her own reflect, "I like Christmas at Grandma and Grandpa's house . . . They have a Christmas tree, and we get presents, and Mom takes presents for everyone, even though it is not our holiday. Mom said it's like when we went to my friend Tai Wong's house for Chinese New Year. We can go to his house and help him celebrate his holiday, even if it is not ours." (King 1993, pp. 43–44). The goal, here, was to allow interfaith couples to experience the holidays, while maintaining Jewish homes utterly unmarked by Christian celebrations.

It turns out that “celebrating in other people’s houses” can be tricky for interfaith families, which is to say that the topic became a site of conflict, either between couples or between couples and their Jewish religious communities. For many people from Christian backgrounds, even if they are not believing or practicing Christians, it was sometimes very difficult to keep Christmas (the decorations, the music, the food) entirely out of their homes. Meanwhile, for many Jews, Christmas is the time when it seems as if the entire United States has teamed up to tell them that they are not “real Americans”, because of the Christmas music and decorations, and even theoretically neutral civic space like public libraries. For people who feel this way, it is important to have their homes be Christmas-free sanctuaries, where they can escape feeling like cultural outsiders. Moreover, having a home free from Christmas accoutrements can signal to other Jews that this is a Jewish home—having a Jewish home decorated for Christmas can signal to other Jews that one is assimilating to the mainstream American culture in ways that have historically been seen as problematic by Jewish communal professionals and, potentially, by other lay members of the community. This public and private divide can cause problems for interfaith families—for the Christian, the public celebration of Christmas is often not enough, whereas for the Jewish partner, bringing the tree and other symbols of the season into the private home is deeply fraught.

Different families come up with different compromises. Some families simply do not celebrate Christmas at home at all, following the Reform movement’s suggestions that they celebrate only in the homes of relatives. Many others find other compromises. Perhaps most interestingly, one couple whom I interviewed talked about carefully prioritizing what mattered to them in working out their compromises. The Jewish husband explained that he had what he described as an “allergy” to both Jesus and Christmas trees and did not really want either of them in his home. The Mormon wife thought about it and realized that while she felt that Jesus was essential to her understanding of the holiday, she did not feel that she needed the tree. They agreed that he would work on his “Jesus allergy”, so that she could have a nativity scene, but that she would give up the tree. Another couple made almost the exact opposite choice. In that family, the husband came from a Christian background and really wanted the festivities of the season, but no longer believed in the Christmas story, *per se*. They had a tree, and presents, but did not emphasize the theological elements of Christmas. A third household, committed to Judaism, but with a husband who had been raised Catholic, chose to celebrate Christmas in the years that the husband’s children from his first marriage joined them. The Jewish wife and stepmother simply felt that it was more important that her stepchildren be able to maintain their traditions than that her home be free from Christmas. Lastly, many people simply do both—which may mean celebrating Christmas and Hanukkah, or it may mean celebrating Christmas in December, and the Jewish holidays when they appear on the calendar. Many couples, of course, take joy in the celebration of each other’s holidays, but when they do not, conflict is possible. The domestic space is, for most people, a refuge, and so it can seem hard for the Jew who feels like a minority at Christmas to take the holiday into the home; but as Christmas is also a deeply domestic holiday, many find themselves depressed if it is excluded from the home. As a result, the compromises that work in public do not always work in private (or they work for some people and not for others), but thinking about the distinctions of public and private are of central importance in thinking about the interfaith family.

3. Gender, Labor, and Compromise in Domestic Space

The relative power of the two traditions is a cultural factor in how interfaith families shape their choices and in how their choices are perceived by their communities. In the context of the family and the household, it is often not the most important factor, which is one of the most significant differences between interfaith dynamics in public space as compared with in domestic space. Gender constitutes a final crucial lens for understanding interfaith families and the power dynamics that shape what household coexistence might look like and who must make the concessions in reaching compromise. Rather than focusing on how the genders of the parents formally determine the religion of the child—Judaism is, traditionally, matrilineal whereas Hinduism and Islam are patrilineal, in interfaith

families, the role of gender in household dynamics often determines much of the distribution of power and labor in heterosexual families (gendered assumptions and roles are still factors in families headed by same-sex couples).⁸ The role that gender plays differs from family to family and does not always result in the interfaith family configurations that one might most immediately expect, but it is always part of the dynamic in heterosexual interfaith families.

Particularly before the 1980s, religious leaders worried that women (be they Jewish or Christian) would cede to their husbands demands and would raise children in the husband's religion, because of the nature of patriarchy. They worried that husbands would actively forbid their wives from maintaining the religious practices of traditions that the husbands did not share (Mehta 2018, see particularly Chapter 1). For instance, pre-Vatican II, priests worried that Protestant or Jewish husbands of Catholic women would forbid their wives from cooking fish on Friday, instead demanding pot roast. Conversely, they also recognized that much of religious life and practice occurs in the home, and that women do most of the labor in the home. If a husband did not compel his wife to practice his religion, would she do so? Could Protestant or Jewish wives be counted on to put fish on the Friday night dinner table for their Catholic husbands and children? Would Catholic or Protestant women pull out all of the stops when it was time to cook *Shabbos* dinner or make a Passover *seder*?⁹ How would they know how to do those things? Would she drive the children to Hebrew School? To CCD?¹⁰ In addition, and more to the point, if she only did so because her husband forced her to do so, would she do the work grudgingly, such that her children learned to resent the religion, rather than to love it? What actually happened varied, from family to family, depending on levels of commitment, and the dynamic between the couple, but as Jennifer Thompson's work has shown, not only were many Christian or post-Christian women willing to raise Jewish children, they often increased the family's Jewish involvement (Thompson 2014). Gender, then, shaped the concerns that religious leaders and others brought to interfaith families, whether or not those concerns were born out in practice.

Gender also shaped the attitudes of the couples themselves, and the ways in which they made decisions about their own families' practices. In my research, many women, in particular, baby boomer women, articulated that they wanted to raise their children with religion and wanted their husbands to be involved in that process. These (usually Christian) women often assumed that the only way that they could get their (usually Jewish) husbands to help was if they chose to raise their children as Jews, i.e., in the husband's tradition. That attitude persisted into Generation X's marriages, with Christian women assuming that they would get more equal parenting from their Jewish husbands if they raised the children as Jews. Jewish women, however, did assume that their Christian husbands would participate in the raising of Jewish children, though not that they would fully share responsibility for religious upbringing.

Men in interfaith marriages had a different perspective on the gender dynamics of their interfaith marriages. I spoke with a number of couples who all participated in a trip to Israel, designed for interfaith couples, explicitly to encourage them in making Jewish choices for their families. On this trip, sometimes everyone was together, but they also did break-out groups, both by religion and by gender—sometimes all of the women were together and all of the men were together, such that the groups were religiously mixed. Other times, all of the Christians were together and all of the Jews were together, and the groups were mixed gender, considering that each couple of the group was an interfaith couple committed to living a Jewish life together. In my interviews, both the Jewish women and the Christian men reported that the Jewish men expressed skepticism about their wives'

⁸ While this work on gender is reflected in my work, the most explicit work on gender in interfaith families can be found in (Thompson 2014; K. R. McGinity 2014; K. McGinity 2009).

⁹ Shabbos is the Jewish Sabbath, which runs for 25 h from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. Seder translates as "order" and is the structured meal and ritual that occurs on the first night of Passover in Israel and the first two nights of Passover in the diaspora.

¹⁰ CCD stands for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and it is a religious education association established in Rome in 1562. In the United States, public school children attend CCD on weekday afternoons, such that it requires extra transportation.

commitment and motivation for agreeing to raise Jewish children. Why, these men wondered, had their wives agreed to raise Jewish children and could they trust them to do it well, honestly, and to not in the end try to undermine the Jewish identity of the children? Certainly, there are factors here that move beyond gender: Jews are a marginalized religious group in the United States, and many Jewish communities are strongly marked by histories of religious marginalization in Europe and other places, prior to their migration to the United States. That marginalization remains central to many Jewish identities and, combined with the fact that Jews do not proselytize, means that some Jews find it surprising, if not incomprehensible, that someone who was not raised Jewish would be interested in and committed to Judaism. The skepticism that the husbands expressed then, is not inherently surprising, but my informants unilaterally noted that the Jewish women did not express concern about their Christian husbands' motivations in agreeing to raise Jewish children. It seems very likely that these questions about motivation reflected assumptions about who would, and should, shoulder the work of religious transmission: if women were understood to do more of the work, or at least to be primarily responsible for ensuring that the work was done, men were more likely to question why and whether their wives were willing to shoulder the burden of such work outside their own tradition.

Lastly, I would note that that I interviewed couples who committed to raising their children in a third religion or in both of the parental religions. Each of these couples claimed that their choices were rooted in feminism—that they had seen too many women forced into raising their child in their husband's traditions at the expense of their own, and too many women were doing all of the work of religious education for the family. These families who committed to a third path—be it an entirely new tradition or a tradition of doing both—did so in the name of theoretical gender equality. That equality did not always play out as intended, but the desire for gender equity was foundational to the decision.

In practice, as with all other interfaith family arrangements, the families that I interviewed created a range of family practices and had different motivations and definitions of gender equality. For instance, in one family, where the mother herself was the child of interfaith marriage, she had watched her mother give up Christianity and do all of the work involved in raising Jewish children, so equality meant not privileging one parent's religion over the other. Because her husband was the primary breadwinner and she was primarily in charge of the children and the household, she did the majority of the work in maintaining both religious traditions—she did the cooking, the decorating, and much of the volunteering in the couple's interfaith community, though she did so with the participation and support of her husband. In their marriage, however, what was primarily important was that they do both, not how the work of doing both was divided. In another couple whom I interviewed, in which the couple had very similar careers, with similar time commitments and stress, they valued coming to joint decisions and splitting the labor. In part because the husband was more comfortable in his Jewish–Buddhist identity than the wife was in her Mormon identity, the family often spent more time in Jewish community, but they attended all services together and the parents split or shared the labor of creating a dual-faith home. For both of these families, however, the rationale for doing both religions was, in part, feminist. Both families resisted the idea that a woman should sacrifice her tradition to maintain her husband's. Both also ideologically rejected the idea that the woman should shoulder the great responsibility for that work, though in practice only one couple implemented an even division of labor. These two families were representative of many of the families that I interviewed who chose to maintain two religions—they wanted to see both sides of the family heritage transmitted, they articulated feminist reasons for doing so, and they aspired, though did not always achieve, an equal gender division of labor as a result of their decisions. Doing both is, then, an attempt to avoid a co-existence based on the structural inequalities of heterosexual marriage in a patriarchal society. Rather, they were looking for a way of cooperating, even if it meant more coordination and potential conflict than would have existed if one person capitulated and even if, as is often the case, doing both created more tension and conflict or potential conflict with their broader communities.

4. Conclusions

The domestic space of the interfaith family is a very different setting for interfaith interaction than the negotiations of shared civic space, or even of institutional interfaith cooperation. As with any interfaith dynamic, the broader cultural context in which the interfaith family is set is terribly important—the religions exist in historically and culturally unique relationship to each other. The domestic space, however, introduces some unique complications. The emotional stakes of the private, domestic space turn out to be much higher, and the compromises can be, or feel like, zero sum games. If your spouse has a Christmas tree in your home, it is no longer a home to which you can retreat, and if your spouse has decreed or requested that there be no tree, your home may feel depressingly devoid of holiday cheer. Though compromises are possible, and sometimes work, at other times, they leave neither person feeling satisfied with their home, and unlike with public shared space, there is no place to retreat and “have it your way.” Lastly, while gender dynamics are not entirely absent from interfaith engagement between religious groups or otherwise, within the public square, they do not shape the fundamental power dynamic of the negotiations in which heterosexual couples find themselves making decisions about interfaith family life in the context of strict gender roles and divisions of labor—ideologies to which they might or might not subscribe, but which often shape their interactions none the less.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank S. Brent Plate, Yohan Yoo, and Song-Chong Lee for the opportunity to participate in the conference “Religious Conflict and Coexistence: The Korean Context and Beyond” and for the invitation to submit to this special issue. I would also like to thank everyone who participated in the conference for their feedback and Minah Kim for her tireless organizing and hospitality. In addition, thank you to Shari Rabin, Adrienne Krone, Shreena Gandhi, Melissa Borja, and Brandon Bayne for their feedback on this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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