

Game-changing Officiation Research:
A Report on [Under the Chuppah: Rabbinic Officiation and Intermarriage](#)

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The Cohen Center's new study, [Under the Chuppah: Rabbinic Officiation and Intermarriage](#), is extremely supportive of programmatic efforts to engage interfaith families Jewishly. Len Saxe and Fern Chertok's [JTA piece](#) is a good summary. Here are the highlights I noted:

Intermarried couples married by a sole Jewish clergy officiant:

- are more highly engaged in Jewish life than intermarried couples who had other forms of officiation. Differences persist when gender, Jewish backgrounds and Jewish college experiences of Jewish spouses are taken into account.
- on multiple measures of engagement, they look very similar to in-married (but not on all measures).

Reasons for the differences:

- may reflect continuation of preexisting Jewish trajectory of the couple
- religious and cultural commitments of the non-Jewish partner may
- possible that the relationship with the Jewish clergy has an independent impact on subsequent Jewish commitments. "Interactions with Jewish clergy in preparation for the wedding may serve to welcome the non-Jewish partner into Judaism, establish the groundwork for a continuing relationship, and affirm the couple's prior decision to raise a Jewish family. However, the opposite may also be true. Rejection by Jewish clergy may serve to dissuade couples from pursuing other Jewish commitments and connections."
 - "Although the current study does not allow us to know if couples who were not married by Jewish clergy sought out a rabbi or cantor, it is clear that future research should explore what happens when a rabbi or cantor refuses to marry an intermarrying couple."

Synagogue participation:

- Of in-married, 41% are members; intermarried with sole Jewish clergy, 34%; intermarried with other officiants, 7%
 - For intermarried with sole Jewish clergy, this is more than four times higher than couples married under other auspices
 - Attend services at least once in year before survey – 89%/84%/57% [all percentages that follow are in-married/intermarried with sole Jewish clergy/intermarried under other auspices]
 - Attend services once a month or more – in-married 22%, intermarried with sole Jewish clergy 20%

- Special meal on Shabbat – 73%/58%/38%; keeping kosher at least a little important 39%/20%/9%; frequency of talking about Judaism often 45%/30%/15% (this is less impact – why authors say “playing field not completely leveled”)

Raising children Jewish:

- In-married, 94%; intermarried with sole Jewish clergy, 85%; intermarried with other officiation, 23%
 - For intermarried with sole Jewish clergy this is more than three times more likely to raise children Jewish than couples married under other auspices
 - Jewish day care/nursery/pre-school: 53%/36%/10%

Other measures in study:

- participation in community event 79%/58%/30%
- consuming Jewish culture 76%/70%/56%
- giving to Jewish/Israeli causes 67%/54%/18%
- talking about Israel 93%/84%/81%

% who had sole Jewish officiant:

- in-married, 91%
- intermarried, 24% (57% had non-religious officiant such as JP or friend; 11% had non-Jewish clergy only; 5% had Jewish and non-Jewish clergy; 3% had other)
 - female Jews who intermarried – 33% had sole Jewish clergy vs. male – 17%
 - raised Jewish by religion 33% had sole Jewish clergy vs 8% not raised Jewish by religion; had formal Jewish education 32% vs 7%; observed Jewish rituals at home during high school 31-33% cf 6% (seder) 22% (Shabbat); active in Jewish campus activities 32% vs. 19%
 - camp and youth group, Birthright participation, religion of non-Jewish spouse, age at marriage – not related to having sole Jewish officiant
 - authors say might have expected Birthright association – some evidence (small # of cases) it is related to more conversion

Accounting for differences:

- there were pre-existing differences between those who had sole Jewish clergy. After controlling for gender, childhood Jewish background, and participation in Jewish college activities – intermarrieds with sole Jewish clergy were still significantly more engaged on many outcomes: raising children Jewish, enrolling children in Jewish early childhood setting, belonging to synagogue, attending services, celebrating holidays, participate in community activities, donate, talk about Judaism. No significant differences: Shabbat and kashrut, consume cultural content, talking about Israel.
- On some measures, in-marrieds more engaged, once pre-existing differences accounted for: Shabbat, kashrut, talking about Judaism, raising children Jewish, participate in community activities, talk about Israel. No significant differences between in-married and intermarried with sole Jewish clergy: synagogue membership, attend services, holidays, early childhood setting culture, donate.

Other points:

- 61% of millennial children of intermarriage identify as Jewish (previous reports were 59%)
- of study participants, 3% converted prior to marriage, 1% after