IDENTITY MANAGEMENT AND CONFLICT NEGOTIATION IN INTERFAITH MARITAL COMMUNICATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Laura V. Martinez

Thesis Committee Approval:

Dr. Stella Ting-Toomey, Chair
Dr. Tenzin Dorjee, Department of Human Communication Studies
Dr. Gary Ruud, Department of Human Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the identity management and identity negotiation processes in interfaith marital communication. Sixteen marital partners participated in this study. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, interpreted, and analyzed. Guided by Identity Management Theory and Identity Negotiation Theory, the thematic analysis results highlight the development of the interfaith relational identity through the co-creation of a superordinate spiritual and value system, an implementation of relational boundaries to prioritize the relational identity, and the identification of key milestone decisions (i.e., wedding plans and children socialization coordination) interfaith partners face.

Three dialectical tensions along the trajectory of turbulent developmental events were uncovered: Negotiating the Uncertainty-Familiarity Dialectic: Birth and Coming of Age Religious Rituals, Negotiating the Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection Dialectic: Holiday Religious Rituals, and Negotiating the Openness-Closedness Boundary Dialectic: Death Rituals and End of Life Arrangements. In addition, seven communication strategies associated with the dialectics were identified: accommodation, ambiguity, evasion tactics, parallel integrative strategy, creative compromise, temporary acquiescence, and dodging postponement. A retrospective assessment of interfaith marriage revealed three mixed emotions operating within the relationship: Affective Resignation-Wistfulness Emotion, Pride-Remorse Hybrid Emotion, and Upholding Relational Vision-Valuing Identity Distinctiveness Emotion.
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A prevailing topic of intercultural communication that has garnered much attention and research is the communication construct of identity. Identity is the framework through which individuals interpret their selfhood and their social belongingness. Identity is a complex and socially constructed concept and as such can be divided into either a social identity or a personal identity (Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An individual’s social identity may include identification with group memberships while a personal identity refers to the “unique attributes that we associate with our individuated self in comparison to those of others” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 212). Communication scholars have explored numerous aspects of identity. These include cultural, relational, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic identities (Eguchi, 2011; Imahori & Cupach, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

One aspect of identity and identity negotiation that has been overlooked and merits increased attention is religious identity. A religious identity comprises an array of factors, including an individual’s “religious beliefs and values…attendance at services, priority of religion relative to other life roles, an orientation toward collectivism or individualism, and rebirth experience or scriptural belief” (Dollinger, 2001, p. 72). In spite of the large encompassing description of religious identity, this study will define religious identity as “a process in which individuals explore and commit to a set of
religious beliefs and/or practices” (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009, p. 420). This definition of religious identity specifies a degree of commitment to religious identity. Religious identity can be an integral and multifaceted component of an individual’s selfhood, composing both the individual’s personal and social identities (Dollinger, 2001). According to Ting-Toomey (2005), individuals attempt to negotiate, that is to uphold and assert, identity during interactions. Consequently, if an individual has a strong religious identification, or a strong degree of commitment to a religion, he or she may feel compelled to assert and uphold this essential facet of his or her self-conception. This study, in particular, is interested in how individuals negotiate religious identities in the relational context of an interfaith marriage and how these partners manage intercultural conflict stemming from their religious differences.

An interfaith marriage occurs when one partner belongs to or identifies with a certain faith and the other partner belongs to or identifies with a dissimilar faith. For example, a marriage in which one spouse is Jewish and the other spouse is Christian would fall into the interfaith marriage category. In this context of interfaith marriage, two different identities merit discussion. The first is religious identity. The second is relational identity, which both partners form together. Relational identity represents the “aspect of self that is defined in terms of a particular interpersonal relationship” (Imahori & Cupach, 2005, p. 197). Relational identity contains of a sense of “we-ness” in which the individuals involved develop a set of characteristics that are unique to their relationship. Imahori and Cupach (2005) argue that in the context of an intercultural relationship, “competent negotiation of cultural identities requires cultural identity support that is mutually satisfying” (p. 196). However, supporting the cultural identity of
the other can may involve betraying or sacrificing one’s own cultural identity (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). When one’s cultural norms and values “may be at considerable odds with the partner’s cultural norms and values” (p. 200), partners may find it increasingly difficult to reconcile those differences without feeling they are being disloyal to their own cultural identity. In the context of the interfaith union, certain interfaith relational dialectics seem omnipresent. Validating the religious identity of the other may translate to undermining one’s own religious beliefs. Therefore, interfaith partners may struggle when managing their religious identity and relational identity simultaneously.

Research indicates that the challenges that surface within the interfaith union come from factors both external and internal to the couple. External challenges include negative perceptions toward interfaith unions by outsiders and the influence that the partners’ social networks may have on the relationship (Barnett, 1962; Hanassab & Tidwell, 1998; Ortega et al., 1988). The internal challenges that the interfaith couple may face include the degree of disparity between the religions each partner subscribes to (Chinitz & Brown, 2001; Heaton, 1984; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Williams & Lawler, 2003), how partners approach the communication of religious topics (Reiter & Gee, 2008; McCurry et al., 2012; Willimon, 2013), religious rituals and practices (Andrews Horowitz, 1999), and deciding on the religious upbringing of children (Prince, 1962; Williams & Lawler, 2003).

Furthermore, research suggests that the opposing religious viewpoints of interfaith marital partners are a source of conflict in the relationship (Reiter & Gee, 2008). Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2013) define intercultural conflict as “the implicit or explicit emotional struggle between persons of different cultural communities over perceived or
actual incompatibility of cultural ideologies and values, situational norms, goals, face orientations, scarce resources, styles/processes, and/or outcomes in a face-to-face (or mediated) context within a sociohistorical embedded system” (p. 635). Perceived threats, versus perceived support, to an individual’s identity by a culturally dissimilar other (in this case, the spouse) results in an intercultural conflict. In addition, religious beliefs can shape a person’s core values and norms (Dollinger, 2001). For example, to the degree that an individual internalizes a religion’s doctrine, he or she will assimilate those beliefs into his or her value system and act in accordance to what the religion decrees. Therefore, intercultural conflict is inherent to the relationship because both partners are operating from distinct cultural religious frameworks. Consequently, couples who do not subscribe to the same faith find themselves with a unique set of challenges when communicating with their spouse that distinguishes them from the same faith couples.

Despite these challenges, interfaith marriages in the United States have seen a steady increase since the 1960s (Chiles, 1971; Christensen & Barber, 1967; Schlesinger, 1968). Schaefer Riley (2013) states that 42% of all marriages in the United States are reported as interfaith. This percentage is substantially larger than the 15% of interfaith marriages reported in 1988 and the 25% reported in 2006. The Pew Research Center (2009) reports that the most common interfaith unions are Protestant-Protestant (from differing denominations) and Protestant-Catholic. According to the American Religious Identification Survey (2001), Episcopalians, Buddhists, and Protestants reported the highest percentages of interfaith marriages. Concurrently, Schaefer Riley (2013) reports individuals who subscribe to Judaism are most likely to marry outside their faith and individuals who subscribe to Mormonism are least likely to marry outside their faith.
Based on these statistics, religion can be a determinant to marriage in certain cases and in other cases not. Moreover, in spite of the heightened frequency of interfaith unions, research also indicates that these couples have a propensity for heightened conflict, lower marital satisfaction, and higher rates of separation and divorce than same-faith marriages (“Across the aisles,” 2013; Bahr, 1981; Hepps & Dorfman, 1966; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993).

In the face of the apparent challenges of interfaith unions, the prevalence of interfaith marriages in the United States is noteworthy and merits increased academic attention to understand how these couples cope with their differences while managing and negotiating their multiple identities. Kim (2013) argues that positive identity negotiation is necessary for “effective intercultural communication and relationship development” (p. 646). Research that supports the important role of positive identity negotiation in the success of an interfaith union comes from Williams and Lawler (2003), who argue that the actual religious differences between couples may not necessarily be the cause of reduced marital satisfaction. Rather, it is the way in which these differences and conflicts are negotiated that trigger relational distress.

Therefore, a well-conceptualized study on the identity management processes and intercultural conflict negotiation of interfaith marital partners can discover the communication patterns of the interfaith union. This study will investigate the intricacies of an under-explored yet growing segment of the general population. As couples share their stories and give voice to their identity and relational challenges, this research can shed light on the ways in which interfaith marital conflict is approached, avoided, or resolved. Through the application of an intercultural lens to interfaith marriage, this
research can possibly uncover new meaning and depth to intercultural conflict communication in intimate interpersonal relationships.

This thesis is organized in five chapters. This first chapter includes the rationale and purpose of this research study. The second chapter provides an analytical review of current literature on interfaith marriage and an explanation of the theoretical frameworks that guide this study. The third chapter details the methodological design of the study. The fourth chapter describes the thematic analysis of in-depth interview findings. The fifth chapter presents a discussion of findings, contributions, limitations, directions for future research, and conclusion.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is organized into four sections. First, the chapter begins with delineating the influence that an individual’s religious affiliation may have when selecting a romantic partner. Second, the literature review identifies both the external and internal challenges that interfaith couples face and the sources of their marital conflicts. Third, the chapter presents a critique of existing research trends on interfaith marriage. Fourth, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that guide this research, identity management theory (Imahori & Cupach, 2005) and identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1993, 2005), and presents the two research questions in this study.

Religious Affiliation in Selecting a Significant Other

Research highlights the central role religion can play when choosing a marital partner. In the case of religious Jews, for example, a strong religious identification is inversely correlated with willingness to marry outside of one’s faith (Haji, Lalonde, Durbin, & Naveh-Benjamin, 2011). Other groups, such as Mormons, also reported ambivalence to marrying outside one’s faith (Schaefer Riley, 2013). Young Muslim men from Indonesia reported that marrying a woman who shares their faith avoids unnecessary challenges, prevents extensive negotiation of dowry, and ultimately saves money (Carnegie, 2013).
Similarly, young Canadian Muslims who self-reported as strongly religious were less open to engage in interfaith marriages than those who reported a weak affiliation with Islam (Cila & Lalonde, 2014). These same adults reported that their religious identification is closely linked to their social identities and ingroup affiliation. This identification stems from the emphasis on religious identity when categorizing an individual as either an ingroup or outgroup member. Cila and Lalonde’s (2014) findings supported that a strong religious identity (and by extension a strong identification to the ingroup) was inversely correlated with disposition to marry outside the Muslim faith. However, participants in the study reported they would be willing to date a non-Muslim. The aforementioned findings on the consideration of religious affiliation when choosing a spouse underscores how important religious identification may be to a person. Marrying a religiously dissimilar other appears to carry a sense of unpredictability and ambivalence toward the relationship. Nevertheless, the increase of interfaith marriages in recent years indicates many couples may be willing to overlook religious differences at least in the early stages of the relationship. However, couples who do set aside their religious disparities are exposed to certain challenges throughout the course of their relationship.

Research on interfaith unions focuses on the challenges and conflicts these couples experience. Current literature indicates that the challenges faced by interfaith unions can be organized into two categories: Challenges that are external to the couple and challenges that occur within the union, or internal challenges. The external challenges or pressures on the interfaith union are addressed first. The internal challenges an interfaith union faces are discussed after a review of the external challenges.
External Challenges of Interfaith Unions

The two predominant external challenges are the negative perceptions of interfaith marriages from outsiders and the influence of the couples’ social networks. Barnett (1962) reported on Jewish parents’ disapproving attitude concerning interfaith marriages for their children and the overall rejection spouses experienced from in-laws. Additionally, Ortega, Whitt, and William (1988) provided several reasons for the disapproval of interfaith marriages. One reason is that shared group values and norms tend to promote endogamous, or intrafaith, marriages over exogamous, or interfaith, marriages. A second reason encouraging negative perceptions or attitudes toward interfaith unions is the belief that individuals with similar values and beliefs, especially religious ones, will have an easier time adjusting to each other than individuals whose beliefs vary widely (Ortega et al., 1988). In other words, engaging in a romantic relationship with a religiously dissimilar other carries a sense of unfamiliarity and unpredictability. Further discouragement of interfaith unions comes from members of the religion who may view an interfaith union as a threat to ingroup membership or as demonstrating a lack of solidarity, pride, or loyalty to one’s religion (Hanassab & Tidwell, 1998; Ortega et al., 1988).

The findings reported by these mostly quantitative studies have identified a negative standpoint toward interfaith unions from family and other members of the religion which can in turn influence the couple’s relationship. The data reported by Ortega et al. (1988), for example, indicated a positive relationship between religious endogamy and self-reported marital satisfaction. However, these quantitative findings do not identify the underlying meanings and contexts for the negative correlation between
religious exogamy and marital satisfaction. The results only revealed the negative association between interfaith marriage and relational satisfaction and failed to offer an in-depth picture of the stories, meanings, and nuances behind the findings. Furthermore, more research is needed in order to expand understanding of how and why interfaith marriage poses a threat to ingroup membership and creates emotional vulnerability to identity. Research should also examine the specific examples of the types of negative perceptions that afflict interfaith marriages. Understanding the stories of individuals who see interfaith unions as burdensome and unwarranted is necessary. It would also be valuable to comprehend how interfaith couples manage their cultural religious differences. Perhaps their voices can provide positive identity-affirming strategies for each other’s religious identity and relational identity as well. These strategies may provide untapped benefits relating to improved communication, conflict resolution, mutual respect, and understanding for all marriages in general.

Beyond the lived challenges of negative perceptions of interfaith marriage from outsiders, the second challenge rests within the couple’s social networks and the weight these have on the relationship. For example, in some cases marrying a religiously dissimilar other may not be a decision that rests on the individual alone. The individual’s social network may advocate for and have a strong opinion on whom an individual should marry. Hanassab and Tidwell (1998) found that Jewish Iranian parents strongly advocated religious endogamy for their children. Jewish Iranian parents reported that if a suitable Jewish Iranian were not available, they preferred their children marry someone of Jewish background than a non-Jew. If a potential suitor were Iranian but not Jewish, the suitor would not be a desirable choice. This suggests that in the case of Jewish
Iranians, religious similarity is valued higher than ethnic similarity when considering a spouse for their children. This standpoint was derived from traditional views of interfaith marriage in which these were perceived as “a betrayal of important values, and resulted in ostracization from the immediate family as well as from the community” (p. 397).

Social network often carries a strong influence on the decision-making process of marrying a religiously dissimilar other. However, Hannasab and Tidwell’s (1998) findings were obtained through a comparative analysis of participants’ answers to questionnaires sent by mail. The researchers used religious level, acculturation level, dating patterns, parent-child relationship, and sex role attitudes as variables to determine relationships. This study does not delve into what it means for the children of Jewish Iranian parents to marry a religiously dissimilar other or to what extent ingroup values are being infringed. Understanding what the act of marrying a religiously dissimilar other means to group membership identity merits further research. These external challenges can undoubtedly affect an interfaith couple’s decision to enter the relationship long-term and can carry over to the couple’s daily life. In addition to these challenges, the interfaith couple also faces challenges that are internal to the relationship.

**Internal Challenges of Interfaith Unions**

Existing research on interfaith marriages indicates four key internal challenges of the relationship. The first internal challenge of interfaith marriage is the degree of disparity between spouses’ religious affiliations. The propensity for intercultural conflict in the relationship is directly affected by how different the spouses’ religions are from each other (Chinitz, & Brown, 2001; Heaton, 1984; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Williams & Lawler, 2003). For example, Ortega et al. (1988) found that Protestants reported higher
levels of marital happiness when they married within similar religious denominations, such as Lutheran or Methodist, than when they married across doctrines, such as to a Catholic partner. Lehrer and Chiswick’s (1993) reported the highest levels of divorce among Mormon interfaith marriages in comparison to other religions. These findings are useful in outlining the interfaith relationships that have low or high chances of success. However, they do not provide insight into what causes some interfaith relationships to function better than others and how these disparities can be ameliorated throughout the marriage. As previously stated, Ortega et al. (1988) did argue that individuals subscribing to different religions have a harder time adjusting to each other’s beliefs. Therefore, it would be valuable to understand the meaning of these differences and the weight they carry on the development of the relationship. Analyzing these differences through the lens of identity negotiation and clashing identities may provide a more profound grasp on the marital breakdowns of religiously dissimilar others than have been reported.

A second internal factor that can challenge an interfaith union is how partners approach and communicate their religious differences. One reported cause of conflict in an interfaith marriage is initial avoidance of the “religion issue.” Willimon (2013) argued that partners in interfaith marriages might ignore or downplay the importance of religious differences in the initial stages of a relationship and adopt a “love conquers all” mentality, only to discover the negative impact of such differences further into the relationship. Imahori and Cupach (2005) supported this position and argued that partners, during initial attraction, are likely to “ignore or de-emphasize their cultural differences” and instead focus on the interpersonal connection in the relationship (p. 205). This approach of avoidance can prove to be damaging to an interfaith marriage given that
research supports that talking openly about religious differences, although initially daunting, is ultimately beneficial to the relationship (Reiter & Gee, 2008).

Reiter and Gee (2008) found that open communication was directly correlated to lower conflict and distress in an interfaith relationship. Open communication is defined as, “a maintenance behavior which includes a lack of topic avoidance, such that individuals who engage in higher levels of open communication tend not to avoid topics” (p. 541). Their findings also indicated that interfaith unions experience a heightened degree of conflict caused by religious differences. However, when relational partners managed their intercultural conflict productively through open communication, they experienced relationship growth. Conversely, open communication may be challenging to achieve in an interreligious intimate relational context. McCurry, Schrodt, and Ledbetter (2012) found that in a romantic relational context, the topic of religion might be avoided when uncertainty about the relationship is perceived. They reported that when partners felt high levels of uncertainty in the relationship, low levels of intimacy, and low levels of communication efficacy, they were less likely to discuss religious topics. Participants in this study indicated they felt uncomfortable discussing religious topics because religion is a determinant of lifestyle choices, such as the upbringing of children. Therefore, avoiding the topic entirely allows one to avoid discussion of other important, but perhaps undesirable, topics. McCurry et al. (2012) suggested partners’ avoidance of religious topics as one of the contributing factors leading to interfaith relationship dissolution.

The findings drawn from each of these studies are helpful in indicating that open communication is a valuable resource to manage religious differences. These findings
also suggest that although being in an interfaith union may pose more challenges (or at least different challenges) than would be found in a same-faith union, these may not necessarily be “deal breakers” for the relationship. Reiter and Gee’s (2008) conclusions suggest effective management of religious differences via open communication can strengthen the relationship. Therefore, there are several angles that merit further analysis.

One, it would be beneficial to understand what factors contribute to minimizing religious differences when a relationship first begins to bloom. Through the lens of identity management, it seems an individual’s identities fluctuate in priority or intensity at different stages of a relationship. Imahori and Cupach (2005) argue for the alternating nature of identity salience and state that “depending on the person with whom one is communicating, the topic of conversation, and the social context, one or more aspects of identity become highly salient” (p. 197). The intensity with which sociocultural identities are expressed varies depending on identity salience and interactional contexts.

Two, research on interfaith unions would benefit from concrete instances of what makes open communication about religion such a daunting task between interfaith spouses. While listening to these couples’ stories, this study can discover which topics are challenging to approach and why couples refrain from engaging in these discussions. Three, this study can expand previous findings concerning communication of religious differences. When romantic partners perceive relational uncertainty, partners engage in topic avoidance regarding their differing beliefs (McCurry et al., 2012). Therefore, a deeper understanding of how spouses’ relational and religious identities intersect or conflict is needed to grasp why couples employ avoidance tactics or if certain topics are avoided more than others.
A third internal challenge of interfaith marriage emerges from religious practices and rituals. For instance, Andrews Horowitz (1999) argued that interfaith unions between Jewish and Christian spouses are forced to acknowledge and negotiate religious differences in the month of December, when both Hanukah and Christmas are observed. Therefore, at certain points during the year, interfaith marriages can likely no longer avoid certain discussions about religion due to upcoming holidays or festivities. One or both spouses may wish the other spouse would participate with them in religious festivities and may feel saddened or dissatisfied if the spouse does not want to, or cannot, participate due to conflicting beliefs.

Williams and Lawler (2003) reported that interfaith marital partners were less likely to participate together in religious activities. Partners experienced reduced marital satisfaction because they did not participate in religious rituals and events together. Williams and Lawler’s findings also indicated spouses may feel a stronger identification to their religious identity when religious practices or rituals are observed than in other times of the year. At these stages, interfaith marriages would have to recognize and externalize individual feelings about their religious differences. A more detailed look at how spouses choose to approach these topics and express their viewpoints is needed. Furthermore, why or why not these discussions only take place during certain points of the year provides in-depth understanding into the communication dynamics and identity negotiation strategies utilized by interfaith spouses.

A fourth challenge interfaith marriages face surfaces when couples disagree over raising children and the religion these children will follow (Prince, 1962). Williams and Lawler (2003) reported that disagreement over the religious upbringing of children
decreases marital satisfaction. Andrews Horowitz (1999) indicated that parents face complicated challenges in raising children regarding their participation in religious rituals and celebrations. Glenn (1982) argued that fathers in particular experience reduced relational satisfaction in the interfaith marriage since children usually adopt the religion of the mother. The presence of children in the interfaith marriage introduces an additional layer of the relationship that needs to be managed and negotiated. Overall, the internal challenges outlined above form an intricate and delicate set of complications the interfaith couple may face.

A detailed review of the research trends in interfaith marital communication revealed that most past studies have focused on the negative effects of marrying across religions. Based on existing research, the benefits of an interfaith marriage appear to be overshadowed by looming challenges. However, research on interfaith marriages reports several advantages to the relationship derived from spouses’ differing religious identity. Williams and Lawler (2003) reported positive outcomes of marrying a religiously dissimilar other. In their study, participants experienced fostering higher tolerance and understanding of differing religious viewpoints, developing a broad social network from exposure to two churches, increased relational intimacy, and “spiritual growth through exploring differences” (p. 1088). Couples who achieve these feelings of validation and mutual respect have learned to negotiate their religious identities and harmonize them within their relational identity.

Ting-Toomey (2005) argues that “satisfactory feelings of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued” are indicators of individuals feeling satisfied with an identity negotiation encounter (p. 218). The findings from Williams and Lawler (2003)
offered an example of the positive correlation that exists between identity validation and relational satisfaction. Although cultural religious differences may be perceived as barriers to the relationship, navigating through those differences may result in positive outcomes for the relationship. Additionally, mutual identity validation can foster a deeper relational bond between interfaith spouses. Keeping the aforementioned benefits in mind, being in an interfaith marriage need not be portrayed as being in a relationship doomed for failure. The minimal research dedicated to detailing the positive aspects of the interfaith union provides a limited, but nonetheless present, light at the end of the tunnel for these couples. The overwhelming attention to the negative traits of the interfaith marriage is just one limitation of existing research in this area of study. Furthermore, there are additional shortcomings in present interfaith marriage research. These are discussed in the following section.

**Critique of Existing Interfaith Marriage Research Trends**

The available research on interfaith marriages presents significant limitations. The first limitation of existing research is the lack of a theoretical framework to guide the studies. Most studies of interfaith marriages only explore analytical relationships between variables and report on the findings (Bahr, 1981; Balkin et al., 2009; Chinitz & Brown, 2001; Christensen & Barber, 1967; Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Haji et al., 2011; Hanassab & Tidwell, 1998; Heaton, 1984; Hepps & Dorfman, 1966; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Ortega et al., 1988; Prince, 1962; Reiter & Gee, 2008; Williams & Lawler, 2003). Without the use of a sound theory, the credibility of the research is impaired. One exception comes from McCurry et al. (2012), who used the relational turbulence model to delineate the communication breakdowns between interfaith couples and thereby provide significant
findings on the negative relationship between avoidance of religious topics and marital satisfaction. Although the relational turbulence model indicates turning points in the interfaith union, it does not grasp the complexity of cultural religious identity differences operating within the relationship. Nevertheless, McCurry et al. (2012) is a suitable example for how the inclusion of theory can add meaning to research on interfaith unions.

Second, the bulk of research on interfaith marriage has used quantitative data collection. Most of the literature available presents self-reported data obtained from questionnaires (Bahr, 1981; Chinitz & Brown, 2001; Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Haji et al., 2011; Hanassab & Tidwell, 1998; Heaton, 1984; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; McCurry et al., 2012; Ortega et al., 1988; Prince, 1962; Reiter & Gee, 2008; Williams & Lawler, 2003). These findings are useful in indicating sources of conflict, heightened dissolution rates, and lessened marital satisfaction among interfaith unions. However, they do not provide deep insight into the meanings of these religious differences and clashing of identities in situations beyond what the numbers show.

Although qualitative methodology is scant within interfaith marriage research, a qualitative approach to interfaith marriage provides a comprehensive outlook into the communication intricacies of these unions. Andrews Horowitz (1999), with the use of grounded theory, was able to gain further understanding of the communication between interfaith couples at a specific time of distress, when religious practices and rituals are observed. This approach is useful to begin to understand the communication between interfaith spouses. However, as it is limited only to partners’ participation in differing religious practices and rituals, it does not provide sufficient understanding of how these
couples manage their differences throughout the rest of the year and at major interfaith
decision-making episodes. Additionally, through ethnography, Carnegie (2013) inquired
how Muslim men in Indonesia perceive interfaith marriages. However, this study only
focused on individual male perceptions of interfaith marriage and did not represent the
females’ perspectives. While this previous study does highlight some concerns or
apprehensions individuals may have about engaging in an interfaith relationship, the
present study attempts to expand on current literature. Through the use of in-depth
interviews and listening to the voices of interfaith couples, this study may provide insight
into the concerns spouses may have had prior to engaging in the relationship and how
these concerns were managed. Furthermore, the stories of interfaith couples can richly
inform on the meaning of challenges in the marriage.

Research on interfaith marriages identifies significant external and internal
challenges to the relationship. The potential benefits of being in an interfaith union,
however, indicate that couples are able to move past or work with their religious
differences. How partners navigate through these challenges and conflict sources can be
further understood through the application of a theoretical framework. Therefore, the
second half of this review is dedicated to discussing two theoretical lenses utilized in this
study: Identity management theory (IMT) (Imahori & Cupach, 2005) and identity
of the relational identity and how each partner’s cultural identity is negotiated throughout
the relational process. INT provides a thorough lens on the complex construct of identity
and how the individual attempts to enact positive identity negotiation operating within
dialectical tensions.
Identity Management Theory

The relational identity of an interfaith union is a salient factor of the relationship. As previously mentioned, Imahori and Cupach (2005) define relational identity as the identity which “reflects the aspect of self that is defined in terms of a particular interpersonal relationship” (p. 197). Within any interpersonal relationship, the cultural identity, the degree of identification and membership to a certain group, of each partner becomes a component of the relationship. In the present study, the cultural identity of each individual concentrates on the religious identity each brings to the relationship. IMT concerns itself with explaining “how cultural identities are negotiated through development of an interpersonal relationship” (p. 196). IMT identifies three phases in which interpersonal relationships develop: Trial, enmeshment, and renegotiation. It is important to note that these three phases are cyclical in nature and do not necessarily occur in a linear fashion. The elements of each phase and their application to the interfaith union are discussed in the following paragraph.

During the trial phase, referring to the “trial and error” approach of getting to know one another, Imahori and Cupach (2005) argue that the cultural differences between partners are very apparent. Partners may see these differences as obstacles to the relationship. In an interfaith union, partners may choose to purposefully ignore these differences because of their underlying romantic attraction. This point is supported by research reported previously of romantic partners minimizing or ignoring the importance of their cultural disparities (Willimon, 2013). In the face of such differences, and perhaps in an effort to compensate for these, partners may instead focus on shared interests and other similarities (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). These diligent efforts to discover
commonalities might explain the initial attraction between interfaith partners. In an effort to overcome their differences, partners may go to great lengths to find similarities and then hold on to them steadfastly. Once these similarities are identified, partners advance to the enmeshment phase.

Throughout the enmeshment phase, partners continue to develop their relational identity (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). Within this phase, partners establish symbols and rules that are unique to their relationship, such as nicknames or significant places and dates the couples share. Imahori and Cupach (2005) argue, “partners improvise and negotiate their own relational standard for competent communication with each other” (p. 204). Within the context of an interfaith marriage, partners may unknowingly dictate avoidance as the tactic to manage their religious differences. IMT claims partners in the enmeshment phase continue to experience a level of uneasiness with intercultural differences. Subsequently, partners continue to downplay their differences and bolster their similarities. The enmeshment phase of the relationship is a useful guide to understand why interfaith couples are attracted to each other in spite of the reported external and internal challenges they may encounter. Additionally, as the relationship progresses, partners may discover more cultural differences between them and decide how these may affect the development of the relational identity.

Interfaith unions are likely to experience the discovery of additional differences between partners. One example is illustrated in the study conducted by Andrews Horowitz (1999). As stated earlier, the interfaith union is forced to acknowledge cultural religious differences when practicing religious holidays and rituals. Partners in an interfaith union may have been successful in de-emphasizing their religious differences
up until the point they are forced to manage these due to upcoming festivities. When partners realize or acknowledge that their religious differences can strain the relationship, they need to consider the salience of their sociocultural and relational identities. As partners continue to solidify their relational identity via “the increased ability…to work out face problematics and dialectics based on salient relational identity” (Imahori & Cupach, 2005, p. 205), the relationship has entered the third phase of relational development, renegotiation.

In the renegotiation phase, relational partners manage their cultural differences through the lens of the relational identity (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). During renegotiation, partners reinforce their relational identity, which becomes most salient when negotiating cultural differences. IMT argues that during this phase, both partners are operating from a relational framework and thereby manage to view their differences as an asset, a factor that sets them apart from other unions, rather than as an obstacle. Due to their strong relational identity, partners have now developed a mutually respectful intercultural relationship. Once partners develop a strong relational identity as the foundation of their relationship, they reframe how they perceive their cultural differences. Whereas during the trial and enmeshment phases these differences were minimized, now they are exalted, perceived as integral and positive elements to the relationship (Imahori & Cupach, 2005).

In spite of the external and internal challenges and the high rates of conflict, marital dissatisfaction, and divorce reported among interfaith marriages, the renegotiation phase of IMT can explain how some interfaith couples manage their cultural differences. Furthermore, the renegotiation phase supports the notion that romantic partners can
develop positive strategies for reframing their religious differences. While at first these differences are construed as threats to the relationship, as the relational identity becomes more salient, they are instead perceived as assets that strengthen their union.

As mentioned previously, the three phases of relational identity development of IMT occur in a cyclical fashion. The relationship may revert to an earlier phase or never move forward to the next phase. Imahori and Cupach (2005) state, “intercultural partners may go back to earlier phases after reaching the later phases if they discover new areas of cultural identity differences that need to be managed” (p. 206). The cyclical nature of the phases strengthens the applicability of IMT to understand the complexities within the interfaith union. How relational partners approach their differences and integrate (or fail to integrate) these into the relationship can shed light on the causes of relational conflict if partners allow cultural identities to clash and impair the development of the relational identity. Therefore, the three phases of relational identity development and relational partners’ approach to each other’s cultural differences guide the first research question of this study:

RQ 1: How do interfaith partners use relational identity to manage religious identity dialectics?

In conclusion, IMT provides a valuable approach to understand the development of the relational identity between the intercultural dyad. In previous research, IMT has been utilized in the analysis of intercultural friendship development stages (Lee, 2006) and has contributed to deeper understanding on the “process of intercultural relationship formation” (Lee, 2008, p. 51). This proposed study on identity management in an interfaith relational context may contribute to the development of IMT through increasing
current understanding on how individuals harmonize their relational identity with their religious identity. Furthermore, this study benefits from an in-depth understanding of how the cultural identities operating within a relationship are negotiated at an individual level. Therefore, this study incorporates INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005) to guide how the individuals negotiate both sociocultural and personal identity in conflict situations.

Identity Negotiation Theory

Identity negotiation theory posits that identity consists of “reflective self-images constructed, experienced, and communicated by the individuals within a culture and in a particular interaction situation” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). The term negotiation refers to a “transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others’ desired self-images” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). INT argues that individuals concern themselves with supporting the desired self-images of others. In the context of an interfaith marriage, partners encounter a dialectical tension between supporting their own religious identity and the possibly conflicting religious identity of the other. Identity Dialectics is defined here as interactive tensions of “contrastive and complementary” poles of salient identity issues and group membership domains (Ting-Toomey, 2005, pp. 221-222). In the relational context, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identify relationship dialectics as “complex, overlapping domains of centrifugal forces juxtaposed with centripetal forces” (p. 44), which parallel the tug-and-pull dialectics of identity. In the case of marriages in which only one spouse identifies with a religion and the other does not have a religious affiliation, the non-believing spouse may find it challenging or may be indifferent to supporting the religious identity of the other.
IMT proposes a similar dialectic found within intercultural relationships, the “self-other face dialectic.” Imahori and Cupach (2005) argue that when partners support, or validate, their individual cultural identities they simultaneously threaten the conflicting cultural identity of their partner. Vice versa, when one partner supports the cultural identity of the other, the partner may experience a sense of sacrifice of “belongingness and pride with respect to one’s own culture” (p. 200). In addition, the dialectical tensions the individual experiences when attempting to negotiate either the identity of the self or of the other are best described through INT’s dialectic themes.

INT poses ten assumptions from which stem five dialectic themes: Security-vulnerability, predictability-unpredictability, inclusion-differentiation, autonomy-connection, and consistency-change. The dialectic of consistency-change is omitted from the discussion because the current study is not a developmental longitudinal interview study. This section will outline each dialectic theme and their applicability to interfaith marriages. The first theme that is discussed is that of security-vulnerability.

According to Assumption 3 of INT, individuals feel a sense of “insecurity or vulnerability because of a perceived threat or fear in a culturally estranged environment” and experience “emotional security in a culturally familiar environment” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 219). An individual achieves a sense of security or safety when he or she feels confident in his or her group membership. In an “unfamiliar cultural environment,” the individual will feel vulnerable (p. 220). Individuals in an interfaith marriage may consistently experience a sense of identity vulnerability due to conflicting religious identities. Partners may feel the other is threatening their religious identity and therefore feel a sense of ambivalence in the relationship.
Ting-Toomey (2005) argues individuals who feel threatened or vulnerable may then “fall back on their ethnocentric habits” (p. 220). In an interfaith marriage, dissatisfaction with the marriage may develop from both spouses feeling vulnerable in the relationship, leading spouses to stereotype or disrespect the religious identity of the other. Williams and Lawler (2003) corroborated this notion in their findings concerning interfaith unions. Couples in their study reported higher levels of dissatisfaction in the marriage resulting from “lack of respect for the [religion of the] spouse” and “worrying about the spouse’s salvation” (presumably because spouses believe their religion was the true religion and thus, the spouse would not be saved) (p. 1089). Furthermore, relational partners who experience this identity vulnerability may have reverted to the trial phase of IMT’s developmental stages in which partners perceive their differences as barriers to the relationship. Therefore, although relational spouses may feel a sense of wanting to connect to their relational identity, the vulnerability they feel from having differing religious identities can cause anxiety in the relationship. In addition to feelings of vulnerability, partners may also experience feelings of unpredictability within the relationship. These feelings are discussed within the dialectic theme of Predictability-Unpredictability.

Assumption 5 of INT posits that predictability in interaction fosters trust and familiarity whereas unpredictability fosters distrust, anxiety, and feelings of defensiveness (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Trust, or predictability, is experienced in a familiar environment where individuals feel security and can predict how familiar others will behave. In contrast, individuals feel anxious or uncertain among unfamiliar others if they cannot predict how these will behave. Interfaith partners will experience a level of
unpredictability around their religious dissimilar spouse. Even when partners have worked through managing certain cultural differences, new differences may surface as the relationship develops, as suggested by IMT. One example is found in reported marital dissatisfaction and conflict between partners when discussing how to raise children (Barnett, 1962; Prince, 1962; Williams & Lawler, 2003).

If an interfaith couple failed to discuss or consider the religious upbringing of their children, partners may realize the child-rearing methods of the spouse may be unpredictable. If the relational identity of the interfaith spouses is not resilient, it may not withstand the spouses’ feelings of unpredictability and distrust. When individuals strive to negotiate their sociocultural and relational identities, INT argues that feelings of vulnerability, mistrust, anxiety, and defensiveness emerge. These feelings may then produce dissonance within the relationship. Therefore, although interfaith couples may have diligently negotiated some of their cultural religious differences, surfacing differences evoke initial unpredictability. In conjunction with the aforementioned two dialectic themes, the following paragraphs discuss how individuals negotiate their identity within the dialectic of inclusion-differentiation and the theme of autonomy-connection.

Inclusion-Differentiation explains “individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed and experience identity differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 218). Identity inclusion supports the individual’s self-image as a member of the group. Identity differentiation, or distinctiveness, is experienced if the individual feels that his or her group membership is not upheld. Although individuals
long for a sense of inclusion, too little differentiation causes a loss of personal identity. Extreme differentiation, however, causes feelings of exclusion. Interfaith spouses may encounter a strong dialectic tension between feelings of inclusion and feelings of differentiation. The external challenges of negative perceptions toward interfaith marriage and influence of partners’ social networks discussed earlier are directly applicable to the dialectical tension of inclusion-differentiation. Internal challenges to the relationship may surface when spouses long to feel included in each other’s family and social group membership but feel that they are stigmatized because of their religious identity. Within the relationship partners may find it difficult to support their spouses’ group membership identity to an opposing religion, thereby causing a drift in the connectedness between them. The final theme explores in depth the dialectic tension between autonomy-connection.

The autonomy-connection theme posits that emotional security and trust between individuals is created by forming important intimate relationships with others and thus, individuals long to form these relationships (Assumption 6, Ting-Toomey, 2005). While interfaith partners long to feel connection, their religious differences may become a constant reminder of their autonomy. Interfaith spouses may find the constant push-pull force of their conflicting religious identities impairs the development of a strong relational identity. As mentioned previously, Williams and Lawler (2003) report interfaith marital partners are less likely to participate together in religious activities. Participation in separate activities may pull partners away from connection and toward autonomy. However, the renegotiation phase of IMT discussed earlier claims partners are able to reframe and integrate their cultural difference in a way in which they become an
asset to the relationship (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). It appears as if interfaith partners need to harmonize their differences to gravitate toward connection. If unable to integrate their differences into the relationship, partners will experience dissonance between their religious and relational identity.

The assumptions of INT and the four dialectic themes discussed provide a sound framework to understand how interfaith spouses negotiate their multiple and at times conflicting identities within the realm of the relational identity. The themes of security-vulnerability and predictability-unpredictability echo the ambivalence relational partners may feel toward their cultural religious differences. The themes of inclusion-differentiation and autonomy-connection indicate repeated dialectic tensions operating within the relationship and within each partner. When the relationship is met with challenges stemming from religious differences, partners must learn how to negotiate between relational and religious identities. Therefore, the dialectic themes of INT presented in this section guide the second research question of this study:

RQ 2: How do interfaith partners negotiate the dialectics of religious and relational identities in conflict situations?

The use of INT in intercultural communication research is widespread. The theoretical framework of identity negotiation has been applied to the analysis of the acculturation process of immigrants (Collie et al., 2010; Love & Powers, 2004; Moriizumi, 2011), to the negotiation of a bicultural/biracial Asian-Caucasian identity (Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013), to the negotiation of sexual identity (Eguchi, 2011), and to the adjustment process and conflict management of international students (Hotta, 2014; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). As demonstrated from its classic and
contemporary usage, INT lends itself to a qualitative application of research. More so, the appropriateness of INT to this discussion aligns with the suggested extension of the theory suggested by Ting-Toomey (2005), which includes the focus on social identities, one of which is a spiritual identity. INT underscores the importance of competent identity negotiation in building and maintaining intercultural interpersonal relationships. Positive identity negotiation is a key factor in the development of intercultural interpersonal relationships, as explained through IMT (Imahori & Cupach, 2005).

By using the two theoretical frameworks of IMT and INT, an in-depth approach to understanding how relational partners negotiate their sociocultural and personal identities is explored. Furthermore, the theories are compatible in that they both focus on the constructs of management and negotiation of identity in an intercultural context. The conjoint use of INT and IMT expands insight on how intercultural partners develop a relational identity, how they negotiate intersecting identities, and the possible identity dialectic tensions they have to address. In summary, the two research questions guiding this thesis are presented:

RQ 1: How do interfaith partners use relational identity to manage religious identity dialectics?

RQ 2: How do interfaith partners negotiate the dialectics of religious and relational identities in conflict situations?
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

According to Tracy (2013), qualitative research “focuses on lived experience, placed in its context” and “can help explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data” (p. 5). In an effort to offer participants the opportunity to narrate their experiences, share their stories, and encourage them to disclose on the private matter of their interfaith union, a qualitative approach was chosen for this research. Given the predominantly quantitative research studies dedicated to interfaith unions, a qualitative approach expands on the social meanings and contexts within and beyond current findings (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). A qualitative analysis garners in-depth and elaborate information that can allow individuals to understand the intricacies of interfaith marital conflict and identity management and negotiation.

Qualitative Interpretive Research

A thorough analytical review of the existing research centralizing on interfaith marriages revealed that most studies of this population have relied on quantitative research methodology (Balkin et al., 2009; Chinitz & Brown, 2001; Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Haji et al., 2011; Reiter & Gee, 2008; Williams & Lawler, 2003). Furthermore, limited research has analyzed this relational sector from a communication standpoint. Although existing research identifies heightened marital conflict and reduced marital satisfaction among interfaith couples, the research fails to identify the underlying
connotations of these issues. The meanings within relational partners’ clashing identities and intercultural conflicts are absent from existing research trends. In order to capture the intricacies of the interfaith relational context, a qualitative interpretive approach to this study would garner a richer data set than possible from quantitative data collection. Because the process of qualitative interpretive research proceeds “inductively rather than deductively,” Manning and Kunkel (2014) argue the data analysis process enables conclusions “gathered from looking across the data and narrowing them into ideas rather than using the data to confirm or deny a preconstructed hypothesis” (pp. 14-15). Tracy (2013) echoes the notion that the emic feature of qualitative research, emphasizes “behavior [that] is described from the actor’s point of view and is context-specific” (p. 21) and allows the researcher to be immersed within the data and uncover findings otherwise overlooked or incapable of being captured with quantitative means. Research focused on the interfaith marital communication context is limited and does not delve into a deeper understanding of the identity management and negotiation workings of the relationship. The findings associated with existing research provide surface-level absolute correlations between established variables. A qualitative approach, therefore, is lacking in the context of interfaith marital communication and can fill in the blanks of the existing findings.

A valuable tool of qualitative research methods is the use of interviews as data collection. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), “interviews are particularly well suited to understanding the social actor’s experience, knowledge, and worldviews” (p. 173). Given the existing quantitative research on interfaith relationships that used a survey data collection approach, an interview approach to this study was chosen. Tracy
(2013) notes that interviews allow participants to “elucidate subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints” (p. 132). In the context of this research study, interviews were able to provide a richer set of data to understand first-hand the nuances and intricacies of interfaith marital communication than possible from a questionnaire by interviewing actual interfaith partners. A qualitative research approach can also provide a rich incorporation of theoretical frameworks to guide the data interpretation process.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), they claim that theory plays a vital role within qualitative interpretive research in that it provides the researcher with a variety of perspectives with which to analyze the data and invites him or her to “stretch your imagination and create and validate claims” (p. 267). Because the two theoretical frameworks of IMT and INT were used to inform this study, a qualitative approach was useful to interpret the data set in a manner that could potentially support or extend theoretical claims. Therefore, a qualitative approach to this study was able to ascertain theoretical implications that extended, corroborated, and contributed to both identity management theory and identity negotiation theory.

Participants

This sample consisted a total of 16 coupled participants. Seven of the eight couples were legally married. One couple was not legally married, but was legally registered as domestic partners. Participants ranged in age from 28 to 67. One female participant chose not to report her age. The mean age for participants was 50 years old. The length of marriage of the participants ranged from one year and three months to 29 years. The average length of marriage was 17 years. The predominant religious affiliation among participants was Catholic or a variation of Christianity, followed by Judaism. The
most common religious combination was Catholic-Jewish. See Table 1 for a full representation of participant demographics.

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, (IRB) the author utilized convenience and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants. The author also contacted places of worship across Southern California and distributed flyers inviting participants but received no response from these establishments. Participants were able to take part in the study contingent on the fulfillment of two criteria. First, participants must have been married for a minimum of two years at the time of the interview. An exception was made for the domestic partnership couple since they had lived together for 16 years. A second exception was made for one couple that had been married for a year and three months. The author considered them qualified participants for the study even though they had not reached the two-year marriage mark because the couple had been in a relationship for four years.

Second, participants must have identified their marriage as an interfaith union, meaning that they were married to a person who did not share the same religious beliefs, but was instead associated with a distinct religious belief system. The basis for the first criterion is that the purpose of this study is focused on interfaith heterosexual marriage. Imahori and Cupach (2005) argue that married partners “have established significant relational identity” (p. 207). Therefore, participants in the study were required to be married given that the partners’ relational identity should be deeply established in the marital union. Likewise, the author considered a span of a minimum of two years to be a reasonable length of time for marital partners to have experienced and attempted to negotiate intercultural conflict stemming from religious differences. In addition to
participants classifying their marriage as interfaith, the second criterion also established that both spouses needed to be affiliated to an established religious belief system, even if they did not actively participate in religious activities. By excluding couples in which one partner did not identify with a particular religion, this study was able to centralize its focus and expand on research of existing interfaith unions.

Since this is a preliminary study of interfaith marriages, there were no restrictions on the specific religions partners identified with or the degree of divergence between their differing religions. Participants were, however, asked to identify the religious belief system they were affiliated with and these responses were factored into the data analysis.

Procedures and Data Collection

Upon review of criteria fulfillment, the author then set up convenient times to interview each individual participant face to face. Due to scheduling conflicts, one interview was conducted via FaceTime. Interviews lasted approximately one to one and a half hours in length. The interviews were audio recorded with participants’ consent and held at a location and time of the participants’ choosing. Prior to initiating the interview session, participants were provided with a consent form (see Appendix A), which discussed the purpose of the study and confidentiality procedures. To provide participants with a secure environment to express themselves and minimize social desirability bias, relational partners were interviewed separately.

Prior to commencing the interview questions, participants were given a questionnaire to share demographic information and preliminary information related to the topic of interfaith marriage (see Appendix B). This questionnaire inquired on basic demographic information related to participant’s sex, age, marital status, length of
-marriage, existence of children, education level, and profession. The second section of the questionnaire asked participants if they considered their marriage to be an interfaith union, the religion to which they belong to or identify with, and the religion to which their spouse belongs to or identifies with. Next, the questionnaire provided participants a set of 7-point Likert scale items. These included asking participants to rank the degree of importance they gave their religion or religious affiliation and also the degree of importance of the marital relationship from 1 = *not important* to 7 = *very important*. For the question, “How important is your religion/religious affiliation to you?” results revealed a mean score of 4.2. In response to the item, “How important is your relationship to you?” the average score was 6.75. Finally, participants were asked to list the three most common topics related to religion they discussed with their spouse. Interviewee’s answers identified church attendance and participation (*n* = 4), holidays and religious rituals (*n* = 4), religious education and upbringing of children (*n* = 4), and pressure from social network (*n* = 3) as the most commonly discussed religious topics in their marriage. The responses to this questionnaire allowed the researcher to obtain an initial analysis of the effect of partners’ religious differences on their marriage. Questionnaire responses were not part of the interpretive data analysis. After completing the initial questionnaire, the author began the interview with the use of a semi-structured interview guide.

**Interview Guide**

The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C) consisted of 15 questions directly pertaining to RQ1 and RQ2. The interview began with general questions regarding the couple’s relationship, such as, “How did you and your spouse meet?” and
“What attracted you initially about your spouse?” The questions then segued into the focus of religion, asking participants questions such as, “How did you initially feel about your spouse’s religious beliefs?” and “How did your religious differences affect your decision to get married?” After participants answered this first set of preliminary general questions and the questions pertaining to Research Question 1, they were provided with a short critical incident, created by the author, A Family Affair (see Appendix D) to read and respond to. This critical incident was meant to evoke participants’ stories and own experiences in their interfaith relationship. After the critical incident was completed, the rest of the interview resumed. When the interview concluded, participants were provided with a $10 Starbucks card as a token of gratitude for partaking in this study.

Upon completion of the interviews, the author transcribed each interview verbatim and reviewed the data for emergent themes. Both the transcribed data and the audiotaped data were utilized for deriving a thematic analysis. The audio files from the interviews were stored in the researcher’s password protected computer. Transcripts and consent forms were stored separately in a secure locked area within the researcher’s home. In discussing the results, direct excerpts from interview sessions were included. Participant confidentiality was preserved through the use of pseudonyms.

Thematic Analysis and Coding

The researcher transcribed each of the 16 audio files in their entirety verbatim. The interview transcripts were approximately between 10 to 15 typed, single-spaced pages. The transcription time for each interview took an estimated three to four hours for every hour of audio. Thus, an approximate 56 hours were spent in the transcription process. To analyze the interview data for emergent themes, the research utilized Owen’s
Owen’s criteria for thematic analysis of relational discourse consist of repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness. Repetition consists of repeating sentences, words, or phrases within a discourse. Recurrence entails the use of different words with similar meaning. Forcefulness “refers to vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses” (p. 275). During the interview process, the researcher was attentive to interviewees’ vocal modulations and variations to detect forcefulness. The data analysis identifies Owen’s three criteria with the use of italics. The qualitative data analysis software program NVivo was used to augment the derived interpretive analysis. The researcher used the software as a complementary tool to cross-check thematic units with relevant interview excerpts and search word frequency.

After all of the interviews were conducted and transcribed, both audiotaped data and transcribed data were reviewed multiple times. Thematic categories were derived and identified via a constant comparison method (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Tracy, 2013). Interview excerpts were sorted under broad initial thematic categories. The thematic categories were compared and contrasted against each other and further fine-tuned to reflect the collective interview excerpts. This interpretive coding method resulted in identifying seven emergent themes for this study. Detailed result interpretations and analysis are reported in Chapter 4.
Table 1

Summary of Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Spouse's Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Length of current marriage (years)</th>
<th>Children from current marriage</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Alejandro</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>2nd Marriage</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>White Caucasian</td>
<td>College Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>2nd Marriage</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>White Caucasian</td>
<td>Trade School</td>
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<tr>
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CHAPTER FOUR
INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Altogether, 16 participants (i.e., eight interfaith couples) were interviewed for this data collection process. The 16 participants were given a brief questionnaire to fill out prior to commencing the interview, which was guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The interview included a critical incident (see Appendix D) that helped trigger participants’ recollection of how they have managed their own relational challenges in the context of an interfaith marriage. Most of the interviewees declared an affiliation to Judaism or Catholicism. The most common interfaith marital combination reported was Jewish-Catholic.

This thesis explored identity management and conflict negotiation within interfaith marital communication. An in-depth exhaustive analysis of the interview data revealed seven themes. The themes are presented in two sections: Using relational identity to manage religious identity dialectics and negotiating religious and relational identity dialectics in conflict situations. A comprehensive outline of the themes of this analysis is presented in Table 3. Guided by Research Question 1, the following three emergent themes were uncovered: Minimizing Differences, Maximizing Similarities, Negotiating Interfaith Couplehood Culture, and Facing Interfaith Milestones. The fourth theme addresses interviewees’ viewpoints and resolutions to the critical incident, A Family Affair: Grandparents’ 50th Wedding Anniversary.
In answering Research Question 2, the following three themes were identified: Negotiating Turbulence at Major Developmental Interfaith Events, Navigating Symbolic Identity Placement and Participatory Worship Decisions, and Retrospective Relationship Assessment: Dialectics of Mixed Emotions. This chapter presents the research interpretation, analytical views, and the narrative voices of the interviewees. Excerpts and supporting quotations from interviews are identified using the following format: (Pseudonym, Sex, Age, Religion of the interviewee-Religion of the relational partner).

Minimizing Differences, Maximizing Similarities

The first research question asked: How do interfaith partners use relational identity to manage religious identity dialectics? The current literature on interfaith marriage identified that a growing population of individuals marry someone of a different faith (Schaefer Riley, 2013). This occurrence takes place in the face of research indicating interfaith marriages report reduced marital satisfaction and a heightened likelihood of divorce (“Across the aisles,” 2013; Bahr, 1981; Hepps & Dorfman, 1966; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). This first question attempted to understand how relational partners approach each other’s differing religious backgrounds. Interviewees elaborated on how they acknowledged and managed their religious differences with their romantic partner.

In understanding how couples manage their relational and religious identities, a repeated theme surfaced suggesting that although most couples acknowledged the existence of religious differences between them, they simultaneously minimized the extent to which the “interfaith” label defined their relationship. One interviewee described the religious differences in his marriage as, “just another difference you have
on the order of: I like baseball and she doesn't” (Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish). Relational partners did not appear to view their religious affiliations as antagonistic, polarized dimensions of the relationship. In lieu of a shared religious identity, most couples seemed to compensate for their differences by emphasizing their shared core moral and spiritual values. Overall, the effect that their religious differences had on the marriage appeared to be secondary to the relationship itself. Congruent with the stipulations of identity management theory, interviewees appeared to prioritize their relational identity over their religious one. However, based on subsequent shared stories and examples, the research did decode some underlying interfaith marital tensions and dialectics. Within the umbrella theme of *Minimizing Differences, Maximizing Similarities*, two subthemes surfaced: *Depolarizing the Religions* and *Co-creating a Superordinate Spiritual and Value System*.

**Depolarizing the Religions**

The first theme that surfaced in managing religious dialectics was interviewees’ attempt to, consciously or subconsciously, downplay the differences and bolster the similarities of their respective religious doctrines. Recurrent words describing both partners’ religions included: *similar, same, overlap, alike, not that different, in common*. Participants expressed that although they identified with a different religion from that of their spouse, they simply “go through a different path to get the same information” (Irma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian). In addition to minimizing differences, participants highlighted the similarities across doctrines and practices. The following excerpts underscore these efforts:
I'm Christian and she is Jewish, but I think the relationship there is, I mean the Christians don't really object to anything the Jewish people do believe…the way [wife] treated people seemed to me to be really the test of the moral character and that was more important to me than a religious doctrine. If you don't say "I believe in Jesus Christ and accept him as my own personal savior" but you're doing all the things that the historical Jesus would have said you should have done, that was more meaningful to me than saying, "I accept Jesus Christ as my own personal savior" and then spending all your time judging other people and being hostile, and spending all your time trying to kick out the immigrants and trying to find the people that are at the bottom of society now and using your religion as a way to judge them. That strikes me as being more anti-Christian than being Jewish and not accepting, and not taking the interpretation of what most Christians would say it meant to be Christian.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

If you think about it, Judaism is the Old Testament, it’s part of my religion as well, so they just didn't move on to the Christian part (laughs). So because of the overlapping, it's probably easier…I mean the last supper was a Seder, Passover Seder. So some of the things are correlated to each other.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

Judaism and Catholicism are very close together, they're very similar. From my perspective, the difference was that the Jews don't believe in Christ as the Messiah. They believe the Messiah's coming, but they don't particularly label Christ who happened to be Jewish as the Messiah. And the Catholics pretty much have Christ as the Messiah, but a lot of the practices, the devotion to family, and to faith, and to the church and to all the other things that Jews and Catholics are both very devoted to, it's identical… Catholicism and Judaism, they line up like this (put hands at similar levels), the only thing really, other than maybe some of the sacraments and things are the Jews don't identify with Jesus as their Messiah.

(Alejandro, Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic)

Even though there are some fairly dramatic differences between Judaism and Catholicism or any Christian religion, the bottom line is, both of those religions still believe in God. They still believe there is a God. They still believe there is a way you should lead your life.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

Christian and Jews aren't that much different, except Jesus. Everything else is pretty much the same. You start going way different, a Baha’i and a Muslim or you start going way different in religion, where you're not even just talking
about Christ. Cause with Jews and Christ, Christians and Catholics at least it's the same God.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian)

I mean in my mind, Christianity's Christianity. I don't know the difference between a lot of them, maybe the Mormons are a little bit different. They fall into Christianity. But in my mind Catholicism, Methodist, Christian, it's all the same stuff.

(Charles, Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic)

Based on the data collected and highlighted from interviewees, there appears to be a pattern of enhancing the similar attributes across their respective religions. In bridging their religious beliefs, couples do not accentuate the degree of difference that exists in their belief systems. Additionally, in an attempt to downplay the differences across their religious belief systems, a second theme emerged. The theme Co-creating a Superordinate Spiritual and Value System describes the process through which the interfaith couple unites to create a third culture of spiritual value that underscores their shared moral and spiritual guidelines for behavior.

Co-creating a Superordinate Spiritual and Value System

During the beginning stages of each interview, when discussing the weight of religious differences on their relationship, most couples indicated that these had minimal or no effect within their marriage. A key motif that echoed among the interviewees was that religion was not at the center of their relationship. Repeated words and phrases in reference to this idea included: not the center/centerpiece, non-issue, not important to the relationship, does not matter to the relationship, not an issue in the relationship. In speaking about how their religious differences have factored into their marriage, Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian) mentioned, “It honestly never came up, it wasn’t
relevant to what we did on any kind of basis so I don’t think it mattered.” Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) said that religion was “not the center of our marriage” and offered the following response:

For me it's not like, "Ok this has to be the center of our marriage." It's just like we're adults, we like each other, we have daughters, we have a common, a commonality when it comes to what we like to do or not do so, I guess we're ok.

Most of the couples interviewed seemed to be unfazed by their religious differences. In talking about the bond between him and his wife, Charles (Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic) described, “She's my best friend. I don't think going to, in my mind, going to church doesn't have anything to do with that.” Likewise, when asked why he thought religion had not been a big issue in his marriage, Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic) stated that religion was not a priority in the relationship. A similar statement was echoed by Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) who expressed, “It’s not wrapped up in part of us…so it’s not a centerpiece to our relationship and that seems to be ok for both of us.”

Most couples referred to their differences in religious beliefs as “just one more issue” (Marcus, Age 49, Christian-Jewish) or difference that would usually surface in a marriage. Rather than being at the center of their marriage, the “religion issue” formed only one secondary part of the relationship. In reference to their differences, Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian) called these, “just one piece of the pie,” reiterating that they were not the defining factor in the relationship. Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) echoed the sentiment and referred to the religious differences in her marriage as just “one facet” of the relationship. Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) also described her religious differences with her spouse as “one aspect” of a “multi-
faceted” relationship. The following interview excerpts also support the subordinate nature that religious differences held in the interfaith marriage:

For us I think it just means, umm, (long pause), I like baseball, she's not so into baseball. She'd like to hike more, I don't like hiking so much. She'd like to do camping, I don't like camping. And we also have different religious faiths but that's probably not as important as the baseball or the camping (chuckles). I mean I guess to me it means it's just one of many, any two people have differences, this is just one of the many differences you could have and one that's not important enough.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

The one thing that's missing in an interfaith marriage, there's still a bond, there's still connection. It's just that you don't share the same religious support system for the bond. That's the only difference. The only difference is you don't share that same support system and that support system is the profession of the faith together and the attending of events together and the outreach you get with your church community, you know those things. That's just, missing. It's just an element of the experience, the relationship experience that just is missing. It's not necessarily an integral part of your relationship in my opinion, but it is, there's just a part. It's just very natural.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

The research indicates that within the interfaith marriage, there are two possible explanations for why the religious differences between relational partners take a backseat to the relationship. The first is that the couples were keenly aware of their disparities in beliefs and practices. Disparities that, had they been allowed to take precedence over the relationship, had the potential to alienate the couple. Relational partners may have been cautious of setting off a landmine by prioritizing religion in the marriage, deciding instead to suppress their religious identities. Another possible explanation for why religion did not take center stage may have been in part because some participants did not feel a strong tie to their respective religions to deem these important enough to prioritize in the marriage.
Some interviewees conveyed the secondary nature of both their religious identity and their spouse’s religious identity. Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) referred to religion as, “not the center of life,” and “not part of my life.” However, when referring to her husband’s religious identity, pointed out, “for him, it’s more like a part of his life,” and “his priority.” In speaking about her and her husband’s religious affiliations, Marina, (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian) mentioned, “Religion was never important to me, and it became less a part of his life than it was when he was a kid.” A similar sentiment was echoed by Ernesto, (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) who noted, “Religion was a part of our lives, but it wasn’t a big part. And after we got away from our parents’ influence, we kinda both moved away from religion.” Later in the interview, Ernesto reiterated, “I don’t think these religious differences made such an impact because we were both, we both pretty much didn’t practice religion.” In describing her and her husband’s religious identities, Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) contributed, “neither one of us had religion as a focus in our lives.”

Carolina, (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian) expressed that religion was indeed a formative and integral part of her life but when referring to her husband, she said religion “just isn’t a big part of his life.” Additionally, although his wife did have a strong affiliation to her own religious beliefs, Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic) spoke about religion as, “it’s not the subject for me, it doesn’t really matter.” Jose Antonio (Male, Age 67, Christian-Jewish) defined his religious identity as “almost nonexistent” and in speaking about his partner’s commitment to her beliefs said, “On a scale of one to ten I’d say hers are probably about a two. She hasn’t totally divorced it, but it doesn’t come up.” Based on the supporting responses of most of the interviewees to the notion
that religion was of minimal importance in their lives, it comes as no surprise that
religious identity would not have been a factor for them when choosing a romantic
partner. Even among those participants who did feel a strong affiliation to their religion,
the consideration of religious dissimilarity may have been more of an afterthought when
choosing a marital partner than a requirement. For example, when asked if it was
important for her to marry another Catholic, Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)
conveyed, “I didn’t even consider it. I just wanted to make sure I was married in a
Catholic church.” Even though most interviewees seemingly downplayed their religious
identity or that of their spouse, they also made references to the core moral and spiritual
values they shared as couple that could potentially substitute for a shared religious
identity.

In spite of their religious differences, interviewees were able to relay the moral
values and spiritual ideas they did have in common with their spouse, thus co-creating a
superordinate spiritual and value system both partners could share. One example comes
from Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic). Her and her husband were able to come
together on their shared core belief in God and the quality of kindness. She mentioned:

The fact that we both believe in God, is a great springboard (laughs). Because,
you don't veer off from that. So, yeah, religion doesn't really come, it is not a part
of our discussions in decision-making or anything because I just practice to try to
be a good person and so if that's the basis… It's just being good. Because that's
what God would want. He wants you to make good decisions, be a good person,
be kind to others. And so if that's how you base your life, then how could you go
wrong? You're still really following his edicts or his desires if you're just making
good decisions.

During her interview, Beatriz shared an anecdote of an occasion in which her and her
husband held a garage sale and used the proceeds to purchase tape recorders for a local
deaf school. Although the two of them differed in religious affiliation, she mentioned, “being of a faith, we were very philanthropic,” and consequently were able to pass down those shared core values to their children. She spoke about the garage sale incident as opportunity in which, “that teaching passed on God’s faith without it being interpreted a certain way.”

Amelia (Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish) and her husband also communicated the core belief in God she shared with her husband. In their case, both partners were committed to their spiritual identities and had chosen to worship together in a non-denominational church. In doing so, she expressed that they were able to partake in religious activities together without identifying with the same faith. She stated, “We’re both committed to doing selfless service work in our church—titheing of our time and our talents and we just do whatever we can to help others.” The following excerpts indicate further examples to support the commonality couples were able to achieve through shared core moral values and beliefs:

Again just to be able to honor each other’s paths and just to recognize that, you're both children of God and you just need to, go with the flow and just, I think having the same core values is the most important thing in life. Just knowing that you believe in the higher power, just having that as your background, as your backbone and I don't see where it should really become a problem even in a marriage where the couples choose to go to both churches. It would be nice if they could come together at certain times, but I just feel that as long as there is that spiritual side to the relationship, I think it's a good thing.

(Amelia, Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish)

I think with us it's been much less of an issue because look, do we both believe in God? Yes. Do we both believe in heaven? Yes. So it's been our beliefs or the base of our beliefs has been, we have strong bases… at the end of the day we both still believe in God and we still both believe that there's a way you should lead your life and that when we die there's a heaven and hopefully we're gonna see each
other there. I mean there are still some core beliefs so it doesn't matter, doesn't matter.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

I guess it depends on how you approach religion. If you approach it as, a set of behaviors and rules, you run into conflict immediately. If you approach it as, a way to inform a set of values about what you think is important in life and how you should, what your behavior should be, not in terms of religion but in terms of everything else you do, umm, that's what I'm talking about, it actually is fairly easy to have, to come to the same conclusions from different pathways.

(Marina, Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)

The marriage is just, more dealing with marriage and personalities than it is religion, there aren't too many religious issues cause we both believe in God, we're really strong to our faith. We trust God and we know God is all-powerful, and good. And so what more do you need to know?...We have the same human stuff that everybody else has in a marriage but spiritually I think we're pretty grounded and we're pretty comfortable in our spirituality and the fact that we have different religions of origin really doesn't matter at all. I think she's a good Catholic, I'm a good Jew.

(Alejandro, Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic)

He doesn't think that you know, it's necessary to go to church, it's necessary to pray and things like that but again the core values, like being a good person, treating others well and all that, that's-you know we definitely have that in common and agree on that solidly.

(Carolina, Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian)

Even though relational partners did not identify with the same religion, some of them had been successful in crafting cohesion between their beliefs and codes for moral conduct. In some cases, the spouses were able to come together in a shared belief of a higher power. In others, having the same core moral character established a foundation for the relationship and bridged the gap between their religious identities. Through the process of centering on shared core beliefs and values, interfaith couples were seemingly able to shelf their religious differences. Having forged a spiritual commonality, interfaith
partners erected a relational shield, so to speak, that would block their religious differences from attacking the relationship. In doing so, interfaith partners were able to then focus on developing and buttressing their relational identity.

**Negotiating Interfaith Couplehood Culture**

In addition to finding a common ground for spiritual and moral values, interviewees described the ways in which they prioritized their relationship over their respective religious identities, thus establishing their own couplehood. In accordance with IMT, relational partners develop specifics rules for behavior during the enmeshment phase of relational identity development (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). Interview responses from interfaith couples support this notion. As part of managing their religious dialectics, interviewees described how they developed their relational culture and established boundaries to buffer the marriage from their religious differences. Under the theme of **Negotiating Couplehood**, two subthemes surfaced: **Emphasizing Relational Culture as Priority** and **Fortifying Relational Boundaries**.

**Emphasizing Relational Culture as Priority**

With the exception of two participants, all of the interviewees considered their relationship with their spouse to be more important than their religion. One exception came from Israel (Male, Age 48, Christian-Catholic). When asked if he considered his relationship to be more important to his religion, he responded,

Well I think, from my perspective, that the best husband I can be is to do what God tells me to do. If I make God number two in my life, that's wrong, cause he provides everything. He provides my work, my health, he provides everything, my essence, and it's not saying that my spouse, she's first in my relationship with other people...and I would want my spouse to be the same way with me, our relationship would have to be number two compared to God.
In response to the same question, the second exception came from Benjamin (Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish), who answered,

> Well look *I don't think, I don't think, I don't think* I've ever felt like I've had to put one ahead of the other. And I don't think I would ever want to be in a position where I had to put one ahead of the other. I think it's a really unfair question. Not, *not*, I'm *not* saying that personally to you, I'm just saying that's a really unfair question. Ask it again… I actually think they're very much intertwined. I don't think I could, I don't think I would have as much faith without my relationship with [wife] and I don't think I would have my relationship with [wife] without my faith. So I think they're not mutually independent.

Benjamin’s response highlighted that he was unable to prioritize one identity over the other and rather, both were intertwined. The remaining participants were swift to identify their relationship with their spouse as taking priority in their lives over their respective religions.

When asked to juxtapose the importance of both identities, Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) noted, “I think it’s my relationship that’s *more important* because I don’t have like very, strict religious beliefs.” Jose Antonio (Male, Age 67, Christian-Jewish) responded in a similar fashion, “Well one’s almost nonexistent so, the other one takes precedence automatically.” However, most participants did not default to prioritizing their relationship over their religion on the basis alone that they did not hold strong religious beliefs. Rather, they were aware that in weighing the two, the relationship was simply more valuable to them than their religions. For example, Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) responded without hesitation her relationship was more important because, “religion for us is separate and relationship together.” Julianne (Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian) prioritized her relationship “one hundred percent,” even going as far as to mention that she would, “give up the religion” for the sake of the
relationship. Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto) realized during the interview her relationship was held as more important and noted, “Well because I didn’t choose a partner who’s Catholic, right? I chose the person above the religion, yeah. I never thought about it ‘til you asked me.” Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian), who had labeled her commitment to her religion as “pretty strong… I think it’s a big part of who I am,” gave the following explanation when asked which identity was most important to her,

Mmm, ooh that's a tough question, but I think, yes. I would say our relationship is more important than religion. But it's very close. I only say the relationship is more important because I understand that [husband] comes from a different religion so his ideas and thoughts and the way he thinks are not gonna be exactly the same as mine. So, I think our relationship should always be number one. You know before religion, even before family, as hard as it sounds. I think you should always put your relationship first, otherwise you risk it suffering, if you put something else first.

Overall, interviewees indicated that in having to compare the standing of both identities, they felt more strongly about the relational identity and were not willing to jeopardize that identity for the sake of their religions. However, a key theme that surfaced in negotiating couplehood was that even though generally religious identities were not prioritized, most partners knew to respect the fact that their spouse believed in something different from what they believed in. In essence, even though interfaith partners minimized the differences between them, it was understood that the fact that these differences existed was to be mutually respected.

Alongside the theme of demonstrating respect to the religious beliefs of the other, the following terms and phrases were repeated among interviewees: respect, accept, understand, be open (about differences), open-minded. In speaking about how he and his
wife manage their interfaith marriage, Alejandro (Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic) described, “We're very respectful of the diversity and we're very respectful of something that's very much the deep part of a person. It's unconditional love.” Along the same lines, Charles (Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic) noted, “You have to accept the other person for who they are and what they are. And they have to accept you.” Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) shared similar expectations in her relationship, “It's just like being kind of respectful for what he believes but that's what I expect from him too, that he has to respect what I believe.” When asked what the most important thing to keep in mind was when managing religious differences in her marriage, Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian) answered, “All the same things that are important to keep in mind in any relationship in general, to be respectful.” The following interviewee excerpts portray the culture of respect, acceptance, and open-mindedness interwoven into the interfaith relationship that allows for it to function effectively.

You have to decide for yourself (pause), what do you think about your own religion? Do you think it's the one and only true and right religion, there's not other way of looking at it, that there is, the five thousand different religious beliefs on the planet, you've got the only one that's right and that somebody questioning that needs to be converted or shouted down or is on the side of Satan? If the answer to that question is yes, an interfaith marriage is not for you (laughs)…I guess [wife] are in the sweet spot where we do feel like we have religious commitments and moral grounding but not such that we feel that the other can't have them.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

Just learning to accept people for who and what they are. You can't take back what you've already learned. You can't take back your beliefs, but being able to come together at one place of worship is really nice. Especially a place that honors all paths. It's very good.

(Amelia, Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish)
Unless you're more open minded like the two of us, we don't care what somebody else's religion is. So that's why we can be an interfaith couple, because I respect whatever…So to me it's just means that we're open about it and to be in an interfaith, you have to be. You have to respect what they wanna do and what they think…The most important thing I would say is if you're in an interfaith relationship, you have to be open about the religion, or it's gonna cause conflict. You'll fight, cause, you'll wanna do one thing and the other person isn't. That's why we can get along. Whether it's interfaith, because whatever either one of us wants, that's what we do. That's how we do it…have to be open minded about the other side. Don't make one right and one wrong. Just make it different. That's, that's, if one's wrong and you're right, you try to push yours on someone else, it's not gonna work because faith is not like chocolate and vanilla ice cream, where you can each go pick. Faith is much more internal, you're not gonna change that in somebody. If they really believe in their faith. So in an interfaith couple, they have to respect whatever they believe. Not that you have to believe it, but they have to respect it.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian)

We've never let our religious differences get in the way of the relationship, in my opinion. I've tried to be very respectful of [wife] and her beliefs and her feelings and her mom and brother and their institutions and how they profess their faith and live their culture…She respects my religion and my religious beliefs but again, I'm not an "in your face" religious believer and she's not an "in your face" religious believer either and I'm not sure if that's out of respect for one another or that's just the way we choose to profess our faith.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

I respect you, you respect me. That's it, that's it. And in that particular context, I respect your beliefs, you respect my beliefs, I don't know how the conflict ever happens… I don't know, my comments may throw your study a little bit off the charts. My answers may be very atypical answers for lots of people…As long as you work together, that it’s an open-minded discussion, that could open up your views, your worldview, the big picture.

(Lucas, Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic)

Compromise, respect, and understand that faith is something that someone has chosen to believe and just because you don't believe the same thing doesn't mean they're less of a person for believing it. And compromise in that you have to understand that the marriage and the union is more important than the individual and you have to compromise and make sure that it works for both people.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)
The *open-minded* part of it all. You can't stress that enough. Like I said, unfortunately, when it comes to religion, people get rigid, close-minded, that breeds problems. Resentments across. It can manifest itself in other parts of the relationship. That you're just not aware of, but that's the root of it. So you gotta be kind of *open-minded* and *respectful* and/or, recognize the other person's differences and/or feelings.

(Jose Antonio, Male, Age 67, Christian-Jewish)

Interview data suggests the interfaith couple needs to manage the different religious identities in the marriage in a respectful and accepting manner, demonstrating open-mindedness to the religious affiliation of the other person. Further analysis of the interviews underscores how that mutual respect in the relationship was first implemented. By establishing relational boundaries for their religious differences, couples were equipped to safeguard their marriage.

**Fortifying Relational Boundaries**

During the interview process, each participant was asked to talk about the religious beliefs of their spouse and their degree of religious commitment. They were also probed on how likely they were to share their beliefs with each other. Interviewees’ responses indicated some ambivalence toward explicitly discussing beliefs in the marriage. When asked about sharing their beliefs with their spouse most participants indicated that their spouses lacked knowledge about or misunderstood their religious beliefs. These answers suggest interfaith partners fortify relational boundaries from religious differences.

When asked to disclose what their spouses believed or label their religious commitment, most participants were largely unaware of the beliefs, practices, and degree of religious commitment of their partners. In one exception, however, the interviewee had
embraced her husband’s beliefs wholeheartedly and would partake more in his religious rituals and celebrations than her own (Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish). At one point during the interview, she expressed that she believed she knew more about the Jewish religion than her husband did. Yet most participants exhibited a degree of uncertainty about the actual religion their spouse identified with, the symbolism behind certain practices, or if their spouse had a strong religious identity. Some participants even had trouble filling out the demographic questionnaire concerning the religious affiliation of their spouse. One example comes from Israel (Male, Age 48, Christian-Catholic). When asked if he supported his wife in her faith, his response was, “Well hopefully we have the same beliefs, so if you do there's supporting, yes.” Similarly, Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) described, “I think she's more Jewish than Catholic now. Cause she likes the beliefs and the culture of the Jewish. Like for example, the education, stuff like that, some of the holidays.”

Amelia, (Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish), who attends a non-denominational Christian church with her husband, expressed some discomfort when her husband introduced her as an “ex-Catholic” at a church function and was quick to correct him, sternly stating she was still a Catholic. Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto) was unsure about whether her husband of 27 years identified with the Shinto or Buddhist religion and if a difference existed between the two belief systems. When asked about the religious beliefs of their partners, participants also acknowledged they were unsure about what their partners believed or simply did not know. One case comes from Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian), who indicated her husband believed the religious artifacts she wears on her bracelet were purely cultural, but not religious, symbols. Amelia
(Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish) gave the following response when asked if her husband’s Jewish beliefs differed to a large extent from the teachings of the non-denominational church where they both worshipped, “Hmm, well, mmm, it’s kinda hard to say, but, you’d probably need to ask him what the differences are and how he feels about that.” In response to being asked to describe his wife’s commitment to her religious beliefs, Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic) replied, “Oh that I can’t tell, no I can’t tell.” The subsequent examples further support this finding.

I don't know much about the Shinto religion or the Buddhist, cause I know the grandparents were more Buddhist, but, I forget whether the father or the mother is more Shinto. I don't know who is the Shinto, whether it's my mother-in-law or my father, I don't know which one…With my husband, I don't know where he stands on those kinds of things cause he just doesn't talk about it, but I should ask, you know…I should ask him more about his religion (laughs). I don't know! I don't know what's the difference between Buddhism and Shinto. There's a difference and I don't know when we go to these places which one is which! Now I should know! I shouldn't think that everything's the same.

(Laura, Age 49, Female, Catholic-Shinto)

You'll have to ask [husband] about this but my take on what's happened as he's gotten older is, his sense of his religious beliefs have become a little broader. Umm, he definitely believes in God and he definitely believes in Christ, I think, he still does.

(Marina, Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)

Hmm, that would be an interesting question to ask him. Because I only see what I see so I don't know how it guides him every day…You know that'd be a good question to ask him too…And I don't know honestly how he stands on abortion or the pill. Yeah I couldn't, I couldn't probably tell you.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

As indicated in the aforementioned excerpts, when asked about their spouses’ level of commitment to their religion, most participants described they were unable to determine it. One participant referred to her incapability to define her husband’s
commitment to his religion because she could not use “the same measuring stick” she would use to determine her own religious commitment (Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto). Her full response demonstrates the degree of oblivion regarding her husband’s beliefs.

You know it’s hard to say because I don’t know his religion that much and maybe, for that faith, that he's pretty connected, I don't know. Just because you know, I can’t use the same measuring stick. Like for us right, I could tell for another Catholic if they’re more Catholic than me, or less Catholic than me right? But for somebody like him who's either Buddhist or Shinto or both, I'm like I don't know what the measuring stick is. Like, are they supposed to pray? Are they supposed to do certain things? I don't know. He's very close to his family and, there's certain things that we do when we go back to Japan...we don't go temple or to the shrine as often as Catholics go to a church, but cause we always go in New Year's and then I guess you go to the shrine and it's like, he was telling me, it's like going to the cathedral, that's the big shrine, family shrine…So we do that, but, because he's not around that a lot, like he doesn't associate with a shrine or a temple here. So, I don't know if that gives you some clue, so I really won't know how, and I don't know if that would symbolize whether he has a close connection or not to his faith.

Interviewees’ hesitation to offer a response about their spouse’s religious commitment signals a discernible lack of communication regarding religious topics. Additionally, since participants were aware that their spouse would also be interviewed for this study, the common response to describing the level of religious commitment of the spouse was to ask the spouse directly.

Although the data collected did not indicate that spouses explicitly agreed to avoid discussing religion, it did indicate they withheld from inquiring about their partners’ religious beliefs. Interviewees’ responses suggest that because partners have differing religious beliefs, they actively avoid discussing their differences in an attempt to ignore them. They may also suppress any cognitive dissonance they may have by leaning
on the idea they share a superordinate faith system to trigger a defense mechanism for the relationship.

In reference to discussing opposing or different views, words and phrases such as *don’t talk about it, don’t argue, we don’t have those discussions, not a point of discussion*, echoed among participants. When sorting out religious differences, Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) relayed, “It’s useless to argue something that we totally think different.” Afterward, during the interview she reiterated her stance and commented, “Just *don’t argue*…don’t even go into that argument.” When discussing differing religious viewpoints with her husband, Beatriz (Female Age, 58, Jewish-Catholic) noted,

We’ve learned I guess over the years to *not discuss* it. It’s just *not a point of discussion*. It’s like going to a party, you *don’t discuss religion and politics*… we don't really argue-it's not really a point of discussion or argument because there will be no agreement.

Benjamin (Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish) expressed an affective reaction to the thought of managing religious differences with his spouse and furthermore, having to discuss those differences. He described that having to navigate through those differences gave him a sense of relational “uneasiness.” Although he claimed their religious differences did not play a role in their decision to get married, needing to acknowledge those differences was a source of discomfort:

My feelings for [wife] had nothing to do with her religion, ok, first of all, so I didn't have strong feelings or less strong feelings because of her faith, so my faith and her faith had nothing to do with how, at least how I felt for her or felt about her or that I hoped that she felt about me. But having said that, at some point, *it is an issue*, at some point there is a discussion and *it is an issue* and it did make me feel a little *uncomfortable* given that we would have to discuss and tackle and work out that difference if we were to continue in a relationship. But that wasn't the driving, that wasn't the first thing I thought of. I didn't think, "Oh my God,
she's Jewish! I can't think she's pretty, I can't wanna go out with her, I can't wanna date her." So that was an afterthought that comes, I think it comes well after into a relationship.

The participant excerpts indicate that spouses may not necessarily prefer to avoid talking about their religious differences. However, two possible explanations for this avoidance emerge. First, partners may not find the need to discuss their religious differences, as they do not believe these are vital to the relationship. Alternatively, the thought of discussing their differences and possible contradicting ideas and beliefs may invite additional concerns or negative affective responses toward the relationship.

In addition to avoiding the “religion talk” with their spouses, relational partners appear to manage their religious identity dialectics by setting boundaries in the relationship. These boundaries refer to a seemingly mutual understanding that each partner will refrain from trying to both convert and impose their religious beliefs on each other. When asked if they had discussed the possibility of one of them converting to the other’s faith, almost all interviewees immediately responded the topic had either never been discussed or was immediately dismissed upon refusal. Interviewees also stated they would never ask their spouse to convert. In some cases, the couple had to deflect outsider pressure if one partners’ social network suggested the other convert or imposed their religious beliefs. When encountering a direct request for her husband to convert by a family member, Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto) quickly dismissed her relative’s boundary breech and reassured her husband that she did not share those feelings nor would she want to impose her religion on him. The following anecdote describes the situation in detail:
I remember my uncle, I think he started talking to him about, "You should get baptized, we should convert you," kind of language, and then my husband told me and I said, "Oh no no no no! How dare he talk to you that way?" I said, "Honey, you don't have to come anymore. I don't feel that way. I'm sorry that my uncle came to you and talked to you that way cause that is him, purely him. I do not share that point of view, I do not think that I force my religion on anyone. Because I think if you want to be Catholic, you'll know. No one has to tell you, it will come to you. And if you don't, that's fine too. I still love you."

Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian) described the overt imposition she was exposed to by her mother-in-law and how she, together with her husband approached the situation:

[name]'s mother, her religion is very important for her, it was sort of an issue for her, that I wasn't Christian, because I'm, you know damned, and my soul will be in Hell, for eternity, which she's told me many times…I've had interesting conversations with my mother-in-law, which continue, like she very very strongly believes that if you do not accept Jesus into your heart you're damned for all eternity, you're a bad person, and that's clearly an issue for her…She'll tell me, "I'm so very sorry that your soul is damned, you'll be spending eternity in Hell." I hear that a lot from her…I don't think it affects us. See what he says about it. That's pretty much the whole conversation, "Your mom said this and this again." I mean there's not much to say. She doesn't do it like every time I see her, so, it could be worse.

In these cases, however, partners were successful at building a strong fort around the relationship that could shield it from external stressors. Additional examples from participants on the issue of conversion support this theme:

I think we might've talked about it once and then when he was adamant, "No I'm not doing it," then I realized well, why should I give up mine for yours? So we talked about it maybe once or twice, it wasn't anything that was a sticking point or something that, if he volunteered great, but it was not something that I was gonna require.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

You know if he would've said, "You need to convert for us to get married." I would've said, "I bet there's somebody else that fits you better." That's like college acceptances, right? (laughs) They don't say, "We don't want you," they say, "There's a better fit somewhere else"…there's a better fit somewhere else, you
know, so if he would've asked me to convert there's probably a better fit for me somewhere else and a better fit for him somewhere else.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

Nope, *nope*. And I'd never ask her to become a Jew. I mean I didn't ask my first wife. *I don't believe in that*. You know, if someone wants to do it, some churches insist on it. If someone wants to do it, I'd have to question their motives. You know, if you love somebody you can love them without being in the same religion.

(Alejandro, Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic)

No, I don't think we did. I don't recall her saying, "Would you ever convert to Judaism?" And if she did my answer would be, "No, I don't feel it's necessary, it's not necessary for me in my relationship with you, just as it's not necessary for you to convert to Catholicism for me to love you."

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

Likewise, participants expressed a sense of relief that they were not exposed to constant proselytizing from the part of their spouse. Most of the couples had an unspoken understanding it was necessary to not infringe on the other person’s beliefs. Common phrases such as *not forcing anything on me, not imposing beliefs, not trying to convince, don’t push*, resonated among participants. Attempting to impose their religious beliefs would be a breach of respect to both the individual and the relationship. Not all participants, however, respected the unspoken boundaries in place. One example comes from Irma (Age 49, Catholic-Christian), who noted:

Mostly what upsets me is when he tries to, "This is the way that you have to do because this is the way that the Lord says." And it's like ok, no. *Don't tell me what to do* or don't tell me what to think because I already know how to think (laughs).

The following examples, however, highlight how vocal interviewees were about not having their partner impose their religious beliefs and consequently, being careful to not impose their own beliefs on their partner. Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic)
appreciated the fact that his wife, “was not forcing anything on me, or vice versa…She is not imposing her beliefs on me or trying to convert me or anything.” The excerpts that follow reiterate this finding:

She didn't try to proselytize you know, try to force views or anything on me. As long as that doesn't happen, it would be fine. Believe what you want. It's fine… Like I said in the onset, I have a "live and let live" kind of attitude. And, that transcends itself into less problems all over the place. I'm not gonna force my beliefs, whatever it might be on you, I'm not gonna allow you to do it on me. If we have that same kind of understanding, we'd get along fine.

(Jose Antonio, Male, Age 67, Christian-Jewish)

Just let them have their own ideas and thoughts and don't push them, or insist, cause that usually doesn't work. Try not to convert them I guess. Trying to convert them would be bad, well, might not be successful.

(Ernesto, Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)

I think we know, we understand that we both believe and I think we respect the belief. Whatever her beliefs are personally, I really am not too much concerned for me, just the fact that she believes was enough and I think that's the way she feels about me. I'm not positive but I think so because we don't discuss it very much. It doesn't really present a conflict, it doesn't present difference, you know, that's the beautiful part of it is, you have that commonality and we don't push our beliefs on each other.

(Alejandro, Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic)

I'll respect you, you believe in whatever you want, don't force it on me. This is what I believe, you're not gonna change me…And I don't push my believes on him, he didn't push his on me. Even the beliefs I have. Even if we upped it one, which we don't. I respect what somebody believes even if I don't believe in it. That's what keeps us together, as far as the religion side.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian)

At the core of managing religious identity dialectics in the relational context, interviewee responses reveal an ongoing, conscious effort is in place that secures the relationship from any possible damage that could result from having opposing belief
systems. In negotiating their relational culture, interfaith couples managed to prioritize the relational identity above the religious identities. Relational boundaries were fortified to prevent the “religious issue” from hindering the marriage. These boundaries then, in turn, managed to offset the impact that belonging to different religions had on the relationship. Due to the delicate nature of these relational boundaries, the research contends interfaith couples may have been wary of sharing their personal religious views as this action may have been misinterpreted as trying to impose their beliefs on their partner. In spite of their best efforts to construct a fortress around their relationship, interfaith partners discovered key situations in which the dialectics of their religious differences managed to seep through.

**Facing Interfaith Milestones**

Although interfaith partners did not perceive their religious differences to pose a significant threat to their marriage, at certain key turning points of the relationship they found themselves needing to acknowledge their religious identities. Having readily downplayed the role of religion in their marriage, interviewees indicated that there existed two fundamental stages of life when they needed to sort out their religious differences head on. The first stage occurred when partners were making the decision to get married and in planning wedding services. The second main stage in which partners were required to address their religious differences came about in resolving how to raise their children. The two delineated stages resulted in the following sub-themes: *Deciding to Marry and Planning the Wedding* and *Coordinating Children’s Religious Upbringing*.

Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto) identified the wedding as the first time her husband’s faith affected their relationship and noted their religious differences came
into play, “then again when the kids were born.” Several participants also delineated these two stages as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

I think the biggest time that it comes is when you’re getting married and when you’re having children…Those are the only times you're making the decision together, that religion affects, so where you get married and if you baptize your children and if you raise your children that way, so once you get over that hump, or that discussion, I don't know where, I don't know where it would play into a discussion, I honestly don't.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

The two we've already talked about, and again I think this would be true for any interfaith marriage. One is the wedding ceremony and how you are gonna go about that and two is the children and how you're gonna raise your children. Those are the two biggest topics. I think as it relates to the two of us, religion hasn't been an issue, in my opinion. It's only an issue because of parents in terms of the wedding and planning and again it was mostly on [wife]'s side, and then with regard to raising children.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

Really the two biggest issues were how we were gonna get married, and what are we gonna do with the kids…as far as conflicts, really just the kids. That’s the biggest, biggest issue. What to do with the kids…those are pretty much the, biggest issues, the kids, where we got married.

(Ernesto, Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)

At both stages, the “religion issue” needed to be addressed, to a certain extent, due to influence and pressure from the couples’ social network on how religion would factor into those decisions.

Deciding to Marry and Planning the Wedding

Most interviewees did not consider the difference in religious affiliation between them and their potential spouse to be a deal breaker to the relationship. As a matter of fact, most of them failed to consider their differences until the time came to plan their wedding. However, some interviewees did admit to considering that factor prior to
making the decision to wed. Benjamin (Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish) recalled having a
cornerstone conversation regarding how their religious differences would potentially affect their
marriage and raising children with his wife before they decided to get married. However,
he also noted that those differences were not a factor in making that decision. His
response is outlined below:

We got married because we loved each other and because we wanted to be
together and because we wanted to have children together and so, the decision to
get married was the first of many, again, that had nothing to do with what religion
we were, had nothing to do with what religion we were and everything to do with
a lot of other things. We had to deal with what religion we were as a result of
some of those issues, the decision to get married, the decision to have children,
but it wasn't the driver of those decision. It clearly was not the driver. And it
shouldn't have been the driver in my opinion.

On the contrary, Julianne (Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian), who formed one half of
the only couple in the study who was not legally married, did note that their religious
differences played a role in them not being married. She identified that a factor in not
marrying her partner was likely the pressure she received from her social network to not
marry someone who was not Jewish. The following excerpt highlights her response when
asked if religion was a factor in not marrying her domestic partner:

Part of it. I think it was just feeling that pressure from the culture not to do it.
That's not why we're not married but it could be a part of it. A part of it. I mean
we've been together so long but there's a gray line, and everything's technically
like we're married cause it's been so long, 16 years, but legally you're not married.
It's more in your head. It’s a piece of paper. But, that could be a part of it.

Likewise, Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) recalled that his and his wife’s
different religious affiliations were “a big obstacle” in getting married. He noted that,
“Both parents wanted their kids to marry in the same faith, so that was really the pressure.
And neither was comfortable with the current situation of different religions.” Moreover,
Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian) clearly stated to her husband that he would need to convert if they were to get married. Carolina’s decision was influenced in part by her family’s pressure to only marry within her faith as well as her desires to worship together and raise children in the Catholic religion. Even though Carolina’s husband did in fact convert to Catholicism, Carolina identified their marriage as interfaith given that her husband’s decision to convert was based exclusively on his desire to marry her. She detailed the following response:

He knew that if he wanted to marry me, *he had to convert* (laughs) and also go to church, every week with me and our kids would have to be raised Catholic. So I made that clear from the beginning, even though we didn't talk about it until we were more serious, but he knew that was one of the things that *had to happen*...I just said, “This is what would make me happy and my family accepting of you.” So, I would say *it wasn't easy* for sure, but it definitely had to happen and, I think he accepted it, cause I think for him, he saw that it wasn't changing him too much that he didn't want to do it so it worked out.

Aside from the exceptions outlined above, most interviewees recalled having to acknowledge and sort out their religious differences in planning the actual wedding ceremony. Because the couples identified with different faiths, they had to agree on a ceremony that was suitable for both partners as well as one that was suitable for both their families. The following anecdotes relay the challenges that the couples encountered in planning their interfaith weddings:

Even our wedding, was a *compromise*, from the very beginning, *we didn't get married in a church*, he didn't want to get married in a church, but I wanted it to be recognized, it was recognized by the Catholic church as a sacrament, so he was willing to go through the classes and we had a deacon there to bless the wedding and the wedding was actually held by a cantor. There's a rabbi who holds the service and the cantor's usually the person who leads the singing, but he has the ability to marry, but *we were married by a cantor and then a deacon* and he came and blessed the wedding and it was held in a hotel, *no one felt out of place*, so from the very beginning we had to *compromise*, we really learned how to compromise from the get go…but his parents still had a hard time. I was like, “I'm
having a Jewish ceremony, what more do you want?” But they still had a hard
time through some of it, like I wanted the unity candles and I wanted the parents
to each light the separate candles, and we take those candles and stuff, his dad
didn't want to have anything to do with, that was a Christian thing, we weren’t
gonna do that. But we still stomped on the glass, and we still had a Jewish
ceremony so, I got what I wanted in certain ways and other times we just had to
say, you know what, the walls can fall down but we're still gonna be married, so it
worked.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

When we got married, we searched for a nondenominational pastor and it was
harder then than it is now. We actually talked with a Unitarian and we had a long
correspondence, said, "My mom's Jewish, my mom's family's Jewish and we just
want a nondenominational." Well the day we talked to my mom after the
wedding, cause I had no idea, cause you're kind of in a fog during your wedding. I
guess he said, "Jesus Christ" 13 times or something and, my mom was furious
and she thought that I actually knew that that was gonna happen ahead of time and she
was so mad at me and you can tell, my before wedding pictures and the after
wedding pictures, her face.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

I think when we started planning the wedding, that was when it started, because I
always dreamed about getting married in the Catholic church, big church
wedding, back then I guess I wasn't too interculturally sensitive (laughs), even
though, you know now I am, and then his parents, his immediate family are all in
Japan. He's the only one here and they all didn't speak English, and then I knew
they weren't Catholic. And then I remember he was so sweet, he bought the
Catholic Bible in Japanese, because we were gonna do the program of the whole
mass and of course he didn't know how to translate it, so he went to the official
source, the Bible, you know and he did the actual translation of the entire mass,
you know for his parents and his grandparents. He had an aunt and cousins and
the immediate family come from Japan. Everybody else who was related to him
was here, spoke predominantly English, so they were ok but still they were not
practicing, majority were not practicing Christians or not even Christians. I don't
know if they were agnostic or I don't know, the other ones here but the ones from
Japan are either Buddhist or Shinto so definitely, I think that was when we started
figuring it out.

(Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)

Even though the interviewees faced unconventional challenges from same-faith
couples in planning their wedding services, they were able to at that point overcome their
differences. Although religion posed a significant obstacle in the actual process of getting married, once the couple overcame that hurdle, they seemingly did not have to address the “religion issue” until they began to discuss how their children would be raised. Therefore, based on these examples, interfaith couples appear to take an explicit approach to managing their religious differences only at certain points in time, rather perceive these as ongoing snags on the relationship. It is possible that because the interfaith couple was able to overcome that challenge in planning the wedding ceremony, the couple may have then began to consider the religious differences as a minor issue that would only present itself on certain occasions. Conversely, because they had already been successful at managing their differences on one occasion, the couple may have felt more confident in managing those differences again in the future. Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) illustrated the following point:

> When we got married, I was turning 30 and my husband was already 30 but we were older so you're kind of already set, *religion's not an important part or not a big part* in our life and so, we definitely wanted to have kids and then the religion thing was already, *we were already past that* because we already had the wedding…so we kinda already went through those conversations.

However, the second stage of having and raising children posed a more difficult challenge to the couple in managing religious dialectics. More so than with the wedding, coming to a consensus on *how* their children would be raised and what sort of religious education they would receive proved to be a more daunting task. The implications associated with decisions on raising children carried heavier weight both in consequence and longevity of results than the implications at stake for the wedding.
Coordinating Children’s Religious Upbringing

None of the interviewees suggested that the religious differences between them and their spouse were a factor that withheld them from having children. Rather, once they had children, parents acknowledged the need to address how religion would factor into the life of their kids. Without a doubt, relational partners identified raising children as the stage in their marriage in which their religious differences most factored in. The following repeated phrases resonated throughout the interviews: the biggest issue, the biggest thing, the big change.

Although relational partners had managed to keep their religious identities at bay from their marriage, the presence of children drew in those differences. Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Catholic) recalled her and her husband’s religious differences “didn’t become an issue at all until we had to figure out what to do about the kids.” Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic), echoed a comparable response in that religion was never a significant factor in the marriage and said, “neither one of us held much importance to the difference until we had children.” Marcus (Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish) described how having children invited the religion discussion in noting, “when we started having kids it's like, oh we gotta figure out well, are we gonna take them to church, what will we encourage them to do? So I think that was the first time that we had to have any discussion about it at all.” Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian), who did not yet have children, projected how her and her husband’s religious differences may factor into the marriage once kids were present. She mentioned, “I can see it becoming a bigger issue when we have kids, like I mentioned earlier. When kids get involved I think it will be a bigger challenge.” With the exception of the couples that did
not have children with their current spouse, all of the interviewees described how their religious differences were an issue that needed to be addressed with the introduction of children.

In some cases the couples had an added pressure in raising their children, which came from their social network. Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) noted that his family and his wife’s family were most concerned about how their religious differences would play into how they would raise their kids. He expressed, “Well obviously the kids, was the biggest thing…they wanted their grandkids to be the same religion.” When faced with direct pressure from a family member, Marcus (Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish) describes the following situation:

My mother remains *uber* religious, she was always more into Christianity than I was and still is…I mean of the issues that we deal with, *the first one is clearly the kids* and what kind of education, religious education they're going to get but the number two one is, how do we deal with my mom? Who, if she got my kids alone, would clearly try to convert them to Christianity and is surely disapproving of the dual faith marriage, but won't openly discuss it.

Charles (Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic), whose marriage was contingent on the fact that he would convert to Catholicism, expressed the extent to which family pressure would define the religious affiliation of their children:

Well that was part of becoming Catholic. You have to promise you're gonna raise your kids Catholic. I think that was even part of the marriage vows, or part the marriage process. Which, to be honest if we didn't have those vows or whatever, I still would know, just the family that they're getting into is they don't have a choice. *They're going to be Catholic whether they like it or not.*

Aside from family pressure to raise the children in a specific religion, Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) recalled facing judgment from people external to the
relationship, such as the parents of other schoolmates, as outlined in the following excerpt:

It's more, *explaining to the outside world our decisions.* And having people being *critical* that they weren't raised in one formal religion, whether, regardless of what it was, they just kinda feel that they should be raised with a religion. And not that it's anybody else's business, which was my contention, but again like I said, I raised them open-minded. They understood differences. They understood more about it because of it. So I think that instead of being in a very narrowed, they were exposed to much more things.

In spite of the social pressure to raise their children in a particular faith, once participants discussed how they would raise their children, they came to either one of two conclusions. They would either raise the children in one faith or expose them to both faiths without necessarily having them practice either.

Among some of the participants, the decision to raise the children in one particular faith did not present a vital conflict to the relationship. For Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto), deciding to raise her children in the Catholic faith was an easy conclusion to reach, as her husband did not appear to have any preference either way. She describes how the conversation unfolded in the following excerpt:

The priest said, well, "We don't mind marrying you in the church as long as you agree to raise, baptize the kids and raise them in the Catholic faith," and then I said, "Is that ok with you?" and then he goes, "Yeah, it's fine." You know so I went, "Ok! I guess we're fine," you know?

Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian) had discussed with her husband her wishes for their children’s religious affiliation prior to getting married. Therefore, there was a mutual understanding of how the children would be raised when these arrived. She details the role that religion will play in the lives of their children with the following response:
I'm definitely gonna want them to go to Catechism class like every Saturday, like I did or participate in the youth group like I did. I think that might be more like quote on quote burdensome because we'll have to, take them and we'll have to plan our schedule around them and everything and right now it's not, that's something that we don't have to think about. So it's kind of more things to add on to the list and knowing [husband], he's all about convenience and not having to do all those things, but I think that's why it's important to set that expectation ahead of time so that he knows that's something that we have to do.

The cases described above indicated an absence of tension or disagreement in deciding how to raise children. However, these examples are isolated in the sense that among the rest of the interviewees who had children, the discussion on how to raise them religiously contained a more significant amount of deliberation. The following passages outline the specific approaches to and conclusions that interviewees reached on how their children would be raised:

Honestly, the more interesting questions you should be asking are about the kids, because that's the issue that's really been complicated for us...We didn't really discuss it until they were pretty existent, I mean pretty big. When they're little it's not really much of an issue...So we had to start discussing how we were gonna present that but in the course of the millions of discussions you have when you have kids about how you're going to do everything...We did discuss what we were gonna do with the kids and just decided that initially we were just going to present all of it to them so that's what we were doing...Because it's a minority religion (Judaism), where we live, we also knew that if we didn't do something there the kids would not, learn anything about it at all...So, we went back and forth on this for a long time. Mostly me. I think [husband] would've gone along with anything, if I had a strong opinion one way or the other but I felt very conflicted asking the kids to do something that I didn't want to do (laughs). Which as my son has pointed out many times is hypocritical. But, in the end we decided that it was important to have the children be educated about Judaism regardless of what they wanted to do with it. If they didn't ever know about it, they could never do it and it is important to learn about religions. Mostly because they're such a huge part of our culture, especially in this country. That it was a necessary part of understanding how to live in the world and interact with other people.

(Marina, Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)

I mean I can remember talking about (pause), I know that we, oh! I can remember conversations that we had when we were raising children about starting them in
some sort of religious practice but *we ultimately just didn't agree on it*. Then we just didn’t [raise the children in either faith].

(Beatriz, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

*We agreed that neither one*, that they would be raised, mindful of both and then they can choose when they wanted to. So it never really was something that we came together with. They weren't confirmed or done anything in my religion so it wasn't fair to do it for his religion. So we just kinda decided neither one, from the beginning...Because our wedding was a compromise, *we pretty much knew our kids would be compromise* as well and, since we brought both into the ceremony, the wedding ceremony, *we brought both into the kids lives*. And I think that's pretty much how we made the decision not to have them one way or the other.

(Emma, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

So *we decided to basically raise our children agnostic* (chuckles). We've given them the freedom to choose. So our thing was, "Ok well we're gonna teach them about all religions, we're gonna include them in the Friday night dinners at Uncle [name omitted]'s house, they'll learn the prayers and the meaning and the message and they'll go to church with me if they want to go to church with me and so we'll teach them about all religions. We've got friends who are Indian and they'll learn about their culture and their religion through their friends and so they'll get exposed to all the different ways to profess your faith in God and then they can, when they're of sound age, *they can choose*, go about how they want.

(Benjamin, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

The religious question was like where are they gonna go to school? Are they gonna play baseball? Should they go to church? Which church? But I think it was such a *non-issue* for us that *it didn't seem like a big issue*. And still not a big issue for the kids, it is *never a source of conflict*. The only conflict is my son would rather not have to go to school after he's been to school. But that's not a conflict between the two of us...our kids are being raised in the Hebrew temple so they have the exposure to the full range of the Hebrew religion and we don't expect that means they're being raised Jewish. We expect that means that *they will get the cultural education*.

(Marcus, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

Well, like raising the kids, what religion were we gonna raise the kids, that was the *big question*. And *we basically said we're not*...both of us were put through the system, and, both of us really didn't like it. So we didn't want to expose our kids to that and actually that kinda has a lot to do with it, forcing them to go to church and religious school and stuff like that...I don't really recall how much we
tried to educate them but I guess what we kinda tried to do is I guess just to be fair and *not to push* one or the other, let them decide, I guess that's the point I was going to, and *let them decide when they got older*, when they can make that decision, or at least think about it…We told them that we were gonna let them decide when they get older and we're gonna basically expose them to both and when they get older if they wanna choose if they feel spiritual, they can go ahead and go that route.

(Ernesto, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)

The excerpts highlighted above from all of the interfaith couples who had children together described a need to tackle their religious differences and reach a consensus on how these would affect the lives of their children. Couples mulled over their differences and revisited their options until they ultimately decided to expose children to both religions and when the children were older, allow them to pave their own way.

Interviewees who listed their wedding ceremony and the approach to religious education they would bestow upon their children as the two major instances in which religious differences needed to be resolved demonstrated, at first glance, to have successfully managed their religious identities in the context of their relational identity.

Throughout the development of their relational identity, interviewee responses indicated that religious differences were not a poignant centerpiece within the marital context and that these had little to no effect in the relationship. When asked about their relational identity and their religious identity, most participants agreed that they considered their relationship to be of upmost importance. To adequately manage their religious dialectics and protect their relationship from any negative affliction brought about by their differences, relational partners established clear communication boundaries in regards to religious topics. Furthermore, when their differences did “spill over,”
interfaith couples had been successful in joining forces to overcome two major religious hurdles in the relationship: Deciding how they would get married and how they would raise their children. The extensive analysis of the interview data in response to Research Question 1 bring to light the contexts and efforts through which interfaith couples wielded their relational identity to manage religious identity dialectics.

Furthermore, the notion that the relationship outweights the religion is explicitly detailed in the interviewees’ responses to the critical incident included in the study. The fourth emergent theme centers on interviewees’ reactions and proposed resolutions to the scenario introduced in the critical incident. The incident is a useful tool to bridge how interfaith partners manage their religious and relational identities and the strategies they undertake to negotiate religious dialectics in a conflict situation.

A Family Affair: Prioritizing Relationship for Family Event

The critical incident, *A Family Affair: Grandparents’ 50th Wedding Anniversary* (see Appendix D), portrayed a possible situation that may arise in an interfaith marriage. This incident described a relational dilemma between the characters Daniel and Leilani. Leilani’s grandparents’ 50th anniversary celebration is soon approaching but her husband Daniel’s religious beliefs impede him from attending the church service. Leilani must then decide how she will manage the situation. Interviewees were given a choice of five possible resolutions to Leilani’s dilemma. If no option seemed appropriate, interviewees were encouraged to create their own solution.

Most of the interviewees identified with Leilani and demonstrated a strong negative affective reaction towards Daniel’s behavior. Twelve of the 16 interviewees chose option number two, or a variation of it, to best resolve the issue. Option number
two read, “Leilani should explain to Daniel how important this event is for her and encourage him to attend.” Adding to option number two, interviewees responded that if Daniel refused to accompany her, Leilani should still attend. Upon reading the critical incident, interviewees expressed their opinions in one of two ways. Some of them could not understand why the situation would be so complicated and felt Daniel was overreacting by refusing to accompany Leilani. Others relayed that the situation would be difficult to resolve in a manner in which both parties would be satisfied.

The most overwhelming reaction to the critical incident was that Daniel needed to prioritize his relationship with Leilani and not let his religious beliefs interfere with attending the event. All of the interviewees agreed that Leilani should attend the ceremony with or without Daniel. As for Daniel’s indisposition on the situation, interviewees could not understand why his attendance would be problematic. A sense of disbelief resonated among interviewees in regard to how this incident became a challenging issue for the couple. Several interviewees noted that Daniel attending the ceremony should not be “a big deal” and Daniel was “overreacting.” The strongest reactions identified Daniel as being “selfish,” “a little brat,” a “pig-headed idiot,” “a jerk,” and an “asshole.” Benjamin (Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish) retorted sternly to Daniel’s reluctance, “She should divorce him. No I’m just kidding. I’m not done reading but that’s my solution. Wow. I think he’s being extremely selfish.” Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) suggested Leilani “smack Daniel upside the head and say it’s not all about him!” Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) conveyed the most animated response to the critical incident. She was completely dumbfounded by Daniel’s behavior.
Beatrix took some time creating her own solution to the situation, only to cross out her answer entirely and instead write, “Divorce!” Her response is detailed below:

Wow. Oh I think they should get divorced and before they have kids. For anybody to be so stubborn that they can't go into another house of worship is, well I personally think it's ridiculous. I wrote divorce. Only before they have kids, this is just gonna escalate, and magnify...He's being an idiot. I don't know how that issue can be resolved...Seek counseling, because this is going to get worse with children, and with time. If he's uncomfortable going into any other house of worship, how is he ever gonna go to even friends’ weddings or anything? What a pig-headed idiot (stern tone). So she needs to go far away (laughs). She needs to run away and find another guy. That's my honest opinion. I say seek counseling, try to work it out, but the bottom line is that doesn't work out. It just really doesn't. I think he's using his religion as an excuse...I mean there is nothing that should tear your family apart. So if this man that you are bringing into the family is gonna tear you away from your family? (frustrated tone) No, there's nothing more important than family. That was a big uh-uh (shakes head) on that...honestly I would say just, get a divorce. It's not gonna resolve and people don't change...This is a bigger issue. It's just a huge, this is a huge issue. I'm sorry, let's be honest here. People don't change...he's bad. Bad, bad, bad, bad!

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

Another interviewee repeated, “Wow that's crazy, wow that’s funny,” as she read through the incident in apparent disbelief to Daniel’s reaction (Amelia, Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish). The following responses illustrate how interviewees failed to see this scenario as a situation that would be cause for conflict:

I don't think this is a very difficult (laughs) quandary. She should clearly go to the family event. I wouldn't be cavalier about it with her partner however (laughs), worry about it later...It's certainly worthy of a discussion. I would like to think that he would be secure enough to do something, go to attend a ceremony, which I think most people have done in a different church, even people who are very religious. But I guess he isn't [secure], and you can't make somebody do that...and certainly laying it on her grandparents is not appropriate. That should not be the focus of the event, their issue. I don't know, I assume most people have attended religious events, I have certainly, I don't think it's a big deal...Yeah, I would say she should definitely attend. He doesn't need to. It would be better if he did but if he's not comfortable, she can't make him do it.

(Marina, Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)
I think she should just attend, (nervous laughter)...that's crazy. I would say number two but if he doesn't want to attend then I would just go on my own… She should honor it, that's her grandparents… It's crazy to me that there would even be an argument about somebody else's celebration, even though his religious beliefs aren't the same, that shouldn't stop him from someone else's celebration. And I would definitely not cancel a trip because it would be too difficult or embarrassing, I would just explain to my family that definitely, he doesn't feel comfortable attending the church service (laughs). To me it doesn't seem like a really big issue. You know, I mean, we would attend each other's family functions, definitely.

(Amelia, Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish)

I feel like Daniel is overreacting and not being considerate of what's important to his wife. No one's asking him to change his religious beliefs, who cares if he doesn't agree with it? No one's asking him to, just attend and support your wife. To me it's not that big a deal so he should just suck it up and go… I'd say it's kind of an asshole move on him to tell her she can't go see her family. I would say, how would he feel if the tables were turned? Is she gonna tell him he can't go see his family because she doesn't agree with what they're gonna do for like an hour or two? I disagree with Daniel, I think he should suck it up and go, making a big deal out of nothing... I mean come on bro! Get over it.

(Charles, Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic)

Yes see I wouldn't be Daniel so I would be her. I would be the Leilani, because she wants to go. She's going to go make her family happy. She's going to the family dinner, the church, and meet the family, everybody come, go meet the family, that's very positive, family-oriented. I think that's very good. And you're walking into a church, who cares? Attend. So they're walking in to the church. I don't see any activity here that should offend him. He's not being baptized. I just, something easy, like don't wanna kneel, ok don't kneel, but at least be there…I think she needs to explain to him that it's very important to attend because it's family, encourage him to go with her, to be open minded. So I think you have to be open minded if you're in a relationship like this. And if he wants to be stubborn and put his heels in the ground, saying he's right, then she goes without him. I really don't believe you should discount your own beliefs for somebody else's. There has to be a compromise. So she's happy to go, so he would rather her stay home and not go see the grandparent's 50 years of marriage? So just because they have to go to a church, so what? I believe that it shouldn't be an argument. They go, he walks in the church, don't do anything too “religiousy” if it bothers you, don't get baptized or go put the wafer in the thingy or do whatever they do at the church that would offend him, don't cross if you're in a Catholic church and everybody's crossing, just sit there. Just don't do anything that would be against what you believe, but I would respect her. And how could grandparents' 50 years
of marriage, see to me that would be a no brainer. I'd be on that guy and say, "What are you doing?"

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)

In addition to not understanding why Daniel would put Leilani in a difficult situation, some interviewees reasoned that the importance of the event alone should compel Daniel to attend. For example, Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) referred to the fact that, “It’s an important event that is gonna happen with family, I mean it’s not gonna happen every day.” Interviewees noted that a 50-year marriage was a formidable accomplishment that outweighed Daniel’s religious outlook. Israel (Male, Age 48, Christian-Catholic) stated, “She needs to explain what the significance of 50 years is versus the insignificance of going to a church.” Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic) evoked the following response:

This is a ceremony, which typically may not force anybody to believe in something that a person believes in, or does not believe in. I mean a ceremony is a ceremony. It's like, say you got a wedding ceremony for your friends, for your family, who happen to have different religious beliefs, or a funeral where the family or friends, tend to have you know, different beliefs and refusing to go to those ceremonies is pretty silly. That's how I see it. The ceremony would not, should not conflict with your own beliefs. So number two, just join the ceremony, I mean to go together, that's it…This husband here, Daniel, I don't see the point of refusing to go.

(Lucas, Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic)

Although for several interviewees, the situation was a “no brainer,” others felt more conflicted about the proper resolution. Upon reading through the critical incident, some interviewees labeled the incident as being “tough” or “difficult” to resolve. Three interviewees expressed, “This is a tough one!” once they had completed the reading. Israel (Male, Age 48, Christian-Catholic) highlighted, “I understand his concern but I also understand hers.” Seemingly, some of the interviewees who were torn on choosing
the best solution identified with Daniel’s position, claiming they too had felt uncomfortable attending their spouse’s religious services in the past. Others identified with Leilani because they had received similar refusals from their own partners when inviting them to attend specific religious events. Therefore, they had previous experience and knew the situation should be handled delicately. The interviewee excerpts that follow address the careful approach necessary to resolve the situation effectively:

She should explain to the grandparents his beliefs stop him from attending the ceremony, tell them that he probably will not come to the ceremony and why, that way they don't feel like it's them, or that he doesn't care for them and then I would tell her that she should still negotiate with Daniel about her going. I think they both should go to Veracruz but he doesn't have to be in the ceremony and then she could still ask him, "Is it ok that you come for them group photo after the ceremony and all the partying after but just miss the ceremony? Is that ok with your religion?" And see where that goes, I mean he might still be, not happy but, again, it's something that, it's a difficult one.

(Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)

Hmm oh my gosh! (sighs) I mean it's kinda tough on both parties, Leilani and Daniel but I think, I could see this happening in our situation. In mine and [husband]'s situation too. Right now he just makes an effort and just goes most of the time but sometimes I'll say, "Oh you don't have to go to this one," you know and be respectful of him wanting to stay home but I think in this case because it is a 50th wedding anniversary, it's such a big event, I would say that (shaky tone), you know she should #2, should explain to Daniel how important the event is to her and encourage him to attend with her, only because he might not know that it’s that important and, it's gonna be a great party, it sounds like (laughs), so I'm sure he would have fun, although I mean if he feels uncomfortable with this situation, definitely I would encourage him to express that to her, but I think just start that dialogue because often times people will just jump to, "Oh I won't go," or "I'll just tell him not to go and I'll just go by myself" and I think it's a good good opportunity for them to get to know each other more and how it affects them, because at the end of the day, I would think that you would just want to make your significant other happy, so if it's that important to Leilani I think that Daniel would understand and go with her. But if he feels so uncomfortable that he doesn’t want to go then she should understand as well. But either way I think Leilani should go (laughs).

(Carolina, Female, Age 28, Christian-Catholic)
Although some interviewees saw a very simple solution to the incident and could not fathom Daniel’s predicament, others knew to approach the situation with more sensitivity and consideration. However, the emerging theme among the responses to the critical incident was that this situation required Daniel to give precedence to his relational identity over his religious identity. In accordance with the emergent themes for Research Question 1, responses to the critical incident further corroborated the findings that interfaith partners effectively manage the dialectics of their religious identities by deemphasizing these next to the relational identity. The following selections from the interviews echo the importance given to the relational identity over the religious identity:

I’m a number 2 man. I think *when something means so much to someone*, they should at least let their spouse now, "This really means a lot to me and it would mean a lot to have you there." Then he could choose whether he's *uptight* or not. So that's the solution I'm gonna go with, because that's what I would do. And we've had situations like that, not in this marriage. My first marriage but we really wanna go and I think he should just *buck up*, you know. And then he can always say, "No, but you can go by yourself."

(Alejandro, Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic)

*He should be more respectful of her*, because she explained to him how much the ceremony meant to her family and to her, that even if he didn't want to go, he should be willing to let her go participate and partake in the ceremony with family. Again, if her wanting to go and offering to take him with her and explaining the significance of the event and if he chose not to respect that, then *he should choose to respect the fact that she would go without him*. If it made him that uncomfortable, he doesn't have to go. And if he still said no to even that, then I think they got a bigger issue than religion in their marriage, personally…There's a *lack of tolerance* in the relationship if that's the case. That's sad, in my opinion.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

I think she should explain to Daniel how important it is, encourage him to attend, and if he still doesn't go she should just go and then worry about Daniel later *because if he's not willing to compromise* and do what's important for her regardless of what it is, he doesn't care enough about who she is as a person. That's my take on that one because religion is one thing but when a spouse asks
you to do something and it meant that much, you should be willing to compromise and do things that aren't necessarily comfortable for you but you do it 'cause you love the other person. You have to respect. He's not respecting her and her wishes, I have done a lot of things for my husband and he's done for me that we haven't necessarily liked but it's just what you do because you're married...it's just what you do, and I know that it's his religion, but I'm sure that if he were to talk to his religious leader, the religious leader would probably say, "It's more important to do what's special for your wife." It's not like God's gonna strike him down for walking into a different church. So I think he's being a little unrealistic in this scenario.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

I think the second option was she should try to get him to go and I guess what I think she should do is go anyway, cause it's what she wants to do and then they have a disagreement and either he can accept that she's gonna do it and they'll work through it or he won't ever accept it, in which case the relationship is doomed in a way...It seems like he's saying, "I have this religious belief and my religious belief precludes me from doing something that would be meaningful to you." At least in our relationship, we kind of eloped to get married, but her family had kind of a little Jewish reception. We stepped on the glass, we did some of their traditions. They're not what I believe but it was important to her so I think connecting to her is more important to me than deciding this X religious belief was so important I couldn't violate it...The problem with religion is when it rises to the level of categorical imperative, this is timeless truth, this is divinely inspired, hence there's no reason for disagreement about it and my commitment to this abstract concept is more important than my commitment to the most important person in the world to me...It seems like what that guy's doing is sticking to the religious abstract thing to the detriment of other people and the right answer is that he should bend.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

As described by interviewees’ excerpts, the central reaction to the critical incident was focused on Daniel’s apprehension to attend the church service. Although the choices were designed to elicit interviewees to determine what Leilani should do in the scenario, most responses geared toward Daniel’s inflexibility. Interviewees’ general baffled reaction to Daniel’s behavior supports the creation of the interfaith couplehood culture that is fortified against being negatively affected by partners’ religious identities. Even
those participants who did identify with Daniel insisted the right thing to do was to accompany his wife to the event. Notably, several interviewees also reinforced the notion that if Daniel continued to refuse after Leilani communicated the importance of the event, she should respect his decision and not try to force him to attend. This reaction further supports the theme of establishing and respecting interfaith relational boundaries identified in answer to Research Question 1.

Furthermore, the overwhelming choice of solution number two, which involved communicating the importance to the event to Daniel, demonstrated how interviewees would negotiate the dialectics of relational and religious identities in a conflict situation. Interviewees stressed the importance of couples opening a dialogue when a religious predicament arose in the relationship. The final three themes presented in the following sections further explore interfaith partners’ communication strategies for negotiating specific incidences of conflict. In answer to Research Question 2, the following themes emerged: Negotiating Turbulence at Major Developmental Interfaith Events, Navigating Symbolic Identity Placement and Worship, and Retrospective Relationship Assessment: Dialectics of Mixed Emotions.

**Negotiating Turbulence at Major Developmental Interfaith Events**

Across the span of the interfaith marriage, certain key events triggered relational turbulence for the couple. According to the relational turbulence model, relational turbulence is defined as “heightened emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactivity to relationship circumstances” (Theiss & Nagy, 2013, p. 187). In the context of the interfaith marriage, turbulence occurred whenever the delicate relational boundaries that sustain the identity dialectics of the relationship were rattled. For example, with the birth
of a child, couples needed to determine what type of religious ritual, such as a baptism, would be arranged. In other cases, in lieu of a religious ritual at birth, parents had to negotiate a “coming of age” service, such as a Jewish bar mitzvah. Throughout the relationship, the holiday season and recurring religious festivities presented relational partners with the opportunity to negotiate their dialectics in the context of festivity. Lastly, when couples discussed end of life arrangements, such as final testament filing and organ donation preferences, they realized their religious identity dialectics would play a role in arrangements for interment, cremation, and funeral services. Through an extensive analysis of the interview data, the research uncovered the main identity dialectics associated with each turbulent event and the predominant communication strategies employed to ease the tension. Within the theme of Negotiating Turbulence at Major Developmental Interfaith Events, three sub-themes surfaced: *Negotiating the Uncertainty-Familiarity Dialectic: Birth and Coming of Age Religious Rituals, Negotiating the Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection Dialectic: Holiday Religious Rituals, and Negotiate the Openness-Closedness Boundary Dialectic: Death Rituals and End of Life Arrangements.*

**Negotiating the Uncertainty-Familiarity Dialectic: Birth and Coming of Age Religious Rituals**

As discussed under the aforementioned theme of Facing Interfaith Milestones, relational partners managed the dialectics of their religious identities when coordinating the religious upbringing of their children. In connection, at the juncture of the child’s birth, each couple had to decide if the child would participate in the birth rituals associated with either partner’s religious beliefs. Some couples experienced a similar
dialectic when organizing a child’s traditional “coming of age” religious ritual. In reviewing the interview data, participants’ responses indicate feelings of uncertainty accompanied the coordination of birth and coming of age religious rituals. According to INT, the identity dialectic of Predictability-Unpredictability posits that individuals “experience identity trust in interacting with familiar others because expected norms and routines occur with a high degree of frequency” and alternatively, experience identity unpredictability or uncertainty when “interacting with unfamiliar others because unexpected behaviors occur frequently” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 220). Relational partners were unfamiliar with and unaware of the workings of the birth and coming of age rituals belonging to their partner’s religion. They face the dialectics of uncertainty (or unpredictability) with rituals associated with their partner’s faith and the familiarity (or predictability) with the rituals of their own faith. In the context of this dialectic, the term uncertainty is applied to relational partners’ lack of knowledge (unfamiliarity) about the rituals of each other’s religion. Familiarity, in comparison, identifies relational partners’ secure understanding of their own religion’s rituals.

Interviewees indicated fostering a sense of uncertainty when trying to understand the birth and coming of age religious rituals that took place within their partner’s religion. The following phrases echoed throughout the data: *I didn’t know* or *Spouse didn’t know, I didn’t understand, I didn’t realize, I assumed*. Relational partners realized they needed to synchronize which, if any, religious rituals their children would participate in. However, they were uncertain as to what the actual events entailed. Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto), for example, wished to baptize her children in the Catholic Church (familiarity). Although her husband agreed to her baptizing the children in her religion,
Laura was still mindful of her husband’s differing religious beliefs and wished to know what his religion’s birth ritual involved (*uncertainty*):

I'm glad that he allowed me to have the kids baptized. So he was there at the baptism of the children…I think I just told him that this is what we do and he was ok with that…I think I might've asked him, what do they do in Japan? And there's no real ceremony, cause I'm trying to think, do we even have conversations like, "Well what do the Shinto people do and what do the Buddhist people do?"

Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) resonated a similar sentiment of being mindful of her the rituals that took place in her husband’s religion:

The *hardest* thing was when I sat there with the priest and I wanted [my marriage] to be recognized as a sacrament in the church. He said I had to make a promise to raise my kids Catholic and I made that promise and I really did try. *I baptized them* but they were never formally baptized nor were they named in the church or in the temple which is what you would do for the Jewish religion, you would go and you would give them a Hebrew name and they were considered named and there was a bris for a boy where they’re circumcised, *we didn't do any of that.*

As mentioned earlier in this analysis, to reduce her *uncertainty* of her husband’s religion’s birth rituals and other aspects of Judaism, Emma stated, “*I know more* about the Jewish religion than [husband] does to a certain extent, the holidays, and what things are.” Having taking it upon herself to learn the ins and outs of her husband’s religion, Emma negotiated the dialectics of Uncertainty-Familiarity by increasing her knowledge of Judaism. Emma’s efforts to increase her knowledge of Judaism highlight the dialectical pull of the need for *familiarity*. Additionally, it is interesting to note she believed she knew more about Judaism than even her husband did, which insinuates she obtained the knowledge from an external source and not from him. Thereby, the relational boundaries identified in Theme 2, in which relational partners set boundaries to guard their relational identity from their religious identities by refraining from discussing religious beliefs, remained in effect.
A third example surfaces with Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian). She and her husband decided on having a bris ceremony, a traditional Jewish ritual in which the infant is circumcised by a mohel, for their first-born. Being of Hebrew heritage, Marina found it necessary for her children undergo the traditional religious rituals, such as the bris and later on the bar mitzvah, so that the children had the option to practice the Jewish faith when they were older if they chose to do so (familiarity). There was some uncertainty on the part of her husband regarding what the event actually entailed, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

We did have a bris milah for [son’s name omitted]…So there are these people called mohels and that's all they do. They do ritual circumcisions, so he offered up lots of information including, he thought it was funny to continually offer to do [husband] too as a “2 for 1,” which I presume is the joke he makes all the time cause it makes men uncomfortable right? So we learned from that that even if you're already [circumcised], [husband] would say, ”Well I'm already circumcised.” But he explained that it doesn't matter, it's the ritual, so if the man's already circumcised, you just have to draw blood, which usually, makes guys a little squeamish (laughs).

The following excerpts further support the dialectics of uncertainty versus familiarity interviewees experienced when executing the religious rituals their children would partake in:

This is another interesting thing we discovered, that when we talked about religious school, we were talking about two totally totally different things. I didn't understand that [husband] had gone to Sunday school as a kid. But Sunday school is really like glorified day care, which I didn't get that that was the case, like during the services they take the kids and play games and do stuff like that that was vaguely, you know “religiously” with the kids and that's what he thought it was and I didn't realize that's what it was. In my experience, Hebrew school is school. You pay tuition, there are books, and there's homework and you sit in a class and they pay the teachers. It's not playing games during services…We were just trying to figure out what we were going to do and then starting to register and he was sort of put off by the, I mean it became apparent right away when there
was like paperwork and stuff and we had to pay money. He was like, "I don't understand, why is it $2,000?" I was like, "Well it's tuition, they need books and supplies, they pay the teachers." He was like, "What do you mean they pay the teachers?" So it became apparent right away that it was a different creature. And the big thing was when I didn't realize that wasn't what he had done.

Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)

There's a whole bunch of Hebrew traditions that I have no clue about…but that all entailed more than I thought it would. I guess I knew that there was a bar mitzvah but I didn't know that was two days of Hebrew school every week for three years (chuckles), and my son really did not know that (laughs), I bet.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

Interviewees had to navigate through their feelings of uncertainty and familiarity as they followed through with planning the religious services for their children. To navigate such dialectics, the data indicated that relational partners employed three different communication strategies: accommodation, ambiguity, and evasion tactics. The predominant communication strategy partners used was accommodation even after they became aware of the level of commitment required for the rituals. Accommodation is defined as engaging in complying or obliging behavior. Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic) agreed to let his wife baptize their children in the Catholic Church. When asked if he was “ok” with that arrangement, his response was, “Oh sure, of course.” After having agreed to organize a bar mitzvah for his children and understanding the financial and time requirements, Marcus (Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish) detailed:

We're sort of committed to giving our kids that experience…She's always (chuckles) uncomfortably saying, "So we gotta do a bar mitzvah," "Ok," "So we gotta host a reception," "Ok," "It's gonna be $35 a head," "Ok," "We're gonna fly in 50 people from out of town.” (laughs)
When Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Catholic) and her husband realized they had different ideas about what Hebrew school entailed, she described there was some ambiguity and shock involved with the discovery, but that did not stop them from proceeding with the event:

I think we were just surprised…I knew people went to Sunday school, I didn't realize that's what it was. My whole life I heard them talk about it and I knew they did it. I just assumed it was the same kind of thing, that it was really like school. It was just interesting. Which I guess is why [husband] didn't understand why it was a big deal and why I was so conflicted about whether we really wanted to get into it or not. Plus I don't think he realized how much it was gonna cost (laughs).

Charles (Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic) was the only participant in the study who had formally converted to his wife’s religion in order for them to be able to marry in the Catholic Church. However, they still identified as an interfaith marriage because Charles did not adopt the beliefs of Catholicism nor “gave up” his own Christian beliefs. Although not directly related to a birth or coming of age ritual, Charles experienced the dialectics of uncertainty and familiarity during the conversion process which likely reflected his lack of knowledge regarding other religious rituals. He described his experience throughout the conversion process, highlighting the accommodation communication strategy:

That was a pain in the ass (laughs). To be honest I thought I would just have to sign a piece of paper (laughs). And then was I in for a surprise! Cause I was already baptized and I went through confirmation so I was like, alright I know how to do all this, can I just like pledge my allegiance to Catholicism then? (laughs) And apparently no, that's not how it works, (laughs), you have to go through like 10 months of classes, it was two hours, like every week and then you're expected to go to church which that was happening anyway, but now I felt like I was doing three hours of church as opposed to one. So I wasn't super
thrilled with it, but I did it. So I didn't really complain too much. I'm sure I complained a little bit.

When discussing the degree of involvement his own children would have in the Catholic church, Charles noted:

They're definitely gonna go to church a lot more, well I don't know if I went to church a lot as a kid, I can see them being more religious as children than I was. Like I was, we'll say forced as a kid to always go to church on Sundays with my mom and I don't see them escaping that so, I guess they're in for a lifelong church attendance (chuckles).

Even though Charles and his wife did not yet have children, during her interview, she mentioned that she planned for her children to form part of a youth group and attend Catechism classes on a weekly basis. When asked if she had discussed her plans with her husband, she responded with a tone of surprise, “You know what? Not really. I mean I'm sure I mentioned it but not in like, not in full detail. So, I'm sure I've mentioned it but, I don't know, if you ask him, he might say no (laughs).” This example demonstrated the use of a second communication strategy when negotiating the Uncertainty-Familiarity dialectic. Some couples used ambiguity, defined as the use of abstract language to refrain from elaborating on and disclosing all known information related to a specific topic, to placate the discussion with their partners. Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Catholic), mentioned earlier, had made a decision with her husband to proceed with a bris milah and a bar mitzvah for their son, yet failed to provide extensive details on what the events entailed. Given the tone of her response, Charles’ wife’s intent to conceal information also did not seem to be executed in a deceptive manner. The data indicated that relational partners, although aware of their religious differences, did not realize they were operating from different frameworks of perception. Additionally, because interviewees did not have
prior experience negotiating this issue, given that this was their first child, they had not yet found the proper strategy to effectively manage the dialectical situation. On the surface level, spouses appear to have brought up the conversation to their partner to obtain their approval, however, failed to elaborate on the degree of instrumental commitment required or provide details on what the events fully entailed.

One extreme case of ambiguity that resulted in evasion tactics, defined as bypassing a conversation entirely, is demonstrated in the account of Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish). When determining the religious upbringing they would give to their children, Emma and her husband agreed to expose them to both belief systems but not have them participate in either religion’s birth or coming of age rituals. During the interview, Emma stated that having their children participate in the rituals of one parent’s religion but not the other’s religion would be “unfair.” However, she also disclosed that although she and her husband had reached an agreement, she still proceeded with baptizing their children on her own, as described in the following excerpt:

I did [baptize them] in the bathtub, so it's not official but anyone who has been baptized as Catholic has the power to baptize someone else. It's symbolic, it wasn't recognized in the church and there was no party for it or anything...[My husband] didn't know. I don't think he even knows now. I don't think he really cares cause to him it's voodoo mumbo jumbo kind of thing, it wouldn't matter to him cause he doesn't really see that as a threat. But to me it was important at the time.

Emma battled with wanting to uphold the agreement she reached with her husband, yet still longing to have her children baptized. To navigate dialectical tension, she decided to proceed with the event in an informal fashion without her husband’s knowledge, thus avoiding the issue altogether. Emma’s use of evasion tactics included an intentional concealment to deal with the dialectics of Uncertainty-Familiarity.
Alternatively, a second example underscores the use of *evasion tactics* with both partner’s actively negotiating the Uncertainty-Familiarity dialectics. In order to circumvent any *uncertainty* linked to learning about the other’s religious birth rituals, one couple decided to bypass the issue entirely. Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) described how she and her husband managed to reach a creative compromise that gratified both partners:

> We're so opposite and I don't think it was really even a discussion...we both felt, *we both wanted to do something*...I still want my kids to know, to hopefully understand or know that we believe that there is a God and that if something happens to them, that they're in God's image, I don't know, it was our way of saying, "Well, baptizing is a good thing"...I did research and found something that was non-denominational. Our three girls were baptized by a Unitarian minister...*It was a dedication. It wasn't a baptism*, a dedication of our children to God cause we both agree on something, we both believe in God. So *that was our meeting point.*

Beatriz and her husband were able to navigate identity dialectics by choosing not to follow through with the religious rituals of either partner’s religion. Instead, they reached out to something separate from both religions that reflected their spiritual commonality.

The religious rituals of birth and coming of age celebrations reveal that interfaith partners experience feelings of *uncertainty* and unpredictability because they lack awareness and knowledge about each other’s religious practices. The research indicated these feelings are inherently tied to negotiating these events. In order to negotiate the Uncertainty-Familiarity dialectic, partners utilized three main communication strategies: *Accommodation, ambiguity,* and *evasion tactics*. Although some partners wanted their children to follow in their individual religious traditions, they were conscious of the fact that they needed to consider and validate the religious identity of their spouse. To reach a solution, therefore, some couples discussed the topic and made a choice between both
religions’ traditions. Predominantly, relational partners used *accommodation* to negotiate the conflict. Relational partners also resorted to *ambiguity*, although not in a deceptive fashion, by failing to discuss with their partner in detail what the religious event would involve. Finally, some participants indicated they used *evasion tactics* to negotiate the dialectics. One interviewee breached the agreement she made with her husband and concealed a baptism ritual. In contrast, a second couple also engaged in *evasion* by agreeing to a spiritual dedication, in lieu of a baptism, to validate both partners’ religious views. The following sub-theme discusses a second major interfaith event within the context of the Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection identity dialectic.

**Negotiating the Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection Dialectic: Holiday Religious Rituals**

In the interfaith relationship, negotiating how holidays will be celebrated can pose a challenge for the couple. Holidays and other religious festivities are generally interpreted as social events that foster community and an opportunity to spend time with family and friends. INT assumes “individuals tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationships and experience identity autonomy when they experience identity separation,” resulting in the identity dialectic of Autonomy-Connection (p. 221). Therefore, interfaith partners would want to observe religious holidays with their spouse (*relational connection*). However, because they belong to different religions, they celebrate different religious holidays (*identity differentiation*). The interfaith couple experiences the dialectic of Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection between wanting to *connect* by celebrating each other’s religious holidays but feeling
differentiated in that their religious identity separates them from the traditions and practices of these holidays.

Interview data revealed partners felt a strong pull toward relational connection when celebrating religious holidays, in spite of their differing religious viewpoints. The research found that interfaith couples, although having set boundaries to regulate identity dialectics, thereby enacting identity autonomy, were readily disposed to sidestep those boundaries and lean toward connectedness when celebrating holidays. Interviewees stressed their need for relational connection during these celebrations based on the following repeated phrases: We celebrated, we will go, we decorate, and we merge. Interviewees did not perceive their differing holidays to pose a threat to their relational identity. Rather, it gave them an opportunity to share in each one’s festivities without much conflict. Recalling how they coordinated each partner’s holiday celebrations was considered to be “fun” or “fun stuff.” The following excerpts outline how interviewees fostered interpersonal connection during holidays:

On Christmas Eve a lot of the times we’ll go to midnight mass, sometimes in Polish, which we don't understand a word of…We got the Catholic cross from the Palm Sunday, and we also have a Menorah which we light with the Hanukah candles which honors my tradition as well. We celebrate Christmas, we love Christmas, she decorates the whole house, we have a Christmas tree with, mostly the ornaments she's made by hand and for me it's really special, we decorate the whole place. But those are just the fun things.

(Alejandro, Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic)

I think that's what we first started doing, we started having like a Christmas tree and opened presents Christmas morning...it was the way [husband] grew up, it was his traditions…when you have kids, it's fun to do this stuff for them, so that's why these things evolve the way they have because, it's a blast to create these little bits of magic.

(Marina, Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)
That's when we *merge*. The holiday time is when it *merges*. For us, where we *merge* is holiday time. So, we don't do Passover Seder or Easter dinners, unless we're with the kids. His family celebrates so we'll go there for Christmas. She has the tree and the presents and the turkey and we bring food and we all exchange gifts. I don't have any problem with it. I don't believe in the *Christian* part of it, I believe in the *holiday* part of it. So that's where we pretty much I think *merge* is holidays, big time, and any Passover Seder, Easter, Hanukah, Christmas...when the holidays come up we have to decide which holidays *we're following*, or which holidays we're not following so at the beginning we *did both*. So we *would do* Hanukah and Christmas.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian)

Well the big Hebrew holiday is Passover and so we *do* a Passover thing every year, and since the kids go to Hebrew school, they make a big deal out of the other holidays...and Hebrew holidays she wanted to celebrate, she would, *we just would* and all the Christian holidays are kind of there for you already.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

In order to foster their connection during holidays and religious rituals, couples needed to negotiate the dialectics of their religious identities. Interviewee responses revealed feelings of *identity differentiation* were tied with reconciling their religious holiday traditions. Some interviewees described situations related to holiday celebrations in which they were unfamiliar with the traditions of their partner’s religion because they had never celebrated these. Their responses suggest they experienced *identity differentiation* when they lacked awareness of or failed to understand certain practices. This pattern of identity differentiation among relational partners emerges through the following repeated phrases: *I never celebrated, I felt uncomfortable celebrating, I didn’t know what I was supposed to be doing, I don’t understand*. When asked if he felt comfortable celebrating Christmas, Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) answered:

Not at first, no...*never celebrated Christmas before*, so it was like, "Oh, interesting." And also being raised Jewish, we're taught that Jesus isn't the savior. So, that kind of, in the back of your mind you're usually thinking, "Wow these
people are crazy.” But, let them do what they want…[I felt] uncomfortable, celebrating something that I wasn't really comfortable with. But if you think about it, most people who celebrate Christmas aren't religious.

Interestingly, when asked if her husband had any apprehension about celebrating Christmas or having a Christmas tree, Ernesto’s wife replied with a profuse tone and without any hesitation, “No. He would often put it up. He would decorate it.” The following interviewee quotations further identify feelings of identity differentiation associated with celebrating religious holidays:

It was a little difficult in that some of the stuff, the way our labor is divided up, I tend to take care of a lot of the things that were related to that celebration and I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing…So, there were some issues, I mean stupid little, not stupid little things, they were traditions and we had to delve into them and [husband] didn't realize that they were traditions that were specific to the way he was raised like, Santa leaves presents that aren't wrapped, so we had an issue the first time that happened because I wrapped everything, not knowing, and he was like, "Oh no Santa doesn't wrap presents." So there's stuff like that, that comes up…But it was little logistical things like that, like what a stocking is and how it gets filled and who fills it, and the language that you use to describe everything.

(Marina, Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)

I've asked him to participate in the holidays…And so like, Hanukah, he lights the candles with my mother. If I asked him, if he had to wear a yarmulke, he doesn't even know what it is, he'd call it a hat thing, but if I said, "You know you're going into the synagogue, you gotta wear a yarmulke, put the yarmulke on." He would do it, just because.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian)

Easter mass is always a topic (laughs), because it's pretty lengthy, Easter and Christmas Eve masses are pretty lengthy, the mass is not only three hours long but it's in Vietnamese so [husband] can't understand (laughs), so he's just there to be there. Sometimes, he'll question like, "Why am I even going cause I don't understand what's going on, one cause it's in Vietnamese and two, it's so long and there's no air conditioning in the church," (laughs) and at the end of the day he just ends up going. Because he knows it's important to my family and me.

(Carolina, Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian)
Although some interviewees felt *identity differentiation* when joining in the festivities of their partner, the need for *relational connection* outweighed the feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Furthermore, to negotiate the Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection identity dialectic, interfaith partners needed to find effective ways to celebrate their holidays. The research uncovered interfaith partners use two core communication strategies to negotiate this dialectic: *parallel integrative strategy* and *creative compromise*. Based on the response patterns among the interviewees, couples primarily engaged in a *parallel integrative strategy*, defined as integrating elements from both religions to create a “double holiday celebration.” For instance, Julianne (Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian) indicated, “I have my Hanukah stocking I put up, cause it has Stars of David all over it, I put my menorah up, so [because] the holidays are split, we kinda *merge* Hanukah and Christmas into one holiday.” The following excerpts display the *parallel integrative strategy* relational partners utilized to bridge their holidays:

- **My husband plays Santa at our Christmas party at church, he's a Jewish Santa (laughs). For years we had our neighborhood Christmas party, he would play Santa here at the house because there were a lot of little children in the neighborhood when we first moved here and as well as being Santa, we would light Hanukah candles and share that festivity with the kids…so it was his way of teaching that little bit of his Jewish faith to the kids.**

  (Amelia, Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish)

*We do* a Christmas tree, *we* would put up Hanukah decorations and on every night of Hanukah *we* would light the candle. The kids were like, "Oh wow I get eight days of Hanukah AND I get Christmas?!" But if they overlap, *we* would just have one day, so it was *Christmas-Hanukah*. But they understood what it was and the family get together for latkes and everything for Hanukah…It was funny, one time [daughter], she was young, I guess she was learning about Kwanzaa in school, and she knew she did Christmas and Hanukah and she comes, "Can we do Kwanzaa too?" and I'm like, no. But every year I would go into the classroom and teach the class about what Hanukah was, cause there weren’t always kids in the
class celebrating it, so they thought that was kind of special, that they get to celebrate Hanukah and Christmas.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

At one point she was doing the Jewish, lighting the menorah and observing something or other, I remember lighting a candle, that and something else, and I didn't mind, I didn't care if that's what you want to do. You want to light a candle for some reason on the mantle or the table, at a certain time of the year, ok! I won't stand in the way, yeah.

(Jose Antonio, Male, Age 67, Christian-Jewish)

A couple of years at Christmas time we did Hanukah, the Hanukah ritual. We have upstairs even still to this day we got Hanukah candles and stuff and talked to the children about that. Not much but we did a little bit of that.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

To facilitate the holiday integration, some couples would downplay the religious component of the holiday and focus on the celebration and community elements. The following examples support this notion:

All of the decorations, they're not religious-based, they're more holiday-based. I have snowman, I have the garland, I have lights up, the fireplaces are lit, I have stockings that are hung for him, I have mine with the Hanukah stocking that I found. So the house is decorated festive, but not religious, there are no crosses, no Jesuses it's not religious. It's more of the culture and fun side, I guess. And then I put the menorah out... We don't have blow up things, Santa Clauses. We have snowman I put out, most of my decoration includes little dreidels and little, rabbi little stuff, but then it has colorful lights, in the house and the decoration, pinecones, stuff like that. But no Santas and definitely not the religion side, no crucifixes.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian)

In terms of the Jewish holidays, there's only really like three Jewish holidays that we paid attention to with the kids at all, maybe four. And it was all food-based. We basically did things that were home-based holidays, so there were things to do in the home, and honestly, our observance of it was mostly related to the foods that you make (laughs) on those particular holidays. You know we made hamantash for Purim, that there's not a lot of conflict to it (laughs).

(Marina, Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian)
When it comes to Christmas, we celebrate Christmas, *without saying prayers* and stuff but buying people presents and taking presents to people, all that sort of thing but it has very little to do with the *religion*, it's just the theme of the holiday season…it's a *fun* time, people like it.

(Jose Antonio, Male, Age 67, Christian-Jewish)

Although they longed for *relational connection* during the holidays, some couples had a difficult time reconciling certain elements of their spouse’s religious traditions. They engaged in *creative compromise*, defined as incorporating elements of both religions but removing the aspects that cause discomfort. Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) stated, “I don't do Santa, I don't do red and green, it's winter, snowman, it's a winter holiday. Everything is blue and white.” Julianne (Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian) told her partner she felt “uncomfortable” having a Christmas tree in the house. She also recounted the following anecdote regarding their holiday negotiation tactics:

He really *really* wanted to put lights on the house. I had a hard time with it. Because to me that's symbolic of being Christian. The *Christian* part of the holiday. So I agreed as long as it wasn't red and green. I said, "Put up any colors you want, just don't make it red and green." And then I'd be ok with it. So that was the *compromise*. So he put up white lights everywhere. I was happy. It doesn't have to be white and blue. It doesn't have to look like a Jewish house, cause I know that's what Jewish people do, they'll have white and blue. We didn't have to go that far. I just said, "*Don't make it look too Christian.*"

Inversely, she recalled her partner’s disposition to certain practices of her religious traditions:

He doesn't want to do Hanukah gifts but *we do Christmas*. So we do Christmas Eve at his daughter's, the kids, the grandkids, all go to his daughter's. She's got the tree, I wrap all the presents, we got lots of kids, and the grandkids all go to her house and we do a big Christmas Eve at her house and then they all go away and they'll do Christmas with their own families and then we’ll come home and we do Christmas gifts to exchange. Cause I tried for years to *push the Hanukah on him*, "It's Hanukah, you should give me a gift." Just, he's not into that.
In the interfaith marriage, each partner’s religious holidays provide the couple with the opportunity to connect, bridging the gap between their religious identity dialectics. Relational partners experience the Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection dialectic when trying to connect with their partner by celebrating their religious holidays, but feeling uncomfortable with and unaware of practices and logistics associated with the celebrations. The research demonstrates, however, that rather than be separated by their relational boundaries, partners are able to convene near-seamless holiday celebrations. Although they may segment their religious identities from their relationship on a daily scale, religious holidays and rituals double as a loophole to their boundaries. In this context, interfaith couples pull down the curtain of their interfaith couplehood culture and allow their religious identity dialectics to enter. In contrast to the birth religious rituals discussed previously and death rituals, discussed in the following section, holiday rituals occur on a regular basis. The frequency and predictability associated with these festivities may explain why relational partners demonstrate skillful use of communication strategies to negotiate their dialectics. Although relational partners experience emotional vulnerability at their early years of marriage, they have worked out some creative communication strategies and celebration rituals to manage the stressors of religious identity priority versus relational identity priority. Finally, interviewee responses underscored that the end of life triggers identity dialectics. The following section discusses how interfaith partners negotiate the identity dialectic involved in the final major interfaith event, death.
Negotiating the Openness-Closedness Boundary Dialectic: Death Rituals and End of Life Arrangements

While relational partners worked hard at balancing their Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection dialectics to negotiate holiday celebrations, talking about death and end of life arrangements reinforced their dialectics. According to relational dialectics theory, the dialectic tension of Openness-Closedness captures the tension of perceiving the “costs and benefits associated with candor and discretion” and “the vulnerability and risk inherent in disclosure” with the potential relational benefits of self-disclosure (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 140). This study suggests there exists an Openness-Closedness identity boundary dialectic operating between interfaith partners when discussing the end of life. When interviewees were asked if there were any religious “hot buttons,” conversations that would unleash disagreement, in their relationship several of them reported they had begun to have discussions about preparing for death. None of the interviewees who brought up death as a “hot button” had been able to resolve the issue. Rather, the conversation appeared to be “in progress.”

When discussing end of life arrangements, interviewees revealed their intergroup religious identity dialectics were an important factor in reaching a solution. Because certain religions had strict guidelines for interment, cremation, and funeral services, relational partners found a need to discuss the topic. Therefore, one partner would bring up the topic to find out the wishes of the spouse upon death. Repeated phrases that echoed in the responses were: *I needed to know, I asked, I found out, I have told, we had to discuss.* For example, Laura (Female, Age 49 Catholic-Shinto) initiated the conversation (*openness*) because she wanted to know if her husband’s wishes were to be
buried alongside her, or if he wanted a traditional service and disposal that was in accordance with his religious beliefs. She detailed her situation as follows:

My mom already bought plots for us…she bought it for my husband and me, but I don't know if he wants to be cremated. I don't know if he wants to be, like what ceremony. Is it gonna be Shinto? Is it gonna be Buddhist? I know it's not gonna be Christian, probably not, right. And as part of that ceremony does it have to be in Japan? Does it mean that he can't be in the ground, I don't know, so I think that's gonna be a hot topic in a way. A topic but not hot because I think I would go with what his religion says and his parents want and then I would just make sure that I can visit wherever it is that he will be interred.

One interviewee indicated that finding a cemetery that would allow both interfaith partners to be buried in would be a challenge. Since her partner was not Jewish, they would need to find a Jewish cemetery that would allow him to be interred there alongside her. Dealing with the Openness-Closedness dialectics, she recounted the situation:

We have a topic that's not a hot button, I don't know if you've had, something that isn't resolved yet. Uh where we'll be buried. That's an issue. That's an issue. For us. Different faith. That's an issue…That's an issue, that's not resolved yet…So I needed to know if [partner] would be buried in a Jewish cemetery and could we at the cemetery. So we went to the cemetery when my mom died and I asked, “could we be buried there?” Well now it's a reformed cemetery. So he could be buried there if we choose to. And now they put urns there, but they don't cremate. But they're reformed so you go get cremated somewhere else, you can bring an urn in. That's an option. We went and looked at it. So yes I found out he wants to be cremated. Yes I know that's what he wants, I'm willing to cremate him, if he dies first. "Where" is an issue. But we probably will not bury him in the Jewish cemetery. He would like to be at sea, which I have a hard time doing. I have a hard time just throwing somebody in the ocean, I've never done it…So I don't know, but that would be probably a conflict we haven't resolved…It's a little gray because we're different religions and so it's different than just saying, “oh we're both going in the ground.” Even putting my loved ones in the ground for religious reasons, like my grandmothers, you have to be buried within a certain amount of time, you have to have a certain casket, you can't be embalmed, and all these Jewish rules you have to follow. I do those for my loved ones, I know what the rules are. So I can do a Jewish service…but, if he wanted something else, I would have to learn.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Christian)
Although couples understood they had to reach a consensus regarding their end of life arrangements eventually, an analysis of the interview data demonstrated that some partners were hesitant to engage the conversation and did not offer concrete responses (*closedness*). The following phrases were repeated among participants: *isn’t resolved yet, it’s an issue, I don’t know, we didn’t talk, he didn’t say, all he says.* The fact that relational partners had not yet been able to resolve the issue and some were hesitant to discuss it identify the use of two communication strategies to negotiate the Openness-Closedness identity boundary dialectic: *Temporary acquiescence* and *dodging postponement*.

When recalling the conversation regarding death rituals and end of life arrangements, some partners appeared to engage in *temporary acquiescence*, defined as reluctantly agreeing to a particular decision for the time being, in order to end the conversation. Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) indicated he had agreed to being cremated but not buried when he and his wife discussed their end of life arrangements. His response is provided in detail below:

> The main topic probably nowadays is mostly about *what happens when you die*…Now there might be, in the future, there might be some *issues* with death, but, you're dead, who cares…Because my grandparents and my dad, he's buried in a Jewish cemetery and I'm not, actually I'm not sure what [wife]'s does in her family. But the talk now is cremation and no burial.

Although Ernesto and his wife appeared to reach an agreement, his response suggests the conversation was still pending and no formal decision had been made. The following excerpt echoed a similar dilemma:

> We’ve unfortunately been to some funerals and there was a point where *I asked him*, because I know for his culture and his religion, you cremate, and I said, "So do you want me to bring your remains home? Where all the ancestors are?" and at
one point in our marriage he said yeah. I'm like ok, I'll remember that. And then later on many years later he goes, "No, I'll be with you." I'm like ok, and then now we're getting to the time in our lives where my sister is saying, you better do your will. And so I said, oh ok, I will ask him that question again cause he keeps changing his answers and that I think has to do with faith, so it's like, the rituals, the birth, the death, the celebrations so those all have to be talked about in an interfaith...I don't know, cause like I said we're gonna be doing our will, so I don't know if he goes before me or after me or whatever, what his wish is as far as the ceremony for burial.

(Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)

Furthermore, some participants relayed that their partner was unable to provide a tangible response as to what their wishes were regarding funeral services or disposal of remains. These partners were engaging in dodging postponement, defined as refusing to provide a direct answer in order to postpone having to make a decision. Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) recalled how her husband was unable to discuss his wishes on the matter:

We were actually talking last night cause we were going over our wills and talking about what we want to happen with body parts, I mean all the hard conversations, but we didn't talk, we talked about his mom cause she's the only parent we have left, and what kind of service but he didn't, he didn't really say, he couldn't decide. I said, "Well do you want your body parts donated? He goes, "I don't know," I go, "Wait, you have to be the one who decides, don't put that on me."

Similarly, Emma's (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) husband dodged the topic and did not settle on one particular decision:

I have told him and he kinda says ok about burial, interment, and I told him, I said, "I'm not putting you in a Jewish ceremony" and I personally don't like interment, I believe in cremation, so we had to have a discussion because reformed Jews do allow cremation, most traditionally do not. It's a 24 hour post-deceased period that you are buried and I know that I'm going to have to fight with his family for cremation and somehow disposal, I'm not gonna keep the ashes or anything and all he says is, "I'll be gone so it doesn't matter to me." And so I know that I'll probably be fighting against what the family's wishes are on that. But, I know my parents too, in Catholicism, also there's not a whole lot of
cremation and it's more interment and, I don't think they would fight [husband], they would just say, “[husband] kinda knows what Emma would want” and go with that.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

In reviewing interviewee responses regarding death and end of life arrangements, an interesting gender difference dynamic emerged in the data. The female interviewees appeared to be the ones to initiate the conversation as they felt they would be responsible for executing the plans. A simple explanation for this is that on average, women outlive men. Among the couples who participated in this study most of the wives were younger than their husbands. Furthermore, the female participants who initiated the conversation did so with the purpose of learning what their husbands’ would want to happen to their remains after death and the religious service they would like. Echoing the theme of Fortifying Relational Boundaries, the research shows that interfaith partners are not knowledgeable about the doctrines and practices of each other’s religions. Therefore, given the lack of information they had about each other’s religions, partners would want to ask each other what religious ceremony and remain disposal they would want in order to be able to fulfill their wishes.

The topic of planning for death and negotiating end of life arrangements seemed to reinforce the relational identity dialectic boundaries of the interfaith couple. Although couples were aware of the need to make specific decisions regarding interment and funeral services, the research suggests that some partners were hesitant to engage the conversation. Others, particularly female participants, initiated the discussion to learn what their husband’s final wishes were. Because all of the couples that had discussed the topic failed to reach an agreement, the data identified that partners used temporary
acquiescence and dodging postponement communication strategies to avoid the conversation.

Since most of the interviewees had grown adult children, they had long overcome the conversations of birth religious rituals. Couples had also learned to skillfully negotiate holidays and religious rituals, due to their annual occurrence. However, in addition to the uncertainty associated with death in general and the unpredictable nature of death itself, couples either did not know how to negotiate their dialectics or did not want nor care to do so. In summary, interfaith couples negotiate the prevalent identity dialectics occurring at major developmental events throughout the course of their relationship. The research identified the key communication strategies employed to ease the turbulence of each major interfaith event. These major communication strategies include the use of: accommodation, ambiguity, evasion tactics, parallel integrative strategy, creative compromise, temporary acquiescence, and dodging postponement. A comprehensive list of these strategies and brief descriptions can be found in Table 2. Alternatively, the following theme explores how interfaith couples navigate through the dialectics of their religious identities on the micro level of recurrent events and practices.
Table 2

*Communication Strategies in Negotiating Religious and Relational Identity Dialectics*

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<th>Communication Strategy</th>
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**Theme 5: Negotiating Turbulence at Major Developmental Interfaith Events.**

**Sub-theme 1: Uncertainty-Familiarity Dialectic: Birth and Coming of Age Religious Rituals**
- **Accommodation**: Engaging in complying/obliging behavior
- **Ambiguity**: Using abstract language to refrain from elaborating on and disclosing all known information related to a specific topic
- **Evasion tactics**: Bypassing a conversation in its entirety

**Sub-theme 2: Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection Dialectic: Holiday Religious Rituals**
- **Parallel integrative strategy**: Integrating elements from both religions to create a “double holiday celebration”
- **Creative compromise**: Incorporating elements of both religions but removing the aspects that cause discomfort

**Sub-theme 3: Openness-Closedness Boundary Dialectic: Death Rituals and End of Life Arrangements**
- **Temporary acquiescence**: Reluctantly agreeing to a particular decision for the time being
- **Dodging postponement**: Refusing to provide a direct answer to postpone making a decision
Navigating Symbolic Identity Placement and Participatory Worship Decisions

In addition to celebrating different birth rituals, different holidays, and holding different funeral services, interfaith couples need to navigate daily occurrences in their relationship that arise from their religious identity dialectics. One of these occurrences includes coordinating the display of religious artifacts in the home. Couples also had to negotiate the dialectic of wanting to support each other’s faith by joining them for religious services, but not necessarily feeling comfortable when doing so. The following two subthemes explore how interfaith partners navigate through these issues: Spatial Dialectic: Religious Artifacts and Participatory Decision Dialectic: House of Worship.

Spatial Dialectic: Religious Artifacts

In the interview process, participants were not asked any questions that specifically pertained to religious artifacts. However, although not a prevalent topic among interviewees, some did allude to the fact that an interfaith couple will have to resolve how religious artifacts will be displayed in the home. Relational partners highlight that some conflict may arise from differing views on what religious artifacts will be in the home, where these should be displayed, and negotiating the size of the artifacts (spatial dialectic). As some of the interviews were held in the participant’s home, the author was able to witness first-hand the artifacts and placement of these that were discussed during the interview. One couple in particular detailed a conflict that arose from the placement of religious figures in their home:

So my parents are really adamant about having Jesus statues and Mary statues (laughs) and crucifixes around the house and actually, when we bought this house together, my dad wanted to buy us like a huge (laughs) Last Supper painting and put it in the house but [husband] was very very adamant about saying no. One and then also when he put up the little altar with the small statues, my dad wanted to
place it in the main wall of the living room and [husband] said no, so we moved it to a smaller wall. So again, it's that compromise and I think that was one of the bigger conflicts that we had, was just the placement of statues and how big they are (laughs). It's kind of ridiculous but that's what we fight about (laughs) because I was trying to make my dad happy and [husband] was just not having it (laughs).

(Carolina, Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian)

We kinda joke around, so we do have the, what is that (looks at artifacts), Jesus on the crucifix and Mary above the TV. In her family they all have something in their house and her parents are hysterical about always trying to get the biggest statue to put in your house so some of my in-laws have legit statues like, few feet big and I was like no there's no way that's going in my house. So I'm willing to do it but I'm not going to the scale that her parents wanna do it. They're not putting a Mary statue in my front yard, even though if you gave them the opportunity they would do it. So it's more of a joking around but I am serious, this is not happening (laughs)…she would do it just cause she wants to appease her parents but she also realizes, I think she realizes the ridiculousness of it and having me push back helps cause she would probably not say no to her parents but, I don't think it's an argument, it's probably more stuff that we like joke around about. At least to me it's not an argument, if it bugs her I don't know about it (chuckles).

(Charles, Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic)

Both partners recounted the account in a lighthearted and humorous manner, in part because the conflict had already been resolved. However, this anecdote suggests some underlying tensions exist when negotiating placement and display of religious artifacts. Couples need to be conscientious of where in the home they will place their artifacts. Charles, mentioned above, felt it was an infringement of his space to display the Catholic altar in the central wall of their home and the couple decided to move the display to a smaller sidewall of the house. When asked what happened to the Last Supper painting, Carolina noted that they rejected that idea. Similarly, Charles was cautious to not allow his in-laws to place large statues of religious images outside their home. These findings indicate that in addition to boundaries regulating the relational identity dialectics in the interfaith marriage, there are also spatial boundaries that regulate which “space”
each partner’s religious identity will occupy. In the aforementioned example, the religious artifacts of one partner would not take over the main wall of their home.

A second couple also elaborated on the placement of religious artifacts in their home. On the kitchen wall hung a painting of the Last Supper and along the dining room wall were other Catholic artifacts. Compared to the first couple, these religious artifacts were visible in the main room of the house. When asked if her husband was comfortable with the placement of her religious artifacts, Amelia (Female, Age N/A, Catholic-Jewish) replied, “Oh he joins me. He joins me. I think we bought the Last Supper picture together as a matter of fact (laughs).” During his interview, Alejandro (Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic) pointed to his wife’s desk, situated in the main living room, and talked about her Novena, a list of Catholic prayers, she would recite every morning. He also mentioned that his wife bought him the chain with a mystical Jewish star that he wore around his neck. This couple addressed the spatial dialectics of the display of religious artifacts by fully integrating both into their home. After mentioning the placement of religious artifacts, Alejandro provided the following analogy to exemplify his and his wife’s feelings about integrating all aspects of their religious beliefs:

You can see here in our house the love and the special attention, we basically melded in two different sets of furniture, two different sets of everything when we got together and it shows up pretty nice and it kind of is a good expression of how we feel about things. But it's a very peaceful house. And spirituality's at the center of it, no question.

Alejandro’s response also echoes the finding that interfaith relational partners co-create a superordinate spiritual and value system to bridge their identity dialectics as described in Theme 1. Furthermore, the examples of these two couples bring to light another important aspect of the interfaith marriage. How these couples navigated their own
relational and religious dialectics was reflected by the placement of religious artifacts in their home. In addition to coordinating space, the following sub-theme explores how interfaith relational partners negotiate time spent participating in each other’s religious services and the dialectical tensions involved.

Participatory Decision Dialectic: House of Worship

Whereas research shows that the interfaith couple established dialectical boundaries to buffer their relational identity, interviewees reported they were willing to accompany their spouse to religious events such as masses or other religious services. Their responses indicate that accompanying their spouse to a religious service was their way of supporting the spouse’s faith and religious involvement. Additionally, relational partners considered they demonstrated support and acceptance of their spouse’s religious beliefs by not interfering with their desire to participate in religious activities. However, the data introduced a dialectical tension between relational partners of wanting to support, encourage, and participate in the religious services and activities of their spouse but also feeling uncomfortable and “out of place” when doing so. Furthermore, relational partners demonstrated a dialectical tension between understanding that their spouse could refuse to attend religious services with them but feeling disappointed with their decision.

Interviewees recalled they would at times accompany their relational partner to their religious services and rituals. Furthermore, they would also demonstrate support for each other’s faith by encouraging their spouse to attend their religious service and by not interfering with their religious participation. The following repeated terms and phrases resonated in the data: *never an issue, not interfere, not blocking.* Benjamin (Male, Age
60, Catholic-Jewish), for example, was grateful for his wife’s support of his desire to attend church services. He recalled:

She's been very tolerant and very accepting and at times almost will push me out the door on Sundays. I say I wanna go to church tomorrow morning, she's like, "Good, go ahead. I'll see you when you get back." So it's never been an issue in terms of me going and participating as a Catholic in church at least.

Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic) echoed a similar sentiment of supporting his wife when wanting to engage in religious activities, “She needs to practice her faith, beliefs. She can do it. I'm not blocking, I'm not complaining about it, I'm not blocking it. I'm not against it. So I guess that's in a way support passively, right?” Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) comparably noted that he and his wife “wouldn’t interfere with each other’s activities.” As previously mentioned, aside from not interfering with their spouse’s religious participation, relational partners were willing to accompany each other to religious services (participatory decision dialectic).

The research suggests that interviewees perceived accompanying a spouse to their religious activities was a way for them to support their partner and validate their religious identity. Attending a religious event was a surface-level activity that was not construed as an opportunity to proselytize religious beliefs. Much like negotiating holidays and other religious rituals, attending a service with their spouse posed no imminent identity threat. Therefore, relational partners made the decision to join in certain religious activities only as a demonstration of support and encouragement toward their partner, even though they did not usually participate wholeheartedly (participatory decision dialectic). Their responses indicated that joining their spouse in their religious activities was simply part
of being in an interfaith marriage. The excerpts below showcase relational partners’ accommodating and identity-supporting techniques:

When we go to Japan and we pay respect to either the shrine or to the cemetery or to an area of the house where you have the ancestors, then he'll tell us the gestures and the ritual things you do. And the kids when they were little they would ask me, "So mama are we praying to a God? or are we praying to another God? What are we doing?" I said, "No. We only have one God, and you're doing the Our Father in your head while you're bowing (laughs) and just don't do it loud, cause Papa doesn't know the Our Father, so just, in your head, pray the Our Father" (laughs). And we're doing those things and you go like this (puts hands together) and you go like this (gestures), and they go, "Oh, ok!" So I kinda make up my own rules and like, how do you tell little kids that, you know, we're going through the motions but we're not really of that religion.

(Laura, Age 49, Female, Catholic-Shinto)

Well he'll do things that I know he doesn't like doing but he still does them. And he, a lot of the times we'll pray before we eat whenever we go to my parent's house or for a special occasion, and even though we're praying in Vietnamese, he's very respectful, he stands there quietly and he can't understand anything (laughs), but he's just very respectful. When he does that stuff it makes me happy because it lets me know that he cares about my faith.

(Carolina, Female, 28, Catholic-Christian)

I think we both encourage each other to profess our faith in any way we deem necessary and again, when there's been opportunities to instruct or teach the kids about either religion, Judaism or Catholicism, neither or us had said, "Don't talk about it" or "Don't do that" or "Don't demonstrate that." [wife]'s perfectly free to, if all of a sudden she said, "I wanna start going to synagogue every Friday night," or whenever they go, I'd say, "Great!" and I probably would go with her, as an event, an activity. Not necessarily because I wanted to profess my faith in Judaism, or my faith in God as a Jew, but just because she's my wife and it's important to her. Look if it's important enough to her, I respect that and I would participate and partake in it. And I would expect the same from her...I have gone to bar mitzvahs completely willingly...really getting into the prayer for the couple or for the person that's reaching that age and you know really enjoyed the tradition and the ceremony. It had a lot of meaning for me, even though it wasn't my custom and they're praying in Hebrew and I didn't understand a lot of what was going on. But still it was very moving to me and I have been to a number of them and it was great.

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)
She's probably just more outgoing with it and feels the need to go to church all the time cause that's how she was raised and she doesn't know any different. You don't go to church, it's like something bad is gonna happen, I don't know. But if I have to sacrifice an hour of my week, I guess it's not the worst thing...Eh, I'm ok with it I guess. I wouldn't go if it wasn't for her, I don't believe that you have to go to church to be a religious person. I don't believe in it...Maybe when I'm old and have nothing else to do, the church will be more fun. But now it's just kind of, I don't know, sometimes it's fine and sometimes it's a bit of an inconvenience but like I said, I kinda knew what I was getting myself into so I accept it. At the end of the day, going to church is not gonna make me a bad person. But yeah like I said I wouldn't go nearly as often if it wasn't for her...much to my dismay. At first I thought I could like change it but nah, it's not worth fighting this (laughs). Who knows? Yeah I would say quite frequently, I mean, I've probably missed like two weeks in the past couple of months and I still hear about it sometimes (laughs). But yeah I would say I go more frequently than I ever have...I kinda knew what I was getting myself into so, sometimes I'll be like, "I don't feel like going," but most of the time I just go.

(Charles, Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic)

So when he was out of a job during the recession, when he had a brain tumor, we went as a family we went to, there was a high-healing mass held in [location] somewhere and it was a really big deal, which I didn't understand, but it was a really big deal.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

The examples above indicate how disposed interviewees were to encourage their spouse to practice their faith and willingness to join them for certain occasions. Their responses also echo interviewees’ resolutions to the dilemma posed in the critical incident described in Theme 4. Relational partners navigated the Participatory Decision Dialectic by prioritizing the relational identity and suppressing individual religious identities. Although some were not eager to partake in their spouses’ religious activities, they did so under the notion that it “came with the territory” of being in an interfaith relationship. Nonetheless, they experienced some discomfort when joining their spouse’s religious service (participatory decision dialectic).
Relational partners experienced a dialectic tension between wanting to support their husband or wife by joining them in certain religious services, but at times did not feel comfortable in doing so (*participatory decision dialectic*). Beatriz (Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic) relayed, “I'm *so not* Catholic, no…it's so far off anything I knew or understood and again, there are things about it, just that, nobody's talking to me, in the services, nobody's explaining things or making it relatable or any of that.” Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) recounted how she would suggest she and her husband attend a Catholic service instead of his church’s Christian service. However, he felt uncomfortable with what he considered to be “theatrics” and other unnecessary rituals that took place in the Catholic Church. Regarding her own attendance to his services, she also admitted to feeling out place. Her response is detailed below:

> I don't feel *comfortable* going or I don't feel *comfortable* going every single time. I've never lied about how I feel, because every time instead of coming out of the church all happy and refreshed, I was depressed because I felt like, I'm going to church and instead of being happy and willing to serve the Lord I'm depressed because I’m told that I’m a sinner…*I don't feel that I belong* to that type of group.

(Irma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian)

Other interviewees also indicated the dialectic between wanting to accommodate and support their partner, but having feelings of discomfort and exclusion associated with attending services. Their stories are detailed in the following excerpts:

> I did not feel *comfortable* going. I think I went to one mass and I just felt like an *outsider*…Yeah, I do feel a little *uncomfortable* going into Catholic weddings, in the church…It's quite possible that she did go to stuff and she just left me home, cause I wouldn't be *comfortable*, but I can't remember, like baptisms and stuff. Well there was a time when she was pregnant she went to a mass and I went with her and I just didn't like the experience, so I didn't go again. But I did try it once. *You feel like an outsider basically.*

(Ernesto, Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)
If it's like going to the church, I say, "No *I'm not feeling comfortable there,*" and that's the end of the conversation. That happened years ago, and as far as the ceremonies, events, are concerned I don't mind going... I do not join them for like a weekly church going, just because I don't feel anything about the religion. *It's not my place.* I feel it's like almost rude for everybody else who believes in the faith just to be sitting there. If I'm sitting there, I need to believe in that.

(Lucas, Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic)

If she asked me to go to the Vietnamese mass and I'm like I don't understand Vietnamese so I don't go. But that's infrequent and normally when we go it's usually like special occasions so I don't care, like a baptism or something. Other than going to a non-English speaking mass (laughs), other than going to the Vietnamese mass, which *I don't understand* but, I mean I go, I don't really complain I think it's, *if it's something that's important to her...* If it's like a niece's or nephew's baptism on a random Sunday and they wanna go to the Vietnamese mass, I'm not gonna throw my arms up and be like, "I don't understand Vietnamese, I'm not going." Or they don't have AC in the church, I'm not going. (laughs). So, probably the only time, we did go to a Christmas mass once at the Vietnamese church and that kind of *annoyed* me cause it was Christmas.

(Charles, Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic)

In reconciling the participatory dialectic between wanting to support their spouse but not feeling comfortable in the services, the data indicates partners will initially accommodate to the situation and attend the religious service with their spouse. Over time, however, if the affective reaction of discomfort, uneasiness, or differentiation is too strong, the affected partner will notify their spouse they will no longer partake in said activities. Upon learning about their spouse’s feelings of anxiety and angst, the relational partner is expected to respect the relational identity dialectic boundaries and not insist their spouse continue to attend. The following excerpts support this finding of respecting the relational boundaries when negotiating participatory dialectics:

I wanted him to go to something and he wasn't *comfortable* in going... and if it meant a lot to me, to me if I saw him as being *selfish* and he should just do it for me, that would be it but usually I would give in to him and that's just, that's kind of been my ammo. It's just easier just *maintaining harmony* and just say, "Ok,
choose my battles and this isn't worth it.” So if it was attending a service or doing something like that, that would be about it…we were both young and trying to figure out how to navigate being married and I would feel frustrated that, he didn't see it as something important to me, but at the same time I had to respect what his wishes were. So it was a give and take, and again, choose your battles.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

A big deal for me was going to midnight mass and it was a big deal that my husband come and then over the years, he's so tired and then even the kids, they go, "Mom, do we really have to go?" and to me that's like part of my upbringing in the Philippines, it was a big deal to go to midnight mass but then even the kids didn't see the point in it. I'm like, you know what, it's ok, yeah and I'm like, "Yeah you know what, what's the bottom line?" The bottom line is I wanna be with my kids and my husband. So then I give in, right?...I think in that respect we support each other because he allows me to continue in my faith, he allows me to raise the kids in that faith, he hasn't really, made any requests or insisted on anything and because I guess we go through the motions…we're willing to go through the motions when asked, and if it's ok. I think we both know when to ask and when we ask we always say, "It's ok if you don't want to do this" or like, I'll have to tell him like, "I'm gonna sing at (location), is that ok with you? The kids don't have to come, you don't have to come, I'll be back."

(Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)

Anything you can do where you're both on the same page, positively, is good for your relationship. If church is one of them, why not? A football game, the two of you, splash paint on your face, wear a weird hat, go watch a game? Why not? It all can work. But if she hates football and you drag her to football, then it can be a problem. Same thing with a religion. Force him to go or force her to go, it can manifest itself sooner or later in resentments and such so, you know you shouldn't do it. I wouldn't her force her to go to a game. I play tennis, I don't force her to go, "You gotta go play tennis with me, you have to do this," no, she doesn't want to do it, cool. I'll be back when I'm finished. It works. If you wanna go to church, I'll see you when you come back (chuckles).

(Jose Antonio, Male, Age 67, Christian-Jewish)

As detailed above, interfaith partners were expected to respect the relational boundaries if their partner no longer wished to attend religious services with them. As couples navigated the Participatory Decision Dialectic, partners had to keep in mind they could not expect their spouse to join them for all the religious services and activities they
hoped they would attend. Moreover, if the spouse refused to attend a religious service, partners were expected to respect each other’s wishes and refrain from “guilting” each other into participating. Emma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish) recalled she stopped inviting her husband to join her for Christmas or Easter mass because she knew “he wouldn’t go” after having attended a couple of times and voicing his discomfort. Israel (Male, Age 48, Christian-Catholic) stated, “Some things I would want to do, I wouldn't expect her to want to do and vice versa.” However, he also admitted to feeling “disappointed” if he asked his wife to read the Bible with him and she refused. Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian) felt that she and her husband would build a stronger bond if they participated in shared church activities. She also knew, however, there needed to be a “balance” to her expectations. She noted:

I have to pick and choose my battles. I can't expect him to do everything that I want him to do, but I do appreciate what he does, when he does make an effort. Like I said before, I pick and choose my battles so I don't make him do every little thing that I want him to do. I just try to find a balance…cause I do think that going to church together helps us build a stronger bond, and so that's why I want to go to church together, but other things that aren't as important, I won't push them, because I know there has to be a balance.

In spite of being aware of the need to respect interfaith relational boundaries, she also expressed the following:

I'm very adamant about going to church every Sunday or every week, at least once a week and so he, sometimes will think it's a chore or not be excited to go and wanting to do other things instead like watch football (laughs). But he still does it because he knows it's important to me…we don't really get angry too much (laughs), but again it would just be church, we've had some heated conversations about going to church…I think he gets more aggravated when I say that it makes me sad [that he doesn’t want to go], because at the end of the day he doesn't want to make me sad. He just believes what he believes and sometimes he doesn't think volunteering is necessary or he doesn't think that going to church every weekend is necessary. But, he knows that it affects me a certain way so he does it
so that I'm not sad, and not because he wants to go to church or wants to volunteer. So he gets madder when he knows the effects or the consequences.

(Carolina, Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian)

The data indicated that interfaith partners struggle with the Participatory Decision Dialectic and at times infringe on the relational boundaries previously set in place when managing their identity dialectics. Notably, a key factor in managing their religious dialectics within their relational identity centered on establishing impermeable boundaries. The research suggests that although partners appeared to respect the boundaries, they may be masking their true emotions when doing so. Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) supposed his wife was displeased with his refusal to accompany her to religious services. He recalled, “Probably there was angst or anxiety about me not going with her. So she would have to go by herself and I don't think she liked that…there would be some underlying issues ‘cause she would resent probably having to go by herself.” The following examples further underscore this finding:

There was a time where he would come to mass with me and then, like definitely weddings for other people that are in the church he'll come. But then it got to a point where he didn't want to come and I made it optional and it was ok with me, but I miss it. You know I miss the times when he would voluntarily come and then I think, cause I used to sing in the church and there would be times where I'd want him to come because we sing for Christmas or we sing for Easter and so I'd want him to come and I'd ask him, and I respected if he said no…But I still miss it…I definitely probably would enjoy the masses more, if he was, it'd be more fun going to those activities…I think I would enjoy it more, I think.

(Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)

I see the little reminders of, "Oh but we used to do this and that." At the beginning I would force myself to go because I feel guilty not doing it…and I don't want to go so I've been dealing with the consequences of not going and it's like an interaction between us. I can tell that he doesn't like me not participating, but that's the way it is…he gets like kind of upset and then sometimes he goes by himself but he doesn't feel like ok, then he comes home and says, "Oh it was so
fun and you should do this with me," but I don't want to, and those are the consequences, I can see that it's upsetting for him going by himself...also when he is watching his TV shows that they just give you a Christian sermon he says, "Ok come on sit down with me." But if that's the day that I'm doing housework or homework, I ignore it and I know that he gets upset. Because he's just like, "Oh it's because you don't want to sit with me watching this and listening to the Word." And I'm just sometimes very very honest and I say, "Nope, I don't want to see that, it's boring" (laughs). It's cause it's boring. He doesn't say, "I'm upset." But you can tell that he's upset when I just say something like that because it's “blasphemous.” Because I know that he thinks that, I know that, but (shrugs).

(Irma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian)

To summarize, the Participatory Decision Dialectic highlights the tension relational partners experience when wanting to support their partner’s faith but feeling uncomfortable or uninterested in certain religious services. In similarity to the Spatial Dialectic in which partners had to negotiate the placement of religious artifacts, they also navigated the participation in their spouse’s religious services. The Participatory Decision Dialectic poses several challenges to the interfaith couple. Relational partners feel a need to support their spouse by not interfering with their desires to participate in religious activities as well as accompanying them on certain occasions. However, at times relational partners feel uncomfortable in attending or participating in the religious services of their spouse’s religion. Partners then inform one another that they no longer wish to accompany them to their religious service or that their attendance will be limited and reserved for special occasions. Relational partners then experience a dialectical tension of wanting to respect their spouse’s decisions but feeling disappointed that they no longer join them in religious services. Partners thereby may mask their true emotions as to not infringe on the relational boundaries. In some cases, they may bypass them entirely and try to “guilt” their partner into participating.
It is also worthy of noting that when responding to the aforementioned critical incident, interviewees were quick to reprimand Daniel’s behavior for not accompanying Leilani to her religious service because he felt uncomfortable with the event. However, in their own experiences, relational partners claimed feelings of discomfort contributed to them not wanting to participate in their spouse’s religious services. In an actual interfaith marriage, therefore, partners had a challenging time negotiating the dialectics of their attendance and participation. Within their own relationship, navigating the Participatory Decision Dialectic proved to be much more complicated than they suggested when projecting on the fictional relationship of the critical incident. The final theme encompasses the mixed emotions that interfaith relational partners experienced as they recounted the ups and downs of their interfaith marital and family socialization status.

Retrospective Relationship Assessment: Dialectics of Mixed Emotions

Toward the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to reflect on how they believed their marriage would have been different had both partners belonged to the same faith, what advice they would give to future interfaith relationships based on their own experiences, and what was the most important thing to keep in mind when negotiating interfaith conflict. The emergent theme is divided into the following three sub-themes and captures the emotional dialectics of the interfaith marriage: Affective Resignation-Wistfulness Emotion, Pride-Remorse Hybrid Emotion, and Upholding Relational Vision-Valuing Identity Distinctiveness Emotion.

Affective Resignation-Wistfulness Emotion

Looking back on the course of their relationship, some interviewees realized their religious differences had played a more central role in their marriage than they first
acknowledged. When attending to the nuances and discourse of participants, the data indicated that relational partners are accepting of their interfaith marriage, yet allude to longing for a same-faith partner. Although none of the interviewees implied they were unhappy with their interfaith partner, they did acknowledge that at some points throughout their marriage, it would have been easier to navigate certain conflicts had they both shared the same faith. Some interviewees felt that they would have more actively participated in their religion had they married a same-faith partner. They also suggested they would have given their children a more immersive religious education if both partners shared the same religion. Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) noted, “If we were both the same religion, there might've been a chance of sending our kids to religious school.” Although Marcus (Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish) and his wife agreed their children would actively participate in the Jewish faith, he expressed some cognitive dissonance with not providing them with a formal Christian education:

I'm a little uncomfortable that we have kind of enforced Hebrew school and not really done any other Christian anything. I think once I took them to church on Easter. But it's more in the order of working through the logistics than it is a conflict between us...I think [wife's] perspective is that the Christianity is always there, in this culture, it's always there whether you raise it or not. I feel more conflicted that, there are basic truths, the core beliefs of the New Testament that I believe in, you know the story of the prostitute at the well, or the tax collector, or even just the gathering of the disciples, the people that nobody else thought highly of were the ones that Jesus thought would be the core of [Christianity]. I mean those messages do get reinforced in other ways, but they don't really get reinforced as part of Christian morality. We never discuss them that way. So I think I'd like to, I would be happier if we did more of that somewhere in between all of the other lessons that we're doing.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

Interviewees also reported that the relational conflict would be less challenging if both partners shared the same faith. Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian)
believed, “it would be a lot easier if we were the same faith because then it would be more important to him to do those activities” in the context of inviting her husband to volunteer and attend certain religious events. The main point of contrition, however, surfaced in that interviewees felt a sense of disconnect in their marriage because of their religious differences. Israel (Male, Age 48, Christian-Catholic) noted that he sometimes felt disconnected from his wife because they did not share the same faith. Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian) shared that it made her feel “sad” when her husband did not take the religious events she wanted to participate in seriously, recounting that, “at the end of the day I'm just trying to live the faith that I grew up with and believe in.” Other participants described feeling as if something were “missing” or they would have a “closer bond” if both belonged to the same religion. The following expressions underscore this motif:

I do believe deep down inside that if we were the same religion, that we would feel a closer bond only because it would be one more thing that we saw eye to eye on and that we’re participating in together… I think you're much closer as a family because then you take your kids, if you are someone who does choose to worship in a place of worship, I think that you naturally take your children there and then you have help in terms of educating them about God and his church or whatever church that is. And I just think, I think you are closer as a family. I think religion can and does bring you close as a family, particularly in very trying times, deaths of parents, grandparents, family members, whatever, or serious issues that you're dealing with, I think prayer and all that stuff is really good.  

(Benjamin, Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish)

It was uncomfortable during that marriage encounter because then they go deep into different aspects of the religion and they make you go separate from the group and talk as a couple. So I felt like, I missed out, right? Cause I'm like, (smacks lips) well I did choose you and you chose me, so I have to accept that I won't have that back and forth about my faith with this person, you know? I can't really talk about it. I mean if I talk about it, what's he gonna do? Just listen. But he can't really offer his own opinion, because he wasn't raised in that faith. So then I felt like, mmm, yeah, oh well, I kind of missed out on that one huh? (lowers
(Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)

The Affective Resignation-Wistfulness Emotion captures the emotional discord that interviewees experienced when taking an in-depth look at their marriage. Their responses indicate a sense of emotional turmoil in that they felt something was lacking from their relationship or that they had to overcome challenges that would not exist in a same-faith marriage. In continuation, the following sub-theme captures the affective uncertainty relational partners experienced when looking back on having raised their children in an interfaith context.

Pride-Remorse Hybrid Emotion

Interfaith partners had faced identity dialectic challenges specifically related to having children within the course of their marriage. When deciding to have children and in discussing their religious upbringing, relational partners had to reach a consensus on the religious education they would provide. They also had to negotiate the dialectic of Uncertainty-Familiarity when making decisions about birth and coming of age religious
rituals. The Pride-Remorse Hybrid Emotion explores how relational partners felt about raising children in an interfaith marriage. Interviewees indicated an array of mixed emotions when reflecting on the positives and negatives of raising their children. In lieu of choosing to raise their children in one specific religious, some couples chose to expose them to both faiths and give the children the option to then choose which one, if any, they wanted to follow once they were older. Some of those couples, however, highlighted the drawbacks of their approach. Their accounts are outlined in the following excerpts:

As I get older I honestly think that sharing religious viewpoints, is important, is more I important than I thought it was and actually there was a bigger time, I don't think now it's as important. I think that when we were raising kids and a lot of kids had in common their churches or their youth groups or whatever and *my kids missed out*, well my middle one, cause she was always seeking, got involved in a youth group…but neither of my other two sought it out…But I think earlier when our home was filled, I think at that time I felt it might've been more important…*To give them a grounding*, and we did talk about God, but not a lot. And even when I have those conversations now, I almost feel like my kids might be thinking, "Well why didn't you talk about this earlier?" But I didn't really put my thoughts on them. It's more of what I wanted them to discover, but again, I go back to, that makes it hard on them too. I think that they should've been exposed, just at least exposed to understand when other people are talking about things that they would learn, like they should all take a world religion class, just to be exposed to everything before making a decision.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

The only other thing that might be applicable is, the kids not doing religion when other kids are, *not sure how that affected them*, like their cousins were getting bar mitzvahs, their other cousins on [wife]'s side were getting Confirmations and baptisms and stuff like that…I'm sure they were interested. I'm sure they were curious. But yeah I think our general thinking was we're going to expose, we told them that we were going to expose them to both and then, you can decide later. We didn't want to force it on them.

(Ernesto, Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)

Perhaps the most compelling illustration came from Benjamin (Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish). He and his wife decided to proceed with a “hands-off” approach to their
children’s religious upbringing. They exposed their children to aspects of both religious systems, but never enforced a specific religious upbringing. It is worth noting that Benjamin’s interview in a large scale echoed the dialectical tension he felt about the lack of religious education and upbringing they had instilled in their children. He admitted to feeling as if they had done a “disservice” to their children by failing to properly “arm” them with the tools necessary to make a conscious decision about which religion to follow. Throughout the interview he continued to stress the need to “model” a religion for your children so they could be properly equipped with the knowledge to join a certain religion and satisfy an innate spiritual need. The excerpt that follows accurately depicts the dialectic tension he felt regarding how they chose to raise their children:

I have many um, regrets, that's probably too strong of a term. I have many, I have mixed emotions about what we've done. Our middle daughter, she was probably the most religious-curious of the three children and so in high school, she started to attend church with some of her friends and really started to struggle with, “What is religion? How does it play in my life? What should I do about it?” And she went to some Bible studies classes and she did a lot of things but she never really found her "aha!" moment. And then at one point she actually, she told us one time, we were having a discussion. She told us that we were, you know, I'm paraphrasing here a little bit, but that we were bad parents because we didn't model a certain religion that she could then follow on, you know? That we didn't give her enough guidance about God and Judaism vs. Christianity and we didn't expose them to enough religion as children. So it became very daunting for her and very confusing for her as to what religion is and whether she should be professing her faith a certain way. So she told us basically we screwed up. So our big plan, our master plan, at least in terms of her, or at least in her eyes was not successful. But our goal was not to force any one thing. If they asked us what our beliefs were, you'd tell them what your belief is. If they asked, "Why do you this?" or "Why don't you do that?" "Why don't you go to the synagogue?" "Why don't you go to church every Sunday?" or "Why do you go to church?" You know then you just explain, "Well this is what my faith teaches and if you wanna go with me you're more than welcome."...I'm on the fence whether you should, I think it makes life much easier, particularly regarding the children if you're both the same faith... Now I think, if I look back on it, if I could go back and relive my life, that's something I would change. Even to the point where I might even
convert to Judaism. So I'm modeling something, consistently modeling a behavior to our kids. Yeah isn't that weird? That's really weird to think about but, it's true.

In light of the dialectic tension that some interviewees expressed regarding the religious upbringing of their children, most of the couples who had raised children in an interfaith marital context considered that to be a benefit of an interfaith marriage. When describing their children, the following terms were echoed in the data: tolerant, open-minded, accepting. Ernesto (Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic) felt that in exposing their children to both religious beliefs, they had succeeded in instilling “the best of both [religions] into them, and not the worst of both,” alluding to the fact that had they not had religious differences, their children would not have learned about the moral and ethical values of both religions. Marina (Female, Age 48, Jewish-Christian) was pleased with the notion that her children did not seem to have any hang-ups about partaking in both religions, stating, “There's been no issue and furthermore, she just has no problem reconciling the two, with like Easter or Christmas or anything else we do, in their minds it's everything, and it's fine. It’s only the adults who seem to have the conflict.” Raising children in the interfaith context, for some interviewees, resulted in instilling a mindful and flexible approach to intercultural differences. The following responses provide support for this finding:

I think it was, now looking back, better for them to be exposed to differences, so I think that it helped the kids be more open-minded to differences and helped them understand that it's ok and we said, "You can do whatever you'd like, this is your choice, this is this, this that."…It's for them to be open-minded was what my goal was and I think we accomplished that…I think when they were young, they thought it was, kind of interesting, confusing, at times. But, we weren't the same and then we're trying to expose them to both, but I think they understand compromise and people would say, "Well what are you raising the kids?" and I would say, "Open minded." And I think they are open minded to it, to whatever
the differences are, so, I think they kinda see the whole thing, family coming first, and not getting too hung up on the differences of religion.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)

I think my kids are *open, accepting, tolerant* of all, more seeking of information outside of their own religion. I think it just opens up the whole world to them. That they can make their choices, so, I mean I'm sure there's downsides but there's also upsides that they definitely are accepting of, not all, I mean I'm sure that not all religions look down on other religions but I think that there is some essence of certain religions that, they do think that they're holier than thou and everybody else has got it wrong. Where with my kids, they don't know that, so it's just a choice people make, to practice in their different religions…At certain times I thought it was a downfall but, I think that they're just *open, beautiful people*. I'm really lucky I have to say, cause my kids are really incredible people and they're very giving and generous.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

They just seem really comfortable with the idea of, "My parents believe different things and that's ok." I think they think of it as, "Huh, only mom can have kids." Like, she can have kids and he can't, she doesn't believe in God, and he does…We are comfortable with the notion that people can have different religious beliefs and that's not a reason to get mad at somebody else. They seem to have picked that up, and they don't see any conflict in it.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

In retrospect, some interviewees felt conflicted about the religious upbringing they chose to instill in their children while others expressed complete satisfaction with their methods. Nevertheless, interviewees did indicate a dialectical tension between feeling some regrets regarding their children’s upbringing but still managing to find and focus on the positive results. In addition to the optimistic perception in raising children in an interfaith marriage, the final sub-theme incorporates implications of an interfaith marriage and the “big picture” concept that relational partners should focus on.
Upholding Relational Vision-Valuing Identity Distinctiveness Emotion

Although interviewees addressed several contrasting emotions when reflecting upon their relationship, the third mixed emotion conveys a hopeful and reassuring finale to the thematic analysis of interfaith marital communication. This final mixed emotion identifies a complementary, rather than a contrasting, relational dialectic. The affective dialectic of Upholding Relational Vision-Valuing Identity Distinctiveness Emotion accentuates focusing on a “big picture” relational vision and, simultaneously, embracing the distinctive identity facets of the relational partner, in this case, the religious identity.

Interfaith relational partners acknowledged that an interfaith marriage posed some particular challenges. In retrospect, interviewees considered an open, honest discussion of their religious differences to be of vital importance prior to getting married. The data reflected that relational partners felt they needed to understand the differences of their partner and negotiate these prior to marriage but they also focused on the “big picture” of what truly mattered in their relationship. Laura (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto) stressed the importance of negotiating with her partner and educating each other on their religious differences. She stated, “A bit of negotiation and education I guess is what I think and definitely not assuming that everything is gonna be ok in the one faith.” However, her suggestion directly contradicts her own approach the religious differences in her marriage given that she repeatedly shared during her interview how little she knew about her husband’s religion. Irma (Female, Age 49, Catholic-Christian) encouraged couples to, “make sure that everybody is open about what they believe. Don't hide what you believe or just pretend that you believe what they believe because it's gonna bring some conflict.” In addition to negotiating religious conflict, the bulk of the discussion
revolved around how they would advise interfaith couples considering marriage to
manage their differences.

Interestingly, the majority of interviewees advised that interfaith couples should
discuss and address their differences prior to getting married. Resonating among all
interviewees was the suggestion to other interfaith couples that it was of massive
importance to negotiate their religious differences regarding how they would raise their
children. Their advice to other couples is a stark contradiction to how they approached
their own religious differences. As discussed previously in this data analysis,
interviewees revealed they hardly, if at all, discussed or even acknowledged their
differences until the first milestone event of planning a wedding brought them to the
surface. The excerpts below provide support for this finding:

I think ask them some of the questions you asked me, like which one comes first,
the religion or the relationship, and then, have they thought about how are they
gonna raise their kids, and some of the, the things about, where does family weigh
in as far as the religion, because I think, it's interconnected with some of their
values…To me that's important going into a relationship, and understanding that
from the other person and then children, I mean you bring in children to the faith
in a interfaith, you have to talk about, not just the birth, not just the schooling but
then, all the different things, like, circumcision, baptism, if that doesn't happen in
the other faith then, are you going to be ok with that?...From the faith perspective,
when you bring in children into the marriage, right? And then same thing with the
coming of age, with all those little benchmarks in life, is something good for the
couple to talk about, so that they're not caught off guard.

(Laura, Age 49, Female, Catholic-Shinto)

I would say, you really need to set your expectations, from the beginning. And
you really need to understand each other, and more so, on an individual level
because I think religion is just one of the things that defines you but, there's so
much more about a person that you need to get to know. Like what are the core
values that they have and what are the core beliefs that they have? A lot of it does
stem from religion but you really need to understand how that's gonna affect what
you believe in and what your core values are because if those things are not in line
then it would be really difficult to have a good relationship...and like anybody
else, they're gonna make you mad, every now and then, and you just gotta make sure that you're able to deal with it and find that common ground and understanding of each other, cause without that it's gonna very hard and challenging.

(Carolina, Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian)

I would say if religion is very important, to each of them, it's gonna cause some big problems. But at least try to figure out what you wanna do with the kids before you get married and how you want to live your life.

(Ernesto, Male, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)

Really need to do it before you get married (laughs). It's just really important to, and I know people are so in love and blinded and stuff that they, "We'll get over that!" but you don't. If religion is important to you, you need to keep that as a focus when you're picking a partner. So important. Or find a center ground but gosh, I can't imagine if I was very very Jewish, I can't imagine being able to raise children. I mean if you're never gonna have children that's one thing, but if you're gonna raise children, if you really believe in your religion, if I truly believed in all the edicts of the Jewish religion, the most precious thing in my life are my children, how would I, in good conscience, allow them to be raised Catholic? If I was Catholic, and believed everything of the Catholic religion, how could I allow my children to be raised Jewish? Because they're just very different religions...So, in my very humble opinion, I just see that life is hard enough. Don't make it harder. Really, really, being married is hard enough...Life is hard enough, period. Marriage is hard enough, on top of that to then, why would you want to take two people of two totally different religions and try to meld that? I mean I don't know how...No I just think it's way more important than I thought, to discuss it before you get married. Shortly after we got married, by the time we were having kids it's way more, it's just way more important to really come to an understanding before you move forward. So important (whispers with frustration)...Love doesn't overcome financial distress, love doesn't overcome medical distress, it has to be deeper than that, yeah, it's not just love, cause that, all that whole puppy thing fades away really quickly when you come against, when you hit the wall the very first time and then it's all of a sudden, "Oh shit." You know, yeah, who is my partner here? So yeah. Yeah, it's gotta be a very, very big point of discussion.

(Beatriz, Female, Age 58, Jewish-Catholic)

When they have children, before you have children, in an interfaith, you have to decide how you're going to raise them. Because if your spouse says, "My way," and your way's out, then I wouldn't stay in the relationship. Cause if you have faith, you want your children to be your faith. That makes sense. So unless you
can raise them in both and if you have a Christian and a Jew, married, one believes in Christ and one doesn't, how are you gonna teach your children both? You can't. Mommy can't say, "Jesus is the Son of God," and then daddy says, "Oh no he isn't."...So an interfaith couple, even if they respect at their level, if they have children, if they're open to say, "We're gonna teach them both and let them decide," it's not gonna work OR it's gonna cause conflict...Cause one can't be right and one's wrong. Then the next one down, they're gonna have to pick one. There isn't a, you know, chocolate and vanilla mixed together and-if you're really religious, you're gonna have to pick. And then that means one parent is wrong or the other. And if you're really strict then unless you can be open-so for us if we had children it would be very easy. It doesn't matter. I can say, "we both believe different things, Daddy believes Jesus is the son of God and this is why, and you need to learn this. Mommy doesn't believe that. Mommy believes that he was just a rabbi on the planet. And then here you go. This is how we believe and now you can decide what's right for you." But most interfaith won't do that.

(Julianne, Female, Age 53, Jewish-Catholic)

Be open, be honest, have the guidelines or like the expectations figured out before you get married, cause people don't really change so if you think you can like, "Well I'll just change someone to believe what I believe or think what I think," it doesn't happen...I guess if you have different faiths you're gonna have to be comfortable making concessions at some point. No one's gonna always get what they always want, especially if you have kids. I'm sure, unless you're gonna take your kid to like two different church masses. That would be confusing for a kid. You probably got to figure out who's gonna win that argument.

(Charles, Male, Age 31, Christian-Catholic)

In light of this resonating approach, the research suggest that having failed to discuss their differences beforehand, interfaith partners were faced with developing creative communication solutions to their differences and establishing boundaries to protect their relational identity. In hindsight, it appears that couples admit their relational dialectics would have been easier to resolve had they established the relational norms beforehand and sorted out their discrepancies. However, the research suggests openly discussing religious differences before entering into an interfaith union is “easier said than done.”
Furthermore, as couples reflected on the intricacies of their own relationships, they were able to divulge their feelings on several integral aspects of being part of an interfaith marriage. In ruminating on their own stories, participants were asked to share the aspect they considered most important to keep in mind when managing and negotiating their relational dialectics. Interviewees recounted the importance of not allowing themselves to get caught up in the technicalities of their religious differences and to focus their attention instead on “the bigger picture.” As Lucas (Male, Age 53, Shinto-Catholic) recounted, “What you believe in is each other. That's that. You're married because you love each other, religion comes in, that's a problem. Right? And the priority is each other, not the God. And if the God comes in the way, then maybe you're gonna split.” When asked what she kept in mind when faced with a relational conflict that stemmed from her religious differences with her husband, Carolina (Female, Age 28, Catholic-Christian) replied:

It just I think goes back to understanding the other person's perspective. I think as long as you know that your significant other is a good person, that trumps all. Because at the end of the day, I know that [husband] wouldn't do anything to intentionally hurt anyone, or me, so whatever he decides, I know that he is factoring in my feelings as well. So that's what gets me through arguments that we have or disputes that we have and different opinions that we have. It's just knowing that your husband is just trying to be him and you gotta respect that. You can't make him do things just because you want him to do them. You have to find a balance.

At the end of her interview, when asked if there was anything more she would like to add, Carolina simply giggled and said, “No, just that I love my husband!” In conclusion, interviewees emphasized the importance of keeping a close focus on the importance of the relationship and allowing that single thought to transcend all conflict and difference.
The following excerpts elaborating on focusing on the relationship over the religious differences bring this final theme to a close:

You'll disagree about a lot of stuff over the course of a marriage and how you handle those disagreements to a large extent is going to determine the course and success of your marriage. If you can handle the other issues well, you can probably handle the religion issue well, and if you don't handle the other issues well, the religion issue's probably gonna be the train wreck... The more you study it the more it becomes clear that there's probably not a single right answer and the more you can get comfortable with that, the more successful you are likely to be. If you get to that point, it scares you and you retreat into dogma, your marriage and everything else is probably, in trouble.

(Marcus, Male, Age 49, Christian-Jewish)

Trust that the other person loves you, think about what attracted you in the first place to that person, and know all the good things, remember all the good things that this person has that, probably the faith and the culture helped shape all those good things. So that when you get into a discussion where the faiths clash, to be kinder and to listen really, to each other, because deep down you still love each other and you have to find a way to negotiate those differences. There's gotta be a way. Like with your scenario here, there's gotta be a way to make at least, as much as possible, to maximize the happiness and to minimize the unhappiness. I know it's not easy, especially depending on what faith combinations you have, and how close people are to their faith. I guess I'm always finding the gray area. I don't think it's black and white. I always blur the boundaries. So that's something that I would tell the couples and I would hope that if they really love each other they're gonna blur the lines and find that common ground.

(Laura, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Shinto)

Look at the bigger picture and realize that even though, there are differences, that there's a reason that you're together and you have to look at what's important, really look at what's important... The bigger picture is the two of you together, with a life together and that like, even with this whole Leilani and Daniel thing, it's one day out of a lifetime together and they will survive it whether Daniel's upset because Leilani made him do this or Leilani's upset because Daniel didn't do it, to end the marriage or have it create any further problems is just silly. That is just one day and that, you can work it through and if not, it's not something to come back to. And I think that's why a lot of marriages don't work, it's because they remember the bad things and just keep pulling up the bad things instead of moving on to what the good things are, remembering what the good things are.

(Emma, Female, Age 49, Catholic-Jewish)
Don't worry about the religious differences. *God doesn't care*, and they shouldn't. I tell people that a lot. I don't think God does care. I think God cares if you believe, whatever you believe is important. I'd say don't make that a center point in your relationship, because it shouldn't be. It doesn't need to be. *Embrace the similarities. Embrace the diversity. Embrace the attributes. Embrace the good.* God's about love, not about judgment…embrace the similarities, embrace the good stuff, and don't worry so much about the small stuff cause it doesn't matter to God. That's my advice. (laughs) That's what I believe.

(Alejandro, Male, Age 67, Jewish-Catholic)

In conclusion, interfaith partners experienced several mixed emotions when assessing their relationship. They felt a sense of acceptance in choosing an interfaith partner and they felt they would have reduced conflict in a same-faith marriage. When looking back on how they raised their children, interviewees indicated they were proud of how tolerant and open-minded their children turned out, yet felt some remorse in that they did not give them a strong religious foundation to fall back on. Finally, relational partners acknowledged there was a need to discuss their religious differences and how these would factor into their relationship prior to getting married. They remembered, however, to set aside their differences and focus on the “big picture,” their marriage.

**Summary of Data Analysis**

In answer to Research Question 1, the following three themes emerged: *Minimizing Differences, Maximizing Similarities, Negotiating Interfaith Couplehood Culture,* and *Facing Interfaith Milestones.* In order to minimize their religious dialectics, couples downplayed the differences between their religious doctrines and focused on their commonalities. In an effort to reconcile their differing religious beliefs, couples co-created a superordinate spiritual and value system that would highlight a shared spiritual inclination and their fundamental set of core values for behavior. They did so by
minimizing their religious differences and maximizing their relational value priority. To further compartmentalize their relational identity from their religious identity, relational partners established boundaries to safeguard their relational identity from their religious differences via not openly discussing their religious beliefs and practices, not attempting to proselytize or convert the other, and being respectful of the fact that their spouse did not share their same religious views.

Furthermore, although relational partners worked diligently to keep their religious dialectics at bay, these surfaced during two key milestones: Planning wedding services and coordinating the religious education of their children. At both stages, the interfaith couple had to tactfully maneuver through their identity dialectics to uphold the interfaith couplehood culture they had created, thereby unearthing creative solutions such as holding a dual-religion wedding service or exposing their children to both religions but not having them practice either. Hence, the resonating motif to answer the first research question is that interfaith couples learn to manage their identity dialectics by prioritizing their relational identity, subduing their individual religious identities, and implementing relational boundaries to fortify and shield their relationship (see Figure 1).

The interviewee responses to the critical incident, A Family Affair: Grandparent’s 50th Anniversary Celebration, presented in Theme 4 prompted participants to identify a solution to a dilemma that may present itself in an interfaith marriage. Overall, their responses reflected the interfaith couplehood culture of prioritizing the relationship over the religious dialectics as described in Theme 1. Several interviewees echoed they could not understand why the situation in the critical incident posed a challenge for the fictional couple. Others were able to reflect upon their own experiences and identified with the
identity dialectics the fictional couple faced. Moreover, the bulk of the discussion in response to the critical incident focused on the character Daniel’s inflexibility to prioritize his relational identity over his religious identity and attend the event. However, when discussing their own real life scenarios, interviewees expressed feeling apprehensive when choosing to participate in their spouse’s religious activities. Interviewees’ reactions to the critical incident echoed the findings of Research Question 1 and prompted a discussion of their own approaches to negotiating interfaith conflict, as described in the interpretive findings and themes for the second research question.

In response to Research Question 2, the following three themes emerged: 

*Negotiating Turbulence at Major Developmental Interfaith Events, Navigating Symbolic Identity Placement and Participatory Worship Decisions, and Retrospective Relationship Assessment: Dialectics of Mixed Emotions.* Interview data indicated that three main interfaith developmental events brought about relational turbulence and dialectical tensions in the course of their marriage. Upon the birth of their children, relational partners needed to agree on which, if any, religious birth rituals would be organized for the children. Partners needed to negotiate the Uncertainty-Familiarity dialectic between the lack of knowledge they possessed regarding the rituals associated with their partner’s religion versus the familiarity and security they felt with their own traditions. In some cases, this dialectic presented itself when coordinating children’s coming of age rituals. To negotiate the dialectic, relational partners utilized the following three communication strategies: *Accommodation, ambiguity,* and *evasion tactics.* Furthermore, when coordinating *what* holidays would be celebrated and *how* each holiday would be celebrated, the interfaith couple experienced the dialectic of Identity Differentiation-
Relational Connection. Although they saw their individual religions’ festivities as an opportunity to forge relational connection, they experienced identity differentiation in that they were unsure of the holiday traditions and practices because they had never celebrated them before. To negotiate this dialectic, research findings suggest relational partners would employ the following communication strategies: parallel integrative strategy and creative compromise. The end of life also posed an identity dialectic for the interfaith couple. When discussing funeral services and disposal of remains, relational partners experienced an Openness-Closedness dialectic between wanting to discuss the topic to learn their partner’s final wishes but not wanting to engage in the conversation. Relational partners would negotiate the dialectic via the following communication strategies: Temporary acquiescence and dodging postponement. Furthermore, research suggests that the interfaith couple must also navigate identity and relational dialectics on a micro level of frequent occurrence.

Research findings suggest that in the interfaith relationship, partners learn to navigate across dialectics related to the placement of religious artifacts and decisions to join in each other’s religious services. Theme 6 highlights that partners must negotiate how religious artifacts will be displayed in the couple’s home as well as the size and location of these. Moreover, relational partners must also make decisions associated with their level of participation in the religious activates of their spouse. Relational partners navigate the dialectic of wanting to encourage and support each other’s faith by attending religious services and activities with them, yet at times feel discomfort during services. Conversely, partners also navigate the dialectic of knowing they cannot expect their
spouse to join them for all religious events, yet feeling disappointed when they choose not to attend.

The final theme of this data analysis addressed the mixed emotions that interfaith partners experience when reassessing their relationship. Interviewee responses suggest that although interfaith relational partners are accepting of their interfaith relational status, they indicate a longing for a same-faith spouse under the assumption that having the same religious beliefs would have reduced conflict and increased relational closeness. When reflecting on their decisions regarding their children’s religious upbringing, interviewees indicated feeling proud about the socialization outcome of their children but also felt remorseful that they did not provide their children with a firm religious foundation. Having contemplated the developmental journey of their interfaith marriage, partners revealed a final mixed emotion between openly discussing religious dialectics prior to getting married and concentrating on the “big picture” grand relational vision that when all was said and done, what mattered most was their relationship to each other (see Table 3 and Figure 1).

In conclusion, intertwined throughout turbulent events, conflict situations, and mixed emotions is the omnipresent dialectic of Security-Vulnerability. According to Ting-Toomey (2005), Security-Vulnerability occurs when individuals “experience emotional insecurity or vulnerability” when in an unfamiliar cultural environment (p. 219). The unfamiliar culture in many ways represents the early stage of the interfaith marital relationship, especially in terms of wedding planning and children’s religious upbringing issues. INT posits “in an unfamiliar cultural environment, it is inevitable that most individuals would fall back on their familiar ethnocentric nets or habits…to help
them to adapt more efficiently to an unfamiliar cultural environment” (p. 220). However, due to the couple’s strong commitment to relational connection in this study, relational partners diligently strive to create a hybrid interfaith marital bond that works for them both. As the couple struggles with the inner feelings of vulnerability, the relational priority emphasis encourages them to develop creative and elastic communication strategies to fortify their relational identity, negotiate their religious dialectics, and prod them forward to create a superordinate spiritual and relational value system.
Table 3

Interfaith Relational Identity Management and Negotiating Dialectics: Thematic Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Theme and Sub-themes</th>
<th>Interpretive Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q1. How do interfaith partners use relational identity to manage religious identity dialectics?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity Management (IM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IM1</td>
<td>Minimizing Differences, Maximizing Similarities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Depolarizing the Religions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Co-creating a Superordinate Spiritual and Value System</td>
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<td>IM2</td>
<td>Negotiating Interfaith Couplehood Culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Emphasizing Relationship Culture as Priority</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fortifying Relational Boundaries</td>
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<td>IM3</td>
<td>Facing Interfaith Milestones</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Deciding to Marry and Planning the Wedding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coordinating Children’s Religious Upbringing</td>
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<td>Critical Incident Theme (CIT)</td>
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<td>CIT4</td>
<td>A Family Affair: Prioritizing Relationship for Family Event</td>
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<td><strong>Q2. How do interfaith partners negotiate the dialectics of religious and relational identities in conflict situations?</strong></td>
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<td>Identity Negotiation (IN)</td>
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<td>IN5</td>
<td>Negotiating Turbulence at Major Developmental Interfaith Events</td>
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<td>Negotiating the Uncertainty-Familiarity Dialectic:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Birth and Coming of Age Religious Rituals</td>
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<td>Negotiating the Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection Dialectic:</td>
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<td>Holiday Religious Rituals</td>
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<td>Negotiating the Openness-Closedness Boundary Dialectic:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Death Rituals and End of Life Arrangements</td>
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<td>IN6</td>
<td>Navigating Symbolic Identity Placement and Participatory Worship Decision</td>
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<td>Spatial Dialectic: Religious Artifacts</td>
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<td>Participatory Decision Dialectic: House of Worship</td>
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<td>IN7</td>
<td>Retrospective Relationship Assessment: Dialectics of Mixed Emotions</td>
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<td>Affective Resignation-Wistfulness Emotion</td>
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<td>Pride-Remorse Hybrid Emotion</td>
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<td>Upholding Relational Vision-Valuing Identity Distinctiveness Emotion</td>
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Figure 1

Relational Identity Management and Interfaith Conflict Dialectics: Research Findings Summary Schema Model
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Identity is the core communicative construct through which individuals define
group memberships and understand the unique attributes that differentiate the unique
individual from others. Identity in the interfaith marriage is a multifaceted concept that
becomes manifest along different relational dimensions. Through the developmental
timeline of the relational identity, the individuals involved become skilled negotiators
when juggling their identities. The religious identities of both partners become
interwoven into the relationship and the ways in which both partners learn to manage
their individual identity shapes the culture of the relationship. This thesis explored the
intricate layers of identity operating within the interfaith marriage. The purpose of this
thesis was to understand how relational partners managed distinct religious identities in
the combined process of developing a relational identity and negotiating intercultural
conflict kindled by their differences. With existing quantitative research indicating
turmoil and disaster for the interfaith couple, this analytical interpretive study reached
beyond the surface of the interfaith relationship to grasp the complexities and meanings
of the interfaith marriage. This chapter provides a summary of research findings,
implications and contributions, theoretical and methodological limitations, future
research directions, and final conclusion.
Summary of Findings and Implications

Prior to the present study, existing research suggests that the interfaith couple faces specific internal and external challenges that result in reduced marital satisfaction, heightened conflict episodes, and increased separation and relationship dissolution rates when compared to same-faith couples (“Across the aisles,” 2013; Bahr, 1981; Hepps & Dorfman, 1966; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). While recognizing the internal and external challenges to the relationship along with the numbers associated with marital conflict and dissolution, this study uncovered the how and why behind the quantified data. Through repeated listening to interviewees’ accounts and perceptions of their religious identity dialectics and relational challenges, this study was able to establish new levels of intercultural understanding based on how interfaith partners managed their own differences. More significantly, the study discovered communication strategies and identity negotiation behaviors both relational partners utilized to buffer against their religious dialectics.

The first research question explored how interfaith partners used their relational identity to manage their religious identity dialectics. This study used identity management theory (IMT) to understand “how cultural identities are negotiated through development of an interpersonal relationship,” in this case a romantic interfaith interpersonal relationship (Imahori & Cupach, 2005, p. 196). Echoing the developmental phases of IMT to the interfaith marital union, this study uncovered rich findings based on how relational partners approached and managed their religious differences as their relationship progressed. Interviewee data revealed that in order to reconcile their differences, relational partners initially choose to ignore the extent to which their
religious dialectics defined the relationship. These findings support the assumptions of IMT that intercultural relational partners overlook their differences and focus instead on their interpersonal connection during initial attraction (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). Most interviewees in this study bypassed considering the religious affiliation of their significant other while they were dating and claimed that the topic hardly, or never, came up in conversation. Moreover, an effective way for relational partners to overlook their differences was to depolarize the disparity across their respective religious beliefs and focus on the commonalities between both religions’ doctrines. Furthermore, the data revealed couples would co-create a superordinate spiritual and value system that encapsulated both partners’ core moral and spiritual values, thereby molding a third culture relational identity that transcended both religious identities and solidified the relational identity.

Importantly, interfaith marital partners developed a relational couplehood culture specific to their relationship, mirroring the enmeshment phase posited by IMT, in which they prioritized the relational identity above their individual religious identities. Built into prioritizing their relationship was demonstrating respect and open-mindedness towards each other’s religious differences. Doing so served a function of buttressing the relationship against possible tension created by partners’ conflicting religious viewpoints. The research found that relational partners regulated relational boundaries between the relationship and each one’s religion. Interviewees revealed they had a limited understanding of their partner’s religious doctrines and practices, indicating they would avoid the “religious talk” to protect the relationship bond from any religion-induced conflict. Furthermore, relational partners emphasized the boundary line they created
between each other to protect themselves from any attempts to proselytize, impose their religious beliefs on each other, or attempt to convert the other.

Although relational partners managed boundaries between each other’s religious identities and their relational identity, the research revealed two life milestones that would force the interfaith couple to acknowledge and coordinate their religious differences. Interviewees revealed that the first time they were forced to face their religious dialectics occurred when they talked about marriage and had to plan a wedding service. In this situation, external stressors, such as pressure from the couple’s social network to uphold certain religious traditions, coerced the couple into managing their religious differences. However, because the focus was on getting married, the couples were able to unify against external stressors and effectively manage their religious dialectics for the sake of the relationship. The data revealed a second milestone that highlighted the couple’s religious dialectics. Interfaith relational partners found that they would need to coordinate the religious upbringing of their children and make a decision as to which, if any, religion the children would follow. Managing the children’s religious upbringing was revealed to be the most challenging part of managing religious identity dialectics in an interfaith marriage. These findings echo previous research detailing the difficulties associated with raising children in an interfaith marriage (Andrews Horowitz, 1999; Williams & Lawler, 2003). However, having set boundaries to buffer against interreligious conflict, couples managed to overcome the milestone by reinforcing their interfaith couplehood culture. Therefore, the data sheds contrasting light on previous quantitative findings that marital satisfaction decreases because of disagreements regarding the religious upbringing of children (Williams & Lawler, 2003). The
underlying cause of marital dissatisfaction may not be directly related to the religious upbringing of children, rather, it may be rooted in the couple’s failure to establish an interfaith couplehood culture that exalts the relational identity over the religious identities of each partner.

The second research question scrutinized more specific situational instances of interreligious and relational identity dialectical tensions operating during conflict episodes. The data revealed interfaith partners negotiate identity dialectics at three major developmental events in the course of their marriage. First, negotiating the birth and coming of age religious rituals the couple’s children would partake revealed a tug-and-pull tension of Uncertainty-Familiarity in individual partners. The research uncovered relational partners used the communication strategies of accommodation, ambiguity, and evasion tactics to negotiate the dialectic. Second, couples experienced a dialectical tension between Identity Differentiation-Relational Connection when celebrating holidays and religious festivities. Research findings in this study indicate that couples tore down their relational boundaries during these events by participating, and at times embracing, each other’s religious customs. These findings contradict previous research indicating that relational partners may refuse to participate in each other’s religious holidays due to their differing religious beliefs (Andrews Horowitz, 1999). Instead, the data in this thesis indicated religious holidays function as an opportunity for the interfaith couple to share their religious practices and traditions with one another without posing a significant threat to their religious identities. To negotiate their need for connection, relational partners employed the communication strategies of parallel integrative strategy and creative compromise. Third, when discussing end of life arrangements and death
religious rituals, the interfaith couple demonstrated a dialectical tension between
Openness-Closedness. Although relational partners knew they needed to discuss their
preferences for services and disposal of remains, given specific guidelines for death
dictated by each religion, they engaged in temporary acquiescence and dodging
postponement communication strategies to manage the topic.

Aside from major developmental interfaith events, couples also needed to
navigate through frequent occurrences of symbolic identity dialectics in their
relationship. The thematic analysis results revealed that interfaith couples needed to
coordinate the placement of religious artifacts in their home and set spatial guidelines for
where and what kind of artifacts would be displayed. Some couples displayed
considerable artifacts in the main shared living area of the home. Others decided to
display small figures in a less visible area of the house. The research analysis also found
interfaith relational partners had to navigate their attendance to each other’s religious
services and participation in religious activities. Interviewees revealed a dialectic
between wanting to support their spouse by joining him or her in religious activities, but
experienced feelings of discomfort when doing so. There was some indication that
relational partners would accompany each other to their religious services. Over time,
however, the decision to participate would be limited to special events and occasion. In
conjunction, a second dialectic regarding attendance revealed the tension between
relational partners understanding that their spouse could not or would not join them for
all of their religious activities, but at the same time, feeling disappointed and at times
frustrated due to their partner’s refusal to participate. The analysis revealed that relational
partners would sometimes negotiate the dialectic via masking their true emotions in an effort to respect their partner’s choice or via “guilting” their partner into participating.

In addition to identity and relational dialectics operating within each relational partner, a thorough analysis of interview data highlighted three core mixed emotions the interfaith couple struggles with: Affective Resignation-Wistfulness Emotion, Pride-Remorse Hybrid Emotion, and Upholding Relational Vision-Valuing Identity Distinctiveness Emotion. Interviewees revealed mixed emotions between embracing and accepting their interfaith marriage and feeling melancholic about particular elements they may have missed out on and exacerbated tensions that arose from having an interfaith partner. Regarding the religious upbringing of their children, interviewees expressed feeling an internal conflict between being proud of the outcome of raising flexible, open-minded children but feeling remorse about not providing them with a concrete religious foundation they could find solace in. Finally, the findings of this study indicate that although couples reported they had failed to discuss their religious differences prior to getting married, in retrospect, they considered those conversations to be vital to the success of the relationship. However, in spite of their differences, interviewees offered a grand “relational vision,” encouraging future interfaith relationships to “focus on the big picture” and not allow religious dialectics to tamper with their relational identity. The following section highlights the conceptual and methodological contributions provided by this study.

**Contributions**

This study makes several significant contributions to interfaith marital communication and research. Research focused specifically on the study of the interfaith
marital communication context is minimal. Within the existing research, studies have predominately used quantitative methodology to collect data. This study provides a significant contribution to the research of interfaith marital communication based on the following four rationales. First, previous research of interfaith marriage is largely outdated and limited to a handful of studies. This study provides an updated insight into an under-researched relational context. Second, there are limited studies that specifically delve into the communicative aspect of the interfaith marital relationship. Most of these do so from a quantitative variable comparison approach that cannot grasp the underlying tensions and rich meanings of the interfaith marital relationship dialectics. This study has cast a spotlight on the interfaith marital communication context through a qualitative interpretive lens. The narrative findings highlighted the various complex dimensions of relational partners’ communicative processes and strategies. Third, with the exception of a few studies, previous research of interfaith marriage has failed to use a theoretical framework. This study applies the theoretical frameworks of IMT and INT to guide the thematic analysis procedures and provides rich interfaith marital negotiation insights under the lens of a combined relational and socio-cultural identity frame. Lastly, to the knowledge of the author, there has been no previous research in communication studies that conducted and collected interview data from 16 interfaith participants. Most of the existing research of this relational context used questionnaires as the data collection procedure. By interviewing participants, this study gathered a rich data set providing illuminating insights into the meaning construction processes of how intimate partners co-construct and coordinate their interfaith bond via diverse communication strategies.
This thesis also provides several theoretical contributions. As noted by Imahori and Cupach (2005), IMT requires further theoretical development of its interpretation of the identity management strategies within the intercultural relational context. As it relates to the developmental phases of the theory, this study supported certain elements of the trial, enmeshment, and renegotiation phases. Interfaith partners’ initial decision to ignore their religious dialectics underscores the trial stage of intercultural relationship attraction. During the enmeshment stage, IMT posits that partners will choose to focus on commonalities rather than cultural differences. The findings of this study that partners depolarized their religions and co-created a superordinate spiritual and value system further support the relational identity developments at the enmeshment stage. In the renegotiation phase, IMT suggests that relational partners manage their cultural differences employing the lens of their relational identity. This notion is also supported by the present study in that interfaith partners prioritize their relational identity above their individual religious identities. Although IMT emphasizes the importance of the renegotiation phase in fostering greater relational connection, the particular tensions and challenges of this phase are not thoroughly explored or clearly elaborated upon.

Contributing to IMT, the findings of this research study deepen the understanding of the concept of “interfaith relational identity” management as explored via Theme 1 and Theme 2. Theme 1 introduced the conceptual understanding of managing interfaith dialectics by minimizing the differences and maximizing the similarities across relational partners’ religious doctrines. In doing so, relational partners managed the interfaith couplehood identity by depolarizing their individual religious views and co-creating a superordinate spiritual and value system to function as a “meeting point” of their shared
guiding principles and beliefs. Theme 2 identified partners’ establishment of an interfaith 
couplehood culture and emphasized its priority over individual religious identities. To 
enable prioritizing the relational identity, interfaith partners fortified relational boundaries 
to uphold mindful flexibility and intercultural sensitivity. These boundaries encouraged 
the couple to respect each other’s religious identities and prevented them from 
proselytizing or imposing religious beliefs on one another. This study also adds to IMT 
the concept of major milestone decisions occurring within intercultural relational identity 
development. This finding connotes that relational partners need to address and cannot 
evade identity dialectics at certain turning points of the relationship, a feature currently 
lacking from the relational developmental stages of the theory.

This study also employed the INT framework to explore and understand the 
specific tug-and-pull relational and religious tensions experienced by interfaith marital 
couples. The findings of this study provide rich evidence for some of the dialectics of the 
theory. According to the interpretive findings, three intriguing relational/religious related 
dialectics were uncovered: Uncertainty-Familiarity, Identity Differentiation-Relational 
Connection, and Openness-Closedness Boundary. In particular, this study purports a 
cross-fertilization of Inclusion-Differentiation (group membership dialectic) with 
Connection-Autonomy (relational dialectic). The recognition of a combined dialectical 
tension operating within the interfaith marital context addresses the paradoxical and 
multifaceted nature of the relationship, paving the ground for research on poly-layered 
dialectical tensions.

Furthermore, this study worked to uncover INT-related strategies when intimate 
couples have to negotiate religious group membership identity with relational identity
priority. Whereas prior quantitative studies often emphasized the importance of open communication as positively correlated to interfaith marital satisfaction (McCurry et al., 2012; Reiter & Gee, 2008), this study uncovered a diverse and rich set of dialectical tensions and their associated communication strategies: accommodation, ambiguity, evasion tactics, parallel integrative strategy, creative compromise, temporary acquiescence, and dodging postponement. Based on the interpretive findings of this research, open communication is a limited perspective to gauge marital satisfaction of interfaith couples. This study reveals the use of evasive and ambiguous communication as functional methods with which to address the dialectical tensions of the interfaith relationship.

This interpretive thematic analysis also locates the mixed emotions that enwrap identity issues of interfaith marital partners. The dialectics of Affective Resignation-Wistfulness Emotion, Pride-Remorse Hybrid Emotion, and Upholding Relational Vision-Valuing Identity Distinctiveness Emotion accentuate the underlying affective factors that shape identity negotiation. Ting-Toomey (2005) recognizes the emotionally charged motivational factors for effective identity negotiation outcomes. Therefore, this study captures the nuances of those emotions to shape the meaning of the interfaith relational identity. The combined dynamic emotions of each relational partner further underscore the complex layered attributions of negotiating identity in an interfaith marriage. Subsequent limitations of this study are addressed in the following section.

Limitations

This study has its limitations both theoretical and methodological in nature.
This study used two theoretical frames, namely IMT and INT, to guide the conceptual development and data interpretation phase of research. While both theories helped facilitate the deep discovery of the identity management and identity negotiation dialectical themes as well as the communication strategies, there exist some limitations with this approach. First, using the lens of identity may delimit other discoveries associated with the interfaith marital relationship. Had alternate theoretical frameworks such as anxiety/uncertainty management theory (Gudykunst, 2005), expectancy violations theory (Burgoon, 1978; Burgoon & Ebisu Hubbard, 2005), or the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (Pearce, 2005) guided this research, the data analysis would have yielded alternative themes and communication strategies. However, according to Ting-Toomey (2005), identity is “the reflective self-conception” (p. 212) as shaped by our individual and group membership socialization processes and, therefore, is at the core of all interpersonal and intercultural communication encounters.

The second conceptual limitation of the study is that using the notion of dialectics may tilt the research interpretation towards uncovering the polarized dialectical dimensions. The research may therefore fail to observe other specific dimensions of the interfaith marital encounter. For example, if the study had employed face negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1999), it could have explored the different facework interaction strategies used by interfaith relational partners. Third, by using the “event turbulence” theme to interpret the data, the analysis may overlook the micro-events that play out in the everyday life of the interfaith couple. The interviewees themselves did articulate the major turbulent events during the interview process. However, focusing on particular major events as the sub-thematic findings may also gloss over the discussion of other
concepts or relational experiences via the derived narrative analysis. Additional methodological research limitations associated with this study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first methodological limitation of this study was the relatively low variability across the religious belief systems of the couples that participated. Interviewees stated that their partner’s religious beliefs did not drastically differ from their own. Had they married someone who was affiliated with a religion that promoted significantly contrastive doctrines from their own religion, interviewees suggested it would have been harder to negotiate their dialectics. Some even projected this difficulty to external relationships. They noted it would be hard to reconcile the religious differences between a Christian and Muslim, for example. Furthermore, since the author relied on convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants the interviewees reported similar religious belief systems because of their relation to each other, thus limiting the variety of religious affiliations among participants. Had this study been able to recruit participants who were affiliated with religions outside of the two main ones reported, undoubtedly that would have provided a richer data set available for analysis. However, even with the limited religious variety among relational partners, the data revealed significant implications of being in an interfaith marriage.

Second, some interviewees in this study stated they believed their differences would have been harder to negotiate had they both been strongly affiliated with their respective religions. They also noted that due to the radical gaps between polarized religions, two people strongly affiliated with opposing belief systems should not get married in the first place. However, the “love conquers all” mentality suggests that
interfaith marriages between two individuals with strong ties to their respective religions do materialize (Willimon, 2013). To address this limitation, this research could be extended with relational partners strongly affiliated either in belief or in practice of their religion. Nonetheless in this study, interviewees who did not perceive a strong affiliation to their religious belief systems could still identify vivid milestones and turbulent interfaith events that arose in the relationship.

Third, couples who had been married for many years did not readily recall some of the issues and conflicts they had regarding religious differences. During the interview process, they had trouble recalling some specific conflicts and the effects on their relationship. Additionally, couples who had been married a significant amount of time and had already raised children in the interfaith context had already experienced many of the “hard conversations” and milestones that bring about the need to discuss religious discrepancies. Alternatively, couples who had been married for a shorter period of time or who did not have children from their current marriage had not yet nor would they have to face those milestones. There may exist some implications resulting from inconsistency across stages of life and marital status factors among the interviewees. Despite this particular methodological issue, the available data still provided rich stories to illustrate relational dialectics and communication strategies operating within interfaith conflict situations. Nevertheless, it would behoove the present research to be studied from a longitudinal lens as well as to establish specific criteria regarding length of marriage and marital status (i.e., first marriage, second marriage, etc.) when screening participants.

Lastly, in some instances during interviews, participants would say to the author, “You’re probably religious,” seemingly concerned with offending the author’s personal
belief system. Although the author would encourage them to speak freely, oftentimes she perceived they purposefully held back from saying anything that could potentially be construed as offensive to any religion or belief system. However, it can be argued that limitations relating to degree of openness or willingness to discuss delicate topics are inherent to any qualitative study relying on interview data. The following section suggests future directions for research of this communication context.

**Directions for Future Research**

This current topic can follow several conceptual and methodological directions for future research. Theoretical directions in understanding interfaith marital communication can pursue the following three avenues. Future research of this topic may use an intergroup communication perspective on negotiating relational priority dialectics. Issues related to convergence, divergence, and maintenance behaviors can be addressed to understand how prioritizing the relational couplehood culture factors into relational partners’ speech style adjustments (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005). Second, this research uncovers some key relational turbulence dialectics and their associated negotiation strategies. Future research may uncover more intergroup/interfaith negotiation dialectics and communication strategies in other multilayered relationship contexts such as interfaith dating couples, interracial and/or biracial couples, couples in which one or both partners are transgender, or couples with different educational levels and/or socioeconomic status. Third, this study focused on the identity management, conflict negotiation, and communication strategies that take place within the interfaith marital union. Future research should investigate the identity management and negotiation communication strategies that occur within an intergenerational interfaith relationship
between parent and child. It would be interesting to explore, when children grow to adulthood and decide to practice a different religion from that of their parents, how those identity dialectics mirror or differ from the present study.

From a methodological perspective, first it would be beneficial to extend this study by recruiting couples who subscribe to significantly different religious belief systems. Extending the study from this approach can yield a rich data set that may uncover similar or different communication strategies for managing identities and negotiating dialectical tensions. Second, a longitudinal study of interfaith couples can show how couples navigate along their identity dialectics and develop the skillset necessary to manage their differences with the passage of time and along major events. Third, this study interviewed relational partners separately to allow participants the most uninhibited opportunity for free expression possible. It would be interesting to employ a discourse analysis method by interviewing both partners simultaneously to observe how the interfaith couple relates their interfaith identity dialectics. Fourth, future research of this study should consider an interaction analysis method in which relational partners are video-recorded to capture the dynamics of the actual verbal and nonverbal exchange processes of the couple, which may yield a rich data set on how couples approach or evade vulnerable religion-related topics. Fifth, future researchers can probe if relational partners’ ethnicity and different education levels factor into how interfaith couples manage and negotiate their religious dialectics. Lastly, future studies should explore if a combination between a strong religious partner and an agnostic partner will yield similar or different meaning-making accounts in their negotiation of religious identity dialectics in the context of developing a cohesive relational culture.
Conclusion

This thesis provided a rich expansion of the existing research on interfaith marital communication. Through the lens of identity, this study underscored significant findings on identity management, conflict negotiation, and communication strategies of the interfaith relational dialectics. The study uncovered the fundamental development of the interfaith couplehood culture through which interfaith partners depolarized their religious doctrines and together formed a superordinate spiritual and value system that would encapsulate their individual morals and beliefs. The notion of relational boundaries established by interfaith partners to shield their relational identity from their individual religious perspectives underlined how partners were able to prioritize their relational identity above their religious identities. The research also identified milestone events across the interfaith relationship that brought their religious dialectics to the surface.

This study uncovered three prominent dialectical tensions functioning within the interfaith marriage across specific turbulent developmental events and discovered seven communication strategies relational partners used to negotiate them. The research also delved into micro-level frequent situational factors that the interfaith couple navigates throughout the relationship. The data analysis yielded three mixed emotions at the core of interfaith partners’ relational assessment that provide the affective force behind the efforts to manage and negotiate their identity dialectics. The theoretical frameworks of IMT and INT were extended into the interfaith relational context, contributing to the understanding of the intercultural/interfaith relational identity development and providing a cross-fertilization of group membership and relational dialectical tensions.
In sharing their journey of interfaith couplehood, the individuals who participated in this study facilitated significant contributions to the enrichment of scholarly understanding in the areas of identity management, identity negotiation, and intercultural communication strategies. This final quote, expressed by Benjamin (Male, Age 60, Catholic-Jewish) encapsulates the interfaith relational couplehood culture, paying tribute to each couple:

Every relationship takes work and blood, sweat, and tears, there's a lot, so anybody who's stayed together, I mean we've been together almost 30 years, it's not by coincidence that you just happen to be together after 30 years, that's a lot of work. And I think we have a good relationship. I think we love each other dearly, we're committed to each other absolutely, I think we've raised three beautiful children together, mostly because of her, not because of me. I fulfill my role in the relationship you know as best I can, she fulfills her role in the relationship as best she can, in terms of being parents and the children. I think we have a lot of the same interests, in terms of how we spend our time, what we like to do. We like to travel, there's a lot of commonality there but there's also a lot of difference. It's interesting because, you know in that picture (points at picture hanging on wall of a couple strolling close together, holding an umbrella, with a bridge in the background), those people are walking, that's a bridge, but you know there are multiple ways to get there right? So I would say that I don't think we would always choose the same path, but we would both probably still always get to where we're going and one isn't necessarily better than the other and so there's some diversity there and I think that's good in a marriage…But there are challenges, there have always been challenges. There will always be challenges, and disagreements and you know, you just gotta talk it out.

The findings of this study demonstrate that interfaith marital communication is multifaceted, with numerous processes, strategies, and efforts that occur simultaneously to manage and negotiate the working identities of the intimate relationship. No single approach can capture the interfaith communication process. Rather, it is a delicate, balanced, conscious assortment of endeavors that guide relational partners along their journey to one meeting point: the invaluable interfaith relational identity.
Dear Participant,

My name is Laura Martinez. I am a graduate student under the thesis direction of Dr. Stella Ting-Toomey at California State University, Fullerton in the Human Communication Studies Department.

I am conducting a study on identity management and conflict negotiation in the interfaith marriage. The purpose of this study is to understand how spouses in an interfaith marriage manage their religious differences. I am inviting you to be a part of this research. In order to participate, you must be 18 years or older, be currently married for at least two years, and you and your spouse must be affiliated with different religions.

Your participation involves participating in a face-to-face interview with me. Before the interview, you will be given a brief questionnaire to fill out. During the interview, you will be asked to discuss your experiences related to the role religion plays in your marriage and how you navigate through religious differences. The expected length of the interview process is one hour.

Please be aware that your participation does entail minimum risk. I understand that discussion of your experience may arouse distress, discomfort, or unpleasantness. Be assured that you have the right to choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Also, you have the option to withdraw from the interview at any point and for any cause. Once the entire interview session is complete, you will receive a $10.00 Starbucks gift card.

Confidentiality will be provided to the extent allowed by law. By choosing to participate, you consent to have your interview recorded on audiotape. In lieu of your real name, I will use a pseudonym to identify your audio file. This same pseudonym will be used throughout the entire research process. I will not play your audio file to anyone. I will have sole access to the audio file and it will be kept on my password-protected computer. After the research process is complete (November, 2015), your file will be destroyed. I will keep your consent form and transcript in separate locked cabinets. I will
keep all transcripts indefinitely and will have sole access to these. Study results may be published, reported in academic conferences, used in presentations and/or other educational settings. However, no names or other identifying information will ever be attached to study results.

This study is conducted for thesis research. I have no financial conflicts of interest to declare. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without suffering penalty or loss of benefits or services you may otherwise be entitled to.

If you have additional questions or concerns please contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Stella Ting-Toomey, or me by phone or email at the information provided below. If you have questions about the rights of human research participants contact the CSUF IRB Office at (657) 278-7640 or irb@fullerton.edu.

Sincerely,

Laura Martinez, Graduate Student
Email: laumartinez@fullerton.edu
Phone: 714-822-0784

Faculty Advisor: Stella Ting-Toomey, Ph.D.
Email: sting@fullerton.edu
Phone: 657-278-3691

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant (please print):

Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Your signature below indicates that you are giving permission to audiotape your responses.

Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
APPENDIX B

INTERFAITH MARITAL COMMUNICATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather basic demographics as well as preliminary information regarding this research study topic. Please complete each field.

1. Sex (circle one): Male Female 2. Age: ________
3. Your Ethnicity: ___________________ Spouse’s ethnicity: ______________
4. Marital Status: 1st marriage 2nd marriage 3rd marriage Other: ____________
5. Length of current marriage: _______________
6. Do you have children from your current marriage? If yes, how many? ____________
7. Your education level: ________________ Spouse’s education level: __________
8. Your profession: ___________________ Spouse’s profession: ______________

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
1. Do you consider your marriage an interfaith union? Yes No
2. Your religious affiliation: _________________________________
3. Your spouse’s religious affiliation: ____________________________
4. How important is your religion/religious affiliation to you? (circle one)
   Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very important
5. How often do you participate in religious activities? (e.g., services, holidays, rituals)
   Not often 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
6. How important is your relationship to you?
   Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very important
7. How comfortable do you feel being part of an interfaith marriage?

| Not comfortable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very comfortable |

8. To what extent do your religious differences create challenges in your relationship?

| Not challenging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very challenging |

9. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way religious topics are handled in your relationship?

| Not satisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very satisfied |

What three topics related to your religious differences are discussed most often in your marriage?

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
APPENDIX C

INTERFAITH MARITAL COMMUNICATION INTERVIEW GUIDE*

Introduction Questions:
1. How did you and your spouse meet?
   a. What attracted you to your spouse at first?
   b. Were you aware of your different backgrounds? If so, what aspects?
   c. How did you first learn about your religious differences?

2. Initially, how did you feel about his/her religious beliefs?
   a. Was religion a frequent topic of conversation? (percent)
   b. What did you usually talk about when you were dating?

3. How did your religious differences affect your decision to get married?
   a. Did you discuss the role of your religious differences after you decided to marry?
   b. Did your family or your spouse’s family express their opinions about marrying someone from a different faith?

4. What does interfaith marriage mean to you? (What does being in an IF marriage mean?)

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After the introduction questions, each interviewee is handed the critical incident, *A Family Affair*. The following questions are posed after each interviewee has read and selected an option.

Critical-incident Questions:
1. Which character do you identify the most with? Daniel or Leilani? How so?

2. Why did you select the X option as the best way to handle the situation?

3. How similar is this critical incident to your own marriage? Have you experienced a similar incident?

Research Question 1: *How do interfaith partners use relational identity to manage religious identity dialectics?*

1. Overall, how would you describe your relationship with your spouse?
   a. When you think of your marriage, what metaphor or image comes to your mind?
   b. In what ways is your relationship more important than your religion?
2. Overall, how would you describe your commitment to your religious beliefs?
   a. How would you describe your spouse’s commitment to his/her religious beliefs?
   b. When you think about the religious differences between you and your spouse, what metaphor or image comes to your mind?

3. Do you feel that your religious differences affect your everyday interactions with your spouse? If so, how?

4. How do you think your relationship has been affected by your religious differences/viewpoints?
   a. Overall, what does commitment to your relationship mean to you?
   b. Overall, what does commitment to your faith/religion mean to you?

5. Have you ever considered converting to your spouse’s religion or vice versa?
   a. Have you shared your thoughts with your spouse?
   b. What have you concluded?

6. Overall, how do you typically handle or deal with your religious differences?

   **Research Question 2:** *How do interfaith partners negotiate the dialectics of religious and relational identities in conflict situations?*

7. Who usually brings up in conversation the topic of religion in your relationship?
   a. What religious topics do you usually talk about?
   b. What are some of the “hot button” religious issues in your relationship?

8. When the topic of your religious differences came up, how did you usually feel?
   a. Did you feel anxious or vulnerable in your relationship?
   b. How did you usually deal with your anxious feelings?

9. Recall a conflict that was triggered by your religious differences or a religious topic. How did the conflict unfold?
   a. How do you feel about how the conflict was handled?
   b. How was the conflict resolved?

10. When you and your partner argue about a religious topic, what do you say or do that aggravates the situation? What does your spouse say or do that aggravates the situation?
   a. What have you said or done that has been helpful or effective in appeasing/deescalating the situation?
   b. What has your spouse said or done to appease the situation?

11. Do your spouse’s family/friends impose their religion on you? What have they done/said that made you feel pressured?
a. Do you feel comfortable talking about your own beliefs around your spouse’s family/friends?
   b. Do you feel that they have ever gone too far or crossed the line?

12. In your everyday interactions, do you and your spouse support each other’s faith?
   a. How do you usually show support to your spouse’s faith?
   b. How does your spouse usually show support for your faith?

13. Does your spouse invite you to accompany him/her to religious activities, or vice versa? How does that conversation unfold?
   a. How do you feel when you know he/her is going to invite you? How do you feel inviting him/her?
   b. What determines your response? How does your spouse’s response make you feel? How do you feel if you choose to go or choose not to go?

14. Despite your religious differences, do you feel connected to your spouse overall?
   a. Do you ever feel disconnected from your spouse because of your religious differences?
   b. How different do you think your marriage would be if your religious differences weren’t a factor?

15. If you could advise an interfaith couple considering marriage, what would you tell them?
   a. In hindsight, what do you wish someone had told you before getting married? (surprises) What advice would you give other interfaith couples about managing conflicts over religious topics?
   b. What do you feel is the most important thing to do or keep in mind when trying to resolve religious conflicts?

\textit{If applicable:}

16. What role did your religious differences play on your decision to have/not have children?
   a. What are the most difficult aspects of raising children when you and your spouse have different belief systems?
   b. How do you handle your differences?

Before concluding, ask participants if there is anything else they would like to share.

*Note: The numbered items are the actual questions that will be used during the interview. Sub-points (a and b) will be used as further probing questions if needed.
Debriefing and Thank You

Confidentiality will be provided to the extent allowed by law. In lieu of your real name, I will use a pseudonym to identify your audio file. This same pseudonym will be used throughout the entire research process. Upon the research end date (December, 2015), your audio recording will be destroyed. Any questions or responses you may have felt uncomfortable with can be omitted. Thank you for participating in this interview. Your participation will help to further research on identity management and conflict negotiation among interfaith marriages.

ID#: _______________ Pseudonym: _______________

Interview Date: _______________ Start Time/Close Time: _______________

Location: _______________
Daniel and Leilani have been married for nearly two years. Daniel was raised in a conservative religious household, is active in church activities, and is deeply committed to his beliefs. Leilani has a strong belief system but does not strongly adhere to a religion. As a child, her family only loosely participated in religious events. Daniel and Leilani have been able to work out their religious differences throughout most of their relationship. Before they were married, neither of them considered their religious beliefs to be necessarily at odds. Most of the time they overlooked their differences entirely. Having been married for only two years, their religious disparities have not yet been a factor of intense conflict. Granted, they have had some arguments here and there, but they feel committed in their relationship and love for one another. In fact, Daniel and Leilani are convinced that their relationship can withstand any troubles.

Leilani’s grandparents’ 50th wedding anniversary is coming up soon. This is a joyful and exciting event for the entire family. Leilani is eager for her and Daniel to visit her native home of Veracruz and introduce him to all of her relatives. As they are preparing for the trip, Leilani is excitedly telling Daniel how happy she is that he will get to spend time with her family in her hometown. Her grandparents would be celebrating 50 years of marriage. What a wonderful occasion for them to spend with the entire family! Leilani continued to fill Daniel in on the planned activities: the traditional family picture, the dinner and of course, the church ceremony in which her grandparents would renew their vows and all family members would attend.

Upon hearing about attending the church ceremony, Daniel immediately becomes very agitated. He tells Leilani that he cannot attend the church ceremony because he would feel uncomfortable participating in another church’s religious services. Leilani is confused and distraught. Daniel insists she should not go either as this would make him feel left out and alone. However, the ceremony includes the entire family. After Leilani’s grandparents walk into the church, their children will follow, and then the grandchildren.

Leilani is expected to attend and she has been looking forward to this ceremony for months. Daniel is insistent that they not attend the church service. Leilani is torn. She doesn’t want to leave Daniel behind or have a problem with him, but she also doesn’t want to disappoint her family, especially her aging grandparents. What should Leilani do? Should she stay with Daniel and skip the religious service? Or should she go to the church knowing that Daniel will be very upset?

Choose the solution that you consider best resolves the issue:

1. Leilani should explain to her grandparents that Daniel’s religious beliefs stop him from attending the ceremony and she needs to stay with him so that he doesn’t feel left out.
2. Leilani should explain to Daniel how important this event is for her and encourage him to attend with her.
3. Leilani should just go to the church and worry about the conflict with Daniel later.
4. Leilani should stay with Daniel and never bring up the issue to her family, hoping that no one notices her missing from the church.
5. Leilani should just cancel the trip because it would be too difficult and embarrassing to explain to her family the situation with Daniel.
6. Your creative solution:

*Source: An original critical incident developed by Laura Martinez, Human Communication Studies, CSUF, 2015.*
REFERENCES


