[Student name]

Inter-religious marriages

[School name]

[Year]

3616 words
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THE GOAL

I met religious discrimination early in my childhood when, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the society and inter-religious families of Azerbaijan started to see increasing cases of religious hostility and discrimination, especially in interreligious marriages. I was born in a family where two religions, Christianity and Islam, were present. I am blessed that peace and understanding were the dominant powers in my family, however this is not always the case.

In response to the problems arising in the multi-religious families of modern Azerbaijan I decided to create a video film that would help illustrate the issue to my classmates, as well as a wider audience in Azerbaijan. I thought that community of modern Azerbaijan would be interested in exploring this problem further and gaining advice on their future choices. The community needs to learn and obtain advice from my investigation on interreligious families to make choices for themselves in their future lives.

One of the goals of personal project is to gain specific evidence and advice from women experiencing either positive or negative aspects of multi-religious marriages. This advice and information was then communicated to the wider audience by the means of the video film. By showcasing my video film in my school T — which is an international school representing 65 nationalities, I wanted to help the students discover the patterns of conflict that result in relationships involving two religions. I gathered a small audience of different ages in our school and showed them the video film, and then collected the feedback from them. (Appendix # I0, II, please)

I have previously investigated written sources, such as books, videos and picture galleries on the topics similar to mine — i.e. the multi-religious families in modern Azerbaijan. However, since I found many of them either too wide in scope or biased, I tried to come up with my own solutions.

There are many other ways I could have presented the information I learned during my project, apart from a video film. It goes without saying that a booklet about interreligious marriages could have been successful since it would be easy to present a lot of useful information cohesively in several chapters. Another way I could have presented my information is to make a website, however I felt that the video film would be the best since it can both present the information and advice in a lively dynamic way and moreover to capture the audience’s attention. It is also important to mention that making a video film was the dream of my life.

I’ve already mentioned the benefits to the community of my project and so the key Area Of Interaction (AOI) for my Personal Project is the Community and Service. This is so because my project is essentially about the interactions of people with different faiths in the basic units of the society. I investigated the problems often occurring in interreligious families due to the differences in the family members’ faiths. I set my research question as: “Is it an advantage or disadvantage to be involved into multi religious marriage?” Since the respondents for my interviews also provide the advice to the people who are planning to engage in interreligious marriages, the project is a service to community. People who perceive the message in my video film thus have to make certain decisions and possible receive advice on the interreligious marriages and the advantages/disadvantages that these have.
Specifications for evaluation of my project:

- Production of a good quality video film
  - Optimum length – 25 min
  - Inclusion of personal interviews
  - Attractive cover art and include images in video film
  - Subtitles
  - Aim to answer to the question “Is it an advantage or a disadvantage to be involved in a multi-religious marriage?”
  - Constructive feedback from a viewing audience

SELECT SOURCES

In order to complete my project, I first had to decide what resources I wanted to use and collect the relevant information. A list of my sources is as follows:

Background reading and research

I visited the school and local libraries in order to gather as much information as possible about the three main religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and to find out about their beliefs and how they look at multi religious marriages. This included books by Jay Newman and Hayat Fariden who I mention later. I also found stories of interreligious marriages on the internet. My reason for doing it is that the community would not be interested in watching a video film which talks about irrelevant things.

Interviews & Record to video film

Throughout my project, I interviewed and discussed the themes related to my research question with different people. These included my friends and their parents, some of them engaged in interreligious marriages, people I have contacted through school, and even some of the religious ministers (from the church, synagogue and the mosque). I interviewed the parents of my friends and the other individuals I contacted and decided to choose 3 people to take a part in video film, three women involved in interreligious marriages.

I think that interviews are relevant to my goal, because the audience would like to know about the personal ideas of some of those who are involved in inter religious marriages. They are appropriate for my research question since the community is likely to comprehend and appreciate the message more deeply and more factually if the primary voices are given. They deliver a personal voice and help the audience get a greater insight into the situations of interreligious families in Azerbaijan.

Discussions with religious figures

In order to gain information about what each religion above dictates, I spoke to several religious figures including a prominent figure in the Islamic Society of Azerbaijan, MA, a priest in the local
orthodox church, and a rabbi in the local synagogue. This offered the professional view on the topic, which would of course be interesting to the audience.

Collection of cinematographic materials-

Video clips were taken from sketches provided by my friend and video instructor R (appendix 2), as well as from well known movies created by the Azeri cinematographic society in the late Soviet times and sketches from the film Ali and Nino, by Kurban Said. These were filmed materials presented to the Cinematographic society by the Dutch directors and artists who have been to Azerbaijan to create their sketches of Ali and Nino in late 1990’s. (check source #2, please). I think that this would be relevant to my goal, since it will be easier for the audience to comprehend the message if the cinematography is presented to ease the understanding of information.

Research and use of Adobe Premiere and Photoshop-

Editing the video film was very challenging since neither me, nor R were experienced in working with this program before. His friend lent me some books which explained how to work with this software. Unfortunately I had to return them back, so I forgot to include them in bibliography.

For the purpose of making the film, I needed the following equipment: a sound system, a microphone, a camera, lighting, and premises with appropriate interior. I used my parents’ support as well as the help of my friend R, who owns a home studio. I used my own camera to film the video film. Of course, I could have used R’s (check source #28, appendix #9, please) sound system, but that could have threatened the quality and clarity of the sound, so I had to buy a microphone. The proper lights were borrowed from my previous school. My parents gladly let me use our house, situated in the Old City, as a filming premise. Thus, the first episodes of my video film are connected with this place. I thought that our house would be the most appropriate place for the making of the film, as here I had the opportunity to change the interior according to the personality, views, mood, and clothes of my guests. I think the most interesting part of the project is the history of the place, which is so closely connected with the events which led to my investigation, and the interviewing process of individuals who have experienced the issue themselves and made this a truly enjoyable step in my project.

APPLICATION OF INFORMATION

As mentioned, I have looked up in the school library and also a few other local libraries. Moreover I tried to find out as much information as I could about the three main religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam and how each corresponds to interreligious marriages. For instance, in Christianity it is fine to marry a person who is not Christian. In Judaism you don’t have to marry a Jewish person either and it is also important to mention that it is almost impossible to convert in Judaism nowadays. Unlike the previous two religions Islam doesn’t let the people to marry not Muslim people. A person must be converted into Islam.

I accumulated a lot of important information from MA (check the Appendix 7 and source 25, please) — a prominent figure in the Islamic Society of Azerbaijan — who has conveyed me a lot on the nature of interreligious families in modern Azerbaijan and the ways children are taught in these
families. Usually, as he noted, the religion of the husband — which is more often than not Islam — predominated in such families and the children are subsequently taught in Islamic way. However, it is neither a rule nor a doctrine communicated by the Islamic Society or the official religion of Azerbaijan — sometimes the Christian wives are also able to pass their religion to the Muslim husbands. However, as MA believes, families where religious harmony is not present (where man and woman exercise different faiths with a hostile prejudice against other faiths) do not tend to last. The second religious person I interviewed was a head priest in the local orthodox church (check appendix # 6 and source # 27, please). According to him, the people who are involved into multi religious families often suffer. For instance, he told me the story which happened a few years ago a Christian woman decided to baptize her son, but when her Muslim husband found out about that they divorced (check appendix 3, please). The last person was a rabbi in the local synagogue (check source# 25 and appendix #5, please) I learnt from him that it is not almost impossible to convert into Judaism (check the step 3). Also he said that inter religious marriages are perfectly fine if people love each other. This would offer the professional view on the topic, which would of course be interesting to the audience.

From these interviews, I have also learned a lot of new information. Religious ministers, for example, seemed reasonably biased, since their views seemed to correspond to the favour of their own religions. MA, for example, announced that all interreligious marriages of Muslim men and non-Muslim women should be discouraged. I do not think this is the right idea, since, in the case of the first two of my respondents, interreligious marriages have become quite happy and fortunate. Therefore, I think, I would present the audience with an objective view, the one that corresponds to my research question and the demands of Areas of Interaction.

In relation to the interviews with the three women, I set myself certain questions which I must discuss with them. Firstly I asked them about their experience in the interreligious marriages and if the religious discrimination of any sort take/has taken place in their families.

Secondly, I questioned them on the nature of children’s religious education in their families. Are the children allowed to be taught raised in a secular way, or is the religion of mother/father predominant in any way?

Finally, I asked them for advice they would present to the people willing to enter an interreligious marriages, and how to escape problems associated with them.

The first person I interviewed was a Jewish woman named IL. (source # 22, please). Her husband is Muslim. This couple faced a lot of difficulties on their path. Both his and her parent rejected the idea that their children want to marry someone who doesn’t share the same beliefs. For the first two years they secretly were dating, but after they got tired and decided to make a family. The parents of both refused to keep in touch with them. When their first child was born his dad came and visited them, but he never came again. So, M (their daughter) who is also my classmate hasn’t seen her grandparent since she was born. However, there has never been a problem between the two, because they respect each other. There was a moment when her husband was about to convert in Judaism, because he felt himself more Jewish than Muslim. However it is almost not impossible to convert in Judaism. It goes without saying that this marriage at some point is beneficial for the both, because they live in peace and love, but at the same time it separated them from their families.
The second person who was interviewed is TN (check source #23, please). She is Christian and her husband is Muslim. When they decided to get engaged his family was totally against it in the beginning while her family had nothing against their marriage. Even though they had to go through a lot of difficulties they decided to get married. After the birth of the first child- TE’s parents decided to make a contact with the son and his new family. In other words, they accepted his marriage with a Christian woman. Her eldest daughter tended to get sick in her childhood. So she was recommended by her mother that the girl should be christened, and then everything will change. The husband was totally against it, so was his family. At last, however, they gave their consent for the christening. Therefore, in their family the daughter is baptized, and the son has undergone circumcision. He is a true Muslim. I think this is the perfect example of beneficial inter religious marriage, because the kids are lucky since they are accustomed to the traditions and customs of both religions. The Children learn the best of the religions with their milk which is enriches their culture and their perception of the world.

The third and last person I interviewed was lE (check source # 24). I met her through my neighbour who told me the story of her life. She is Christian, and she married Muslim. In the beginning their path seemed to be straight and even. But eventually her husband started to insulting her and even beating her up (unfortunately she refused to talk about this part in the video film) In other words, she was forced to convert to in Islam, However, even that did not help to save the family. As a result they got divorced. She now lives alone with her young daughter, but she does not think that religious discrimination and lack of understanding are present in every family. It all depends on the meaning that the family gives religion. From this interview inter religious marriages will be presented as something more disadvantageous rather than advantageous.

After researching Adobe Premiere and Photoshop I was able to use them to allow for the collection and compilation of video materials into one tape, allowing the production of moderate visual effects in no time. This helped me to organize my tape cohesively and without any glitches, etc. When I finished translating interviews from Russian into English, I made subtitles for the video film through the adobe premiere program. The reason I did this was because I felt that the audience would most likely prefer to capture the tone and sequence in the speaker’s voices, so that the message is communicated effectively. I was also taught by R that my video film should not be more than 25 minutes, so said my supervisor- Mr. C. That’s why my video film is exactly 19 minutes 36 seconds.

I used Adobe Photoshop software to design the themes for the video films, short cameos and the cover art for the DVD release. Since I primarily concentrated on the interreligious marriages dealing with the amalgamations of Judaism, Islam and Christianity into single families, I chose to incorporate the themes of all three religions (holy shrines, traditions, and customs) into short episodes and my cover art. The cover art specifically contains the images of Qur’an, Torah and the Bible merged together. I also used respective scenes from Ali and Nino in my film episodes.

The materials used for the thematic cameo-style episodes were then put into sequential order and inserted in the interims of the interviews, to provide the visual interpretation of the provided information and guide the subject matter of the video film. They also provide a more dynamic picture to the whole pace of the film, so that information is presented in a more viewer-friendly manner and does not bulge excess information in a short period of time with no breaks for thought.
ACHIEVING THE GOAL

The research of my topic was primarily connected with my research question — “Is it an advantage or a disadvantage to be involved in a multi-religious marriage?”

The following specifications for my film have been met:

- Optimum length – 25 min
- Inclusion of personal interviews
- Attractive cover art and in video film
- Subtitles
- Aim to answer the question “Is it an advantage or a disadvantage to be involved in a multi-religious marriage?”
- Constructive feedback from a viewing audience

I felt that some of the weaknesses of my project were in the choice of respondents for the interviews. Only the women were interviewed, since some of the men I questioned were reluctant to provide their viewpoints in a widely accessible film. Children were also often banned from participating in the interviews by their parents. Hence, my choice was initially and subsequently limited.

Overall, I believe my report addresses all of my targets and I am happy with the result of a film for my final product. I would award this product a 4.

REFLECTION ON LEARNING

The initial stages of my research and the three predominant questions I set helped me to balance my interviews and choose the most interesting pieces I have accumulated from the conducted interviews. These are aspects I developed:

When choosing the ways to translate the video film from the language of the actors/respondents into English, I have experienced several problems. The dubbing-in for the video film proved to be extremely difficult, since I did not want to provide the same voice dubbing for different characters. Chances of finding different professional dubbing actors were scarce. Moreover, the system of video dubbing through Adobe Premiere and Quick Time video programs proved to be extremely difficult, since at times, the footage had to be slowed down/sped up and the original voices had to be muted. This has negative consequences on the overall quality of the recording. I also felt that the audience would perhaps like to capture the tone and sequence in the speaker’s voices, so that the message is communicated effectively. Hence, I decided to abandon dubbing in favour of subtitles. Surely I got the help of my video film instructor R who has worked with this program before.

When I looked at the authors’ ideas of the clash of religions in Azerbaijan and the role of this particular clash in the family unit, I have explored many new ideas for myself and evaluated some authors. For example, in Jay Newman’s book Religion and Family values I found in my chapters that the author expects husbands often to adapt to joint religious atmosphere, at least when the Christianity is present in such families. I found many interesting ideas as Newman investigated the
psychology of the marriage and the interactions of husbands and wives of varying religions. However, to an extent, I disagreed with Newman’s ideas, since I felt that interreligious marriages break up much more often than he thinks, especially in the case of Azerbaijan, where Islam, Christianity and Judaism are often mingled together. Alternatively, Heyat Farideh thinks that interreligious marriages are problematic in nature, since one way or the other; religions would impede the family members’ ways of life. For example, a Muslim husband and a Christian wife are likely to quarrel over the choices for their children - would they go to the church or the mosque?

As I referred to in my section Apply information, I felt that I developed my own critical thinking skills when I considered the views of the religious leaders and whether I agreed with them or not.

The researching information for the actual creation of my product involved the analysis of choices for my product and the use of decision making skills. For example, my operator and friend R suggested using a lot more of cinematographic material and less interviewing. However, after reading the Adobe help guide I obtained from school, I disagreed with him. I felt that cinematographic forms deliver little information to the audience, although their dynamism does help the progression of thoughts. I hence felt that I must use more interviews and direct responses to my questions from different individuals. Hence, I would respond to the requirements of my AOI much better. I was pleased with the result and glad I stayed with my original opinion.

The best part of my personal project, as I have decided, was the process of actually making a video film. This was a new experience for me and it greatly advanced my organization skills and ability to present information I learned to others as a part of service and I have learned that interreligious marriages in Azerbaijan could lead to both happiness and failure. From the feedback I received from those who have already viewed my video film, my AOI — Community and Service — also greatly incorporates the dispersion of information and advice, things that help individuals make social choices.
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27. The head priest A. “Personal religious views” Personal interview. 03/01/xx Mobile number: Unfortunately Father A. doesn’t have a mobile number

28. R. Help with Adobe Premiere in order to produce the video film Mobile number: xxx-xxx-xx-xx

APPENDICES

Appendix # 1: The video film I made

Appendix # 2: IL - Jewish/Muslim

F (student): Was the path to family happiness between a Muslim man and a Jewish woman straight and trouble-free or were there obstacles on the way?

IL: Of course it was not so easy. We faced many issues, but we tried to overcome them together. At the time when we got married, Jews were not very welcome in the society, just as they are not so now. However, then this religious issue was more intense. When our parents learned about our relationship and about our plans to get married, they were absolutely against it. We thus had to conceal our feelings from our friends and families, and secretly meet in the course of two years. The ending result was that we decided to break up all relations with our family, and, despite the objections of our parents, to marry.

F: Which of the two religions dominates in the family - the religion of the husband or of the wife?

IL: It depends on the family. In our family, my religion dominates, but it does not at all mean that I treat my husband’s religion with disrespect, anyhow undermining his religious views and beliefs.

F: What can you say about the negative and positive aspects of mixed marriages?

IL: In mixed marriages, both negative and positive aspects are present. There are more negative aspects than positives ones, though. I live in a foreign, in a religious sense, environment, and since my daughter considers herself to be a true Jew, my husband sometimes has to suppress her actions. For instance, he is against her wearing the Star of David in public.

F: Do you reckon that the presence of two religions in a family is an obstacle to family happiness?

IL: If I would say ‘no’, it would not be the truth. Of course, there are many complications. On the other hand, I think that these obstacles can be overcome if there is understanding and respect for both religions in the family. I think that my husband is happy living with me, and that there are no religious disagreements in our family. After the first 5 years of our life together, and already under my influence, my husband confessed that he considers himself to be more of a Jew than of a Muslim man.

F: What question did you want to hear, and have not heard today?

IL: Why are people with different religious beliefs not able to live together in peace and friendship?

F: What would your advice be to the people who decided to tie a bond of marriage with a person of a different religious belief?

IL: I think that if one decided to marry a person who follows a different religion, it is necessary firstly to seriously prepare oneself for this, and only then, when one is sure of being ready to integrate a
foreign religion into the family, tie the bond. Otherwise, with the presence of religious discrimination, a family will collapse sooner or later.

Appendix # 3

TN- a Christian/Muslim

F: What was the reaction of your parents when they have learned about your determination to get married?

TN: We have wedded in the 90s, in the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is a known fact that those disturbing days distressed many families like ours. Due to national riots and religious hostilities, many families had fallen apart. Our decision to get married was thus unexpected, and did not bring much joy to our parents. However, after they realized that they would not be able to prevent our union, they gave us their blessing.

F: It is known that pork is a forbidden product in the cuisine of Islamic nations. What was the reaction of your husband when you made a pork dish for the first time?

TN: I will say he was indifferent. That is, my husband does not follow any specific religious restrictions in food.

F: Were there any disagreements based on religious differences in your family?

TN: Yes, there were. My eldest daughter tended to get sick in her childhood. My mother recommended that the girl should be christened, and then everything will change. I still remember the terror on the face of my husband, as well as on his father’s, as he heard the idea. At last, however, they gave their consent for the christening. Thus, in our family one daughter is baptized, and the son has undergone circumcision. He is a true Muslim.

F: If your husband proposed you to marry according to the Muslim customs, would you agree and follow him into the mosque?

TN: Honestly speaking, I never considered this question. I do not think, however, that this would become the reason for a quarrel in my family. If this was an important matter for my husband, I would not refuse getting wedded in the mosque.

F: According to which religion do you raise your kids- Christianity or Islam?

TN: I think that my children are very lucky in a way that they are accustomed to the traditions and customs of both religions. My husband and I believe that God is one, and try to teach them respect for both, Christianity and Islam. Children learn the best of the two religions with their milk, and this only enriches their culture and their perception of the world.
F: I see that you have covered your head with a hijab. Was converting into Islam your own initiative or was it done on compulsion?

IE: I have become a Muslim on compulsion. Before marriage, we did not have any issues about my religion. However, soon after my husband declared that if I wish to save my family I will have to convert into Islam.

F: What positive factors do you see in families, in which two religions are present? And what negative ones?

IE: Well, in mixed marriages children learn to respect the traditions and customs of other religions since childhood. However, due to the evil in the world, linked with animosities on a religious basis, children are the first ones to suffer from it.

Farah: Did you get married in a church or did you sign a kabin?

IE: In the beginning we registered according to Christianity, but later on, with the insistence of my husband, we have signed a kabin. Despite the fact that I made compromises, my family life did not become happier.

F: Does that mean that, despite your agreement to trade your religion for the religion of your husband, you family life did not change in a positive way?

IE: No, my conversion to my husband’s religion did not bring peace and happiness into our family.

F: Would you want your daughter to wear a hijab and perform a namaz, or do you leave her the right of choice?

IE: I leave the right of choice with my child, for although there are many religions, there is one single God, and it is most important to believe in him.

F: How can one help people overcome the religious discrimination in their family?

IE: I do not think that religious discrimination and lack of understanding are present in every family. It depends on the family, and on the meaning that this family gives religion. I wish that people could have in friendship and love, in consideration of each other and in faith in God, despite their religion.
Appendix # 10

I have watched after the lesson in Russian club’s room. I find this style of presentation very interesting and unique. I enjoyed watching this video, and I really think that it can be used as a creative manner for the religious studies.

Regards,

[Name]

Example 1: written report
Appendix # 11

Dear parents!
I would like to invite you to a presentation of my DVD “Different religions and beliefs in Azerbaijan”
Regards,