RESOLVING IDENTITY TENSIONS ACROSS COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS:

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF YOUNG JEWISH ADULTHOOD IN NEW YORK CITY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Resolving identity tensions across communication contexts:

An ethnography of young Jewish adulthood in New York City

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This dissertation is an ethnographic account of how young, Jewish professionals in New York City resolve identity dilemmas as they attempt to reach normative adulthood. I examine how this group leans on friends and family members to help them get through bouts of uncertainty. The study reveals how these processes play out in two contexts that were particularly dominant for these respondents, specifically dating and community. I draw on 15 months of participant observation and 28 formal interviews to interrogate the processes by which a religious minority group navigates the freedom they encounter in an urban setting, as well as the insecurity associated with their desire to become "adults." My data illustrates how this minority group living in New York City undergoes a dynamic, iterative, six-stage process in which they resolve their identity tensions and deal with their uncertainty in different ways.

The study highlights the utility of incorporating ethnographic methods with theories developed by communication and technology and sociology scholars to better understand uncertainty management practices for young minority groups. I build on extant research on uncertainty management, apply it to the case of emerging adulthood, and outline how my informants attempt to find a compatible romantic partner and a personal Jewish community. The respondents brought their close friends and family members into those contexts to cope with

their uncertainty. Participants engaged in mediated and interpersonal communication with their loved ones, which facilitated their development of skills related to coping with uncertainty, information management, validation, and perspective shifts. I expand on Brashers, Neidig, and Goldsmith's (2004) theoretical conceptualization of social support as assisted uncertainty management through which support is exchanged for the religious minority group who makes up my population of interest.

Next, I lend insight into the concept of context collusion (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014), which takes place when individuals intentionally bring norms, symbols, information, and people from one situation into others using online or face-to-face modes of communication (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). I argue that minority groups who engage in context collusion can bring together their once disparate social identities into a positive, integrated, secure sense of self. I explain how informants threaded different parts of their identities together into various situations in different venues around the city. Lastly, I expand on Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security by explaining how members of a minority group in New York City trying to reach normative adulthood attempt to feel more secure in themselves, in their relationships, in their environment, and in the direction of their future. They resolve these identity tensions through an ongoing, iterative process of merging their social identities and receiving social validation from their communicative communities, which I define as communities with distinct form of communication and a socially recognized communication purpose. In summary, these informants learn to build and rebuild their sense of self in a variety of ways as they communicate with their loved ones and try to reach normative adulthood.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

On a Tuesday afternoon in August 2018 I chatted with Myles, a 24-year-old gay man, at a juice shop on the Upper West Side. Myles was raised in a more traditional Jewish household and remained close to his parents and siblings. He dated women in his early twenties, and "came out of the closet" after Yom Kippur[1] earlier that year. Myles stayed connected to the friends he had when he was "straight," whom he met at the Jewish youth organizations he belonged to during high school and college. He also found his own Jewish community at an LGBTQ synagogue and was surprised by the amount of openness, intimacy, and reciprocity among the group. He laughs, "I never thought I would be talking about who I'm sleeping with at a dinner table, much less a shabbas[2] dinner table." Throughout my fieldwork Myles was trying to incorporate his gay identity with his Judaism and relied on his close relationships to guide him through the process.

The informants in this study—a group of affluent, young Jewish adults, who were living in New York City post-college—responded to unfamiliar situations that caused them to question who they were and who they would like to become. They were dealing with a tension between wanting to maintain a sense of a tradition and wanting to engage in modern practices in the city. They leaned on the people who knew them the best from their communicative communities to help them manage their way through those situations. Communicative communities are communities with a distinct form of communication and a socially recognized communication purpose; these communities interact either online or in-person (Moser, Ganley, & Groenewegen, 2013). This dissertation is about how a religious minority group attempts to

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[1] Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish year, which is spent praying for forgiveness (Chabad.org).
[2] Shabbas, or Shabbat, is the Jewish Sabbath, or day of rest. I use both terms interchangeably.

reach normative adulthood by wrestling with their uncertainty and developing their sense of self.

I argue that the young Jewish adults in this study engage in a multi-stage process to resolve their

identity tensions.

There exist separate rich traditions of a) identifying the uncertainties that take place in

emerging adulthood, b) explicating uncertainty management strategies used by other populations,

and c) articulating the psychological need to build a positive, secure, and integrated sense of self.

In this study, however, I outline the different ways in which a religious minority group learns to

actually feel more secure about their lives combining all of those areas of research.

The Study

This dissertation explains how young Jewish adults manage uncertainty about their

identities. My premise is that feeling insecure is a fundamental part of trying to reach normative

adulthood, which my informants overcome in multiple stages. Emerging adulthood is a period

between childhood and adulthood. It is the point at which young people existentially question

who they are in the present day and age and who they will become in the future (Arnett, 2000,

2004; 2007a; Hartmann & Swartz, 2006; Silva, 2012). My informants wondered how to manage

the freedom that accompanies this life stage and how to leverage their support networks to help

guide the process. The New York City field site, which is known for having one of the largest

Jewish populations in the country, provided a setting for informants to socialize with other young

Jewish adults and find their own sense of Judaism that was separate from their parents. They

interacted with friends and family members from distinct parts of their lives, who helped guide

them towards feeling more secure.

To conceptualize how this minority handles uncertainty during this life stage transition,

I expand on a theory of uncertainty management and extant research on social support. I interweave a concept in communication and technology to account for how informants develop an integrated sense of self. I draw on psychological processes to illustrate the ways in which my informants resolve their identity tensions. The result is an ethnographic account of how members of a religious minority group develop their sense of self as they attempt to reach normative adulthood.

I answer the following research question:

RQ: How do members of a religious minority group living in New York City reconcile identity dilemmas as they attempt to reach normative adulthood?

To explore how young Jewish adults in New York City resolve identity tensions, I embarked on a 15-month ethnography of young Jewish adults in Manhattan. I moved among different settings including religious institutions, bars and cafes, and informants' homes, and observed different modes of communication; I used both participant observation and interviews to understand how my informants dealt with the uncertainty that arose in situations around central parts of their lives. I focused on understanding how participants managed their social options for dating and community in New York City, how they brought close friends/family members into those contexts to cope with their uncertainty, and how they eventually brought contexts together on their own to establish an integrated sense of self. Over the duration of my study I observed many of my informants shift from feeling anxious, insecure, and defensive to feeling confident that they could handle this life stage transition. I also watched informants experience crises that shattered their sense of self and saw them rebuild their confidence yet again.

Broader Contexts: Dating and Community

The core of this dissertation is set around two broader contexts, or situations around key parts of my informants' lives, specifically dating and community. What initially began as a project on dating in emerging adulthood quickly shifted to a project on managing uncertainty in various contexts. When I participated in Jewish social events I realized that my informants were not just attending those events to find a romantic partner. Attending a weekly LGBTQ synagogue service, for example, was a way for participants to make close friends, join a community, and bring those friends into their romantic endeavors (in which they vented to peers, brought peers out to gay bars for support, and so on). Thus, studying how this religious minority group selected romantic partners was impossible to isolate from other contexts that were crucial to my informants and the broader identity projects in which they were engaged.

To orient this study I provide some background on the field site and population in question. I begin by detailing my decision to focus on this community, and move on to explain my involvement in the community, where I am in many ways an insider (Asselin, 2003).

Fieldsite: Jewish New York

When I began my fieldwork, I was intrigued by my informants' opportunities to explore their identities in New York City. Some of my informants received rent, spending money and outside support to pay for health insurance premiums after turning 26, among other luxurious opportunities. Having access to resources, such as financial assistance to pay for school, helps prolong the period of exploration between childhood and adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000, 2007). This is a financially privileged religious minority group living in a diverse city in the United States. The experiences of this population are therefore not directly generalizable to the emerging adult population in this country, which is ethnically diverse, primarily Christian, and tends to live

at home with their parents, as opposed to expensive New York City (Vespa, 2017). As I mention later, my informants differed from many people in their age cohort who started working directly after high school. That being said, their experience living as religious minorities in an urban setting can extend to other minority groups in the United States who struggle to both maintain a sense of a tradition and participate in modern practices.

In addition to those financial resources, my informants had access to Jewish networks in the New York City location and at home. These networks were a privilege because contemporary society is becoming more individualistic, causing young people to undergo this transition independently with little to no guidance (Arnett, 2000; Côté, 2002; Côté & Schwartz, 2002). Unlike other emerging adults, who might have more distant relationships with their families and receive little to no financial support, my informants had access to those resources. They had the freedom to explore New York City and consider different romantic possibilities and friendships. Further, mobile phone and social media use enabled ongoing contact and information sharing among my informants and their social ties. These relationships provided feedback and guidance to support their development.

New York City is known as a place where economically privileged emerging adults migrate after college. It is also a disproportionately Jewish American environment. Ashkenazi Jewish communities migrated to avoid persecution and relocated to immigration hubs (e.g., the Lower East Side) in the early 20th century (Diner, Shandler, & Wenger, 2000). Although migrants were compelled to take on working class jobs, changes in discrimination laws enabled later generations to assimilate financially including entering white-collar industries or becoming successful through self-employment. The informants in this study were descendants of those

immigrants. Today, approximately 30 percent of Jewish people in the entire world reside in New York City (Della Pergola, 2000).

Informants

I interviewed and observed 34 young adults[3] total who identified as Jewish, single, and lived in New York City, ranging from 21 years old to 31 years old (median age was 26 years old; mean age was 25 years old). Forty percent of the population identified as heterosexual women, six percent of the population identified as bisexual women, nine percent of the population identified as gay/lesbian women, and three percent of the population identified as transgender women. Thirty percent of the population identified as heterosexual men, and twelve percent of the population identified as gay men.

Ninety seven percent of the population was of Ashkenazi descent (i.e., from France, Germany, and Eastern Europe) and three percent of the population was of Sephardic descent (i.e., from the Middle East). Religiously, seventeen percent of the population identified as non-denominational[4], twenty four percent of the population identified as culturally Jewish/Atheist, twenty three percent of the population identified as Reform Jewish[5], twenty one percent of the population identified as Conservative Jewish,[6] and fifteen percent of the population identified as Modern Orthodox.[7]

Ninety one percent of informants were raised in Northeast United States and 9% of informants were raised elsewhere in the United States. The entire group resided in the New York City area at one point during the study. The majority of participants lived in Midtown East or

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[3] Appendix B has a table with demographic characteristics.

[4] Non-denominational means identifying as Jewish but not affiliating with one particular movement.

[5] Reform Judaism is a modern form of Judaism that appreciates the diversity of Jewish beliefs and practices.

[6] Conservative Judaism is religious movement that aims to conserve essential elements of traditional Judaism but modernizes religious practices in a less radical way than that espoused by Reform Judaism.

[7] Modern Orthodox Judaism follows a series of beliefs and practices that are loyal to the ancient interpretation and practice of Jewish law.

West (forty four percent), followed by Upper East/Upper West Side (fourteen percent) Brooklyn (eighteen percent), Queens (eighteen percent), Hoboken (three percent), and Downtown Manhattan (three percent).

Further, informants grew up in a professional class, with parents who presumably had high incomes, given that the majority worked as lawyers, investment bankers, accountants, or doctors (sixty percent), professors or scientists (twenty three percent), and small business owners (eight percent). By contrast, my informants were often betwixt and between in their career paths, but largely on their way to similarly lucrative employment. Most participants were currently in graduate, medical, or law school to follow the footsteps of their parents (thirty six percent), or working in accounting or finance (fifteen percent). Others were working in government and healthcare (twenty one percent), fashion/public relations (14 percent) and for non-profit organizations (14 percent).

All participants went to university after high school and settled in various locations in New York City. As these young Jewish adults moved through life, they maintained previous, close relationships but also developed new ties that they met at events and through members of their existing network (Putnam 1993, 1995). New York City lent itself to settings where my informants interacted with other likeminded, young Jewish adults. Below I describe how I gained access to this group and why I bounded the study to this particular population.

Getting In

In June 2017 I stumbled into a gay pride Shabbat at the Jewish Community Center, or the JCC, with my boyfriend (now husband) around the block from our Upper West Side apartment. After having drinks at a bar next door, we spontaneously walked into the JCC, bought tickets, and realized that it was a Shabbat designated towards LGBTQ Jews. I should say that I am an

Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jewish American heterosexual woman who was in my late twenties, so I shared many demographic similarities with the informants I was soon to meet.

I was looking for a dissertation topic that examined the role of dating in emerging adulthood. I had trouble strategizing how to recruit young singles in ways that were not unethical (such as attending a speed dating event or joining a dating app). Based on my own experiences, I had assumed that Jewish social events were implicitly singles events, which was why I initially went to the JCC that evening. I later learned that those types of events provided multiple functions, which is why the dissertation shifted away from its initial dating focus.

A gay, Jewish 22-year-old named Isaac approached me at the JCC and complimented my shirt. I took that opportunity to chat with Isaac about various topics related to my dissertation and exchange contact information. I texted Isaac five days after the event and asked if he was willing to share more information for the project and introduce me to his friends. Two weeks later, Isaac and I went to drinks and dinner in Hell's Kitchen. I was intrigued when we chatted about Isaac's experience "coming out" to an Ultra-Orthodox family as one of seven children and moving to Queens at 19 to explore and enjoy the rich queer culture and develop new friends. I also found it interesting when he discussed maintaining his complicated family relationships after going "off the derech," which is Hebrew slang for leaving an Orthodox Jewish community behind. At the dinner, Isaac invited me to a pool party (and also sent me a Facebook invite) that the 20s and 30s group of the LGBTQ Synagogue hosted.

Three days after our dinner I attended the pool party and participated in conversations about pop culture, challenges finding a Jewish partner in such a tiny dating pool, and an overlap of issues related to work, friendships, and family. After the pool party Isaac began inviting me to various events, both structured (such as synagogue services) and unstructured (such as a trip to

Coney Island with his best friend from high school). I took the structured opportunities to continue developing relationships by consistently attending the same events (Shabbat services and dinner every Friday; community service every Tuesday), and took the unstructured opportunities to a) observe how participants navigated different contexts and relationships and b) broaden my network to recruit.

By January 2018 I was "in" with the LGBTQ Jewish clique where I participated in events hosted by multiple subgroups (such as holiday events, dating mixers, and so on), helped plan and host events (such as a cabaret), attended intimate social functions, and went out to clubs in Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen. I was still having trouble getting "in" with heterosexual cliques, whose networks were harder to penetrate, and felt slightly discouraged after multiple failed attempts. I started anchoring myself in three structured events geared towards heterosexual young Jewish professionals. I also posted a Facebook status about my study and advertised in Jewish Facebook groups and email listservs geared towards young professionals. I used the snowball sampling technique (Weiss, 1994) to recruit informants to whom I would not normally have access because the friend-referral strategy created a sense of trust. These observations helped me better understand the cases at hand and the strategies that this set of Jewish adults used to handle this life stage transition (Small, 2009).

Methodology

To address my research question I used an ethnographic approach, which later incorporated interviews. It was important to immerse myself in my informants' social lives. Ethnographic research studies people in their natural environments and encourages the researcher to achieve deeper immersion and social interaction (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). By interacting with and blending into these social groups I was able to observe how participants

made sense of their identities in multiple contexts—and how my informants eventually collapsed those contexts. Furthermore, I needed to develop a sense of trust and rapport so that informants would feel comfortable expressing their insecurities to me. Ethnography allowed me to capture the complexities of relationships and contexts as they related to uncertainty management. I explored these processes in two phases, as I discuss below.

Phase One: Participant Observation

From June 2017 to June 2018 I attended over 100 formal and informal events with participants in various locations in Manhattan. I centralized my fieldwork in areas such as Chelsea, Hell's Kitchen, and Murray Hill, and would shift locations with participants throughout the evening. I spent a typical Friday night at LGBTQ synagogue services, a community gathering after services, a group dinner, and a night out (from 6:00 PM to 2:00 AM).

I observed community events (such as structured Jewish events) and intimate friendship activities in bars and cafes, and attended "pre-games" at participants' homes before nights out at participants' homes. I followed participants on Facebook and Instagram and joined five Facebook groups related to Jewish emerging adulthood (such Facebook groups for Jewish singles, and Facebook groups for people who are Jewish and LGBTQ). I participated in group text conversations where participants coordinated activities, such as a last minute pregame or night out, a birthday dinner, and so on. I texted, talked on the phone, and had one-on-one (or small group) meals with participants throughout the fieldwork as well.

Writing Field Notes. During participant observation activities, I documented my observations by jotting memos on my phone and later writing in depth field notes on the Evernote note-tracking app when I returned home. These field notes depicted physical spaces, interactions with participants, and participant interactions with each other. I used "thick

description," which were detailed descriptions that could better represent the micro-processes of participants' everyday lives (Geertz, 1973). I also attempted to discern local meanings, or the ways in which participants understood and made sense of their social world (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Geertz, 1983). I sought to better understand how participants viewed their uncertainties in situations around key parts of their lives. This resulted in 193 pages of notes, single-spaced.

Coding Procedure. I chose a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), which means that I intended for my theoretical data to explain based on empirical data, rather than based on "ungrounded assumptions" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 4). Grounded theory is rooted in symbolic interactionism and conceptualizes theory generation as an ongoing, dynamic, and iterative process (Blumer, 1973; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Grounded theory fits in well with the epistemological assumptions of the study, in which ongoing social interaction in different social situations drove my informants' identity development.

I developed conclusions from open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), which equipped me with knowledge to craft the necessary questions for phase two of data collection, in-depth interviews.

Open Coding. I reviewed the entirety of my field notes and participated in three rounds of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). During this process, I developed initial codes within the text based on general descriptions of the emerging adult experience. I coded in vivo responses in which I identified codes for patterns, similarities, differences, and idiosyncrasies within the data. For example, I coded how my informants talked about, and handled, their uncertainties and insecurities (e.g., "JSwipe mishaps" referred to how my informants exchanged social support for dating, and "moving back and forth" referred to how my informants managed their dating pools).

Even as I coded transcripts with first-level concepts and categories, I scrutinized the data for preliminary insights into the ways in which participants conceptualized their uncertainties in broader situations. For example, I began to identify how key situations in my informants' lives revolved around them finding a Jewish community, searching for a compatible romantic partner, and making sense of their religious and sexual identities in the process.

Axial Coding. I narrowed down preliminary codes in the data using axial coding. From here, I began forging relationships between the data, previous literature, and new concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I wrote up a report on the general themes that I analyzed with my Faculty Advisors to inform phase two of the data collection. This report generated insight into the uncertainties of a small set of Jewish adults in the city and provided a foundation for developing follow-up questions to a larger population.

Phase Two: In-Depth Interviews

Phase two of the study took place from June to September 2018. I had two objectives: the first was to theoretically sample additional informants to ensure more demographic balance based on sexual orientation, gender, and religious observance level, and the second was to ask more targeted questions about how my informants coped with uncertainty in key situations of their lives. Semi-structured interviews offered another way to conceptualize how this population wrestled with their uncertainty because it prompted participants to explicitly make sense of those uncertainties and reflect on how they dealt with those uncertainties.

I recruited further participants for semi-structured interviews to flesh out connections between situations (dating and community), areas of uncertainty (about where they belonged/did not belong in society, the chances of meeting a compatible partner, pressures from parents to maintain their Judaism, etc.), and how informants dealt with those issues (turning to friends for

validation, defending their views to parents, etc.). I followed a semi-structured interview format, allowing the conversation to flow naturally, yet ensuring topical consistency using an interview guide (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Interview Guide

I asked a series of questions in a semi-structured interview format regarding the topics of dating, community, and uncertainty. I asked informants about their process of selecting a romantic partner (e.g., "Are you willing to be flexible about your dating criteria? Why or why not? How have your dating strategies evolved over time?") and finding a community (e.g., "What kinds of people in New York City are for you? Are there certain crowds or events where you don't feel comfortable? If so, why?"). I also asked participants how their friends and family member supported their identity development (e.g., "Do your parents pressure you at all? How do you respond to those pressures? What kind of topics do you discuss with your peers?") and how they developed their sense of self over time (e.g., "Have you changed at all since you moved to the city? If so, how?").

I raised questions in the order and phrasing that felt most natural to the dynamics of the exchange. I allowed the conversation to take different directions depending on the position of the participant (in terms of gender, sexuality, and level of religiousness), our relationship (and my background information), and the uncertainties they were facing (such as moving on after a breakup, changing friend groups, and so on). I followed certain conversational detours through probing follow-up questions that provided additional context and enriched my understanding of local meanings (Bernard, 2002). Moreover, each exchange raised themes and analytical insights that informed subsequent interviews.

I conducted the 28 interviews wherever was convenient for participants, which included their offices, homes, coffee shops, and public parks. The interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and were recorded on my iPhone 8-voice memo app. I uploaded the interviews onto my computer, deleted them on my phone, and sent them to a transcription service. I edited the transcriptions line-by-line because there was insider language and jargon that the transcription service was unable to interpret. The transcripts resulted in 496 pages total, single-spaced.

Coding Procedure. I imported the interviews into QRS N-Vivo 12 and engaged in the first round of coding. This led to a first general set of questions surrounding uncertainty (e.g., "managing the small dating pool," "when to reveal or conceal Jewishness," "managing family influences vs. friend influences"). These insights offered analytical leads that I elaborated in memos and tested in subsequent coding, and also served as sensitizing concepts that guided the categorization of data. For example, as I questioned the role of uncertainty in the context of establishing a Jewish community, I noticed that my informants engaged in a process in which they tested out different social groups and compared those groups with themselves, which was a form of self-assessment. I returned to the transcripts with these preliminary categories to validate the major conceptual themes across each group.

Selective Coding. In the next stage of analysis, I selectively coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for coping strategies and identity development, drawing on theory. I organized segments of text iteratively into themes in a process of theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978), surrounding uncertainty management strategies (e.g., "facilitating perspective shifts," "topic avoidance," "information-seeking,"), context collusion (such as "bringing different norms and symbols together,") and the elements of ontological security (e.g., "integrated sense of self," "trust in self and others").

I selected uncertainty management theory (UMT) after recognizing that my informants ranged in their attitudes/responses to uncertainty; some participants wanted to reduce their uncertainty, whereas others wanted to maintain it or increase it. Further, I observed my informants turning to their friends and family for support to help them manage their way through their dating and community options. Compared to other theories (such as uncertainty reduction theory, which assumes that people only want to reduce uncertainty), UMT best captured the diversity of participants' reactions. I selected ontological security to explicate how participants responded to their insecurity and developed an integrated sense of self, merging their sense of tradition with modern practices in the city. Context collusion emerged as the link between the coping strategies and ontological security, in which informants intentionally brought their social identities together to find a coherent sense of self and started trusting themselves and their relationships over time.

I produced tables for processes within the dating context and the community context. The processes included uncertainty management strategies (e.g., "perspective shifts"), examples (e.g., "tolerating that one cannot control family"), and theoretical connections between uncertainty management theory (e.g., "viewing uncertainty as inconsequential") and ontological security (e.g., "developing a narrative of personal growth"). I also created tables to outline the key elements of context collusion (e.g., "social approval for integrated identities,") and how those elements mapped out to forming an integrated sense of self and ontological security. I reviewed these tables and discussed these processes during weekly phone calls with my Faculty Co-Advisor, which resulted in valuable feedback and prompted me to further articulate my findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

This process continued until I reached saturation or until analysis no longer revealed new categories or prompted further refinement of existing ones. The procedure confirmed my categories and strengthened them with detail and nuance (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Outline of the Dissertation

This initial chapter presented the premise of the project, research questions, background on my field site, methodology, and analysis. In Chapter two I provide an overview of my theoretical approach to studying uncertainty and insecurity in emerging adulthood. I present a heuristic model that outlines the six stages my informants move through in their efforts towards feeling more secure. I extend Brashers et al.'s (2004) work on uncertainty management to my study of emerging adulthood by detailing how my informants respond to the broader contexts of emerging adulthood and use different strategies with friends and family to handle their uncertainty. I incorporate the concept of context collusion (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014) to describe how informants combine their once disparate social identities to develop an integrated sense of self. Lastly, I explain how these informants continue to build a sense of confidence, using Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security. I organized the empirical chapters around the primary contexts of emerging adulthood my participants navigate, dating (Chapter three) and community (Chapter four), and their use of context collusion to develop an integrated sense of self (Chapter five).

Chapter three focuses on how participants manage uncertainty about finding a compatible romantic partner, providing empirical evidence for the first three stages of my heuristic model. This chapter describes how informants manage and police their own romantic options in relation to their goals, thereby defining their "dating pool." First, I summarize how informants evaluated themselves among their romantic options, in which they considered whether they should open or

close their dating pool. I outline how informants ranged on an open/closed spectrum when they managed their dating pools. I then explain how each of my informants enlisted their friends to help them cope with uncertainty about dating. I note that informants usually turned to their friends over family for dating support because friends were going through these experiences themselves and understood my informants' Jewish beliefs and values the best. I end by illustrating how informants and their friends affirmed each other's vulnerable feelings and experiences, provided dating advice and assistance, discussed their differences of opinion, and handled issues together.

Chapter four also builds on the first three stages of the model and describes how my informants develop their identities through community interactions and interpersonal communication with their parents; this chapter is about how these young Jewish adults find their friend groups and establish a form of Judaism that is separate from their childhood. First, I illustrate how participants responded to their community options and either expanded beyond their networks or looked within their networks to find a compatible friend group. Next, I share how these young Jewish adults reacted to overbearing family advice that conflicted with their new sense of Judaism. I explain how informants dealt with family pressures by turning to friends to validate their choices during this life stage and to help them repair difficult family relationships. I conclude by sharing how informants continued to form their identities in their interpersonal communication with parents, in which they responded to their demands by self-advocating for their new beliefs, avoiding topics that caused conflict, accepting that they could not control their parents, and changing how they perceived their parent-child relationships.

Chapter five details the last three stages that my informants went through to build their sense of security, in which they resolve identity tensions and continue forming their identities as

they communicate with their strong ties. In this chapter I describe how informants tested out context collusion by intentionally bringing norms, symbols, information, and people from one situation into others (boyd 2002; boyd, 2008; boyd, 2014; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). I distinguish the key elements of context collusion and discuss how the informants in my study who successfully engaged in this process developed a positive, integrated, secure sense of self (Giddens, 1991). I point out just how important receiving social approval from their communicative communities is for their identity formation. I illustrate how some informants started feeling more grounded in themselves, in their relationships, in their environment, and in the direction of their future. I end by pointing out how certain factors (such as demographic characteristics and use of coping strategies) impacted the degree to which informants could transition through these last three stages.

In Chapter six, or the discussion and conclusion chapter, I begin by briefly reviewing the six stages of the model and discussing the top-level findings of the study. I outline the broader implications of this dissertation, including how uncertainty management entails a cross-contextual process and the ways in which strong ties can carry this process forward. I discuss the extent to which this study can be applied to other populations of emerging adults, including other minority groups in the United States, detail how the field site had a disproportionate number of Jewish and LGBTQ population of study in contrast to other locations, and describe the study's methodological limitations. I also provide recommendations for future research, such as using longitudinal and comparative methods and focusing on minority populations who are less privileged than the informants in this study.

In the methods appendix (Appendix A) I reveal certain challenges to the study, including methodological constraints and issues of access. I reflect on ways in which my position

influenced my data collection and analysis, and how my insider position posed ethical and

analytical challenges.

Chapter 2: The Path to Ontological Security

Introduction

The transition from college to the world of work is, for financially privileged young people like my informants, the symbolic line of transition between childhood dependence on adults to actually being an adult. For most Americans in this age cohort, however, the transition from childhood dependence to financial independence occurs earlier. For example, 74 percent of American high school graduates do not move straight into college and 60 percent of those individuals directly enter the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). By contrast, my informants had more time and resources to explore their identities and think about potential pathways for the future (Arnett, 2000). They tended to oscillate between different states and roles, and feel "in between" childhood and adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Seiffge-Krenke, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2009; Shulman, Feldman, Blatt, Cohen, & Mahler, 2005; Staff, Harris, Sabates, & Briddell, 2010). Further, the young Jewish adults in this study had existential anxiety associated with having the freedom to make their own choices in New York City. In order to feel confident that they could reach normative adulthood, my informants had to resolve their own identity tensions and contradictions.

Young Jewish adults encounter situations around key parts of their lives that invoke questions and considerations about their identities. The young Jewish adults in my dissertation responded to those situations by questioning themselves and turning to their strong ties for guidance. Strong ties are close relationships in which individuals interact most intensively and frequently, which involve a high degree of reciprocity and motivation to exchange information (Haythornthwaite, 2005; Krackhardt, Nohria, & Eccles, 2003). My informants relied on the people who knew them the best to help them discover who they were and what they valued in

this life stage (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009; Carroll et al., 2007; Erikson, 1968; Montgomery, 2005). The strong ties that were central to this study were established friends from high school or college, friends my informants made when they moved to New York City post-college, parents, and siblings.[8]

Social support refers to communication that manages "uncertainty about the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experiences" (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987, p. 315). Uncertainty management theory (Brashers et al., 2000; Brashers, 2001; Brashers, Goldsmith, & Hsieh, 2002) outlines how people can reduce, maintain, or increase uncertainty to a comfortable level when they communicate with support networks. These studies describe how people manage uncertainty by interacting with friends, healthcare providers, members of support groups, romantic partners, and family members—but they are not explicit about tie strength in their discussions. My work contributes to closing this gap by showing how the closeness of a relationship in one's communicative community offers distinctive opportunities for uncertainty management and identity formation.

As an example, support from a physician may provide general functions for uncertainty management, such as using the physician as a source of information (Brashers, Hsieh, Neidig, & Reynolds, 2006). However, a relationship with a physician would provide little companionship, emotional aid, or voluntary assistance compared to a relationship with a strong tie (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Furthermore, each type of strong tie relationship provides different opportunities for uncertainty management. For instance, close peers tend to offer companionship because they

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[8]My treatment and analysis of social networks is limited because I did not approach the study as a social network analysis. Therefore, I did not measure tie strength or ego networks of friendship and social support. That being said, I observed participants interact with close friends, and sometimes siblings, and discussed their parent-child relationships during interviews. Rather than accounting for the strength of each relationship, and mapping out how they are connected to a broader network, I account for the subjective feeling of closeness to others and the coping resources they provided.

have similar interests, whereas parents provide unconditional support to help their children deal with crises and hardships (Wellman & Wortley, 1989; Wellman, 1991). Rather than discussing support networks more broadly, this study explains how these intimate relationships support identity development.

Uncertainty management theory also tends to focus on a different life transition, in which people cope with chronic illness. Although attempting to reach normative adulthood is by no means an illness, both kinds of transitions involve shifting roles, new forms of reliance, and unclear social implications. People who are chronically ill must deal with new roles in their relationships, such as moving from being a care-giver to being a care-receiver, whereas my informants had to learn to create new relationships with their parents that go beyond their parent-child dynamics. After becoming ill, people start relying on family members to take care of them, whereas young Jewish adults are trying to shift away from relying on their parents (Brashers et al., 2003; Martin, Stone, Scott, & Brashers, 2010). People who are sick worry about how others will treat them and where they fit into society. The transition into normative adulthood also has social implications, in which young people look for a community where they will feel included and comfortable. In summary, uncertainty management theory applies to the emerging adult population because it illustrates how people deal with changes in their identities, roles, and relationships.

The current research outlines the process by which ethnic minorities enter different social situations and receive support from their strong ties to cope with tensions about their identities as they attempt to become "adults." I extend Brashers et al.'s (2004) social support typology for uncertainty management and illustrate how friends and family guide my informants through different routes to help resolve their identity dilemmas. By combining uncertainty management

theory and the concept of ontological security (Giddens, 1991), I am able to offer an explanation of how members of a religious minority group living in an urban setting resolve identity tensions and develop a positive, integrated, secure sense of self as they attempt to reach normative adulthood.

Lastly, my contribution builds on the concept of context collusion, which involves intentionally bringing norms, symbols, information, and people from one situation into others (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). I define contexts as broader situations that provide "general expectations about people, social roles, events and how to behave" (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p. 5). My informants enter situations and communicate with friends and family members from different parts of their lives. They learn group and situational norms and then start experimenting with how to collapse them. They bring together their once disparate social identities by threading their Judaism across different social situations and segments of their network.

Following successful context collusion, participants establish an integrated sense of self (Giddens, 1991). They continue to deepen their understanding of who they are and where they are going in life. Over time they feel more grounded in themselves, in their environment, and in the direction of their future, which creates a foundation for ontological security. Ontological security is a dynamic state that involves a sense of confidence in "the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens, 1991, p. 92).

In this theory chapter, I trace the pathways my informants took toward achieving ontological security; the goal, in many ways, of emerging adulthood as a life phase. I uncover how the social situations my informants encounter and their ongoing self-assessments drive them to cope with uncertainty. I also point out how important strong ties are for providing the social

support needed to achieve ontological security and its precursory stages. My contribution to the

extant literature lies in identifying the six stages through which members of a religious minority

group in New York City work to resolve their identity tensions and ultimately build (and rebuild)

a sense of security as they attempt to reach normative adulthood. This does not necessarily mean

that they reach the subjective criteria for adulthood, just that they feel they can make this

transition. In Figure 1, below, I present my heuristic model of ontological security achievement.

Figure 1

The Path to Ontological Security
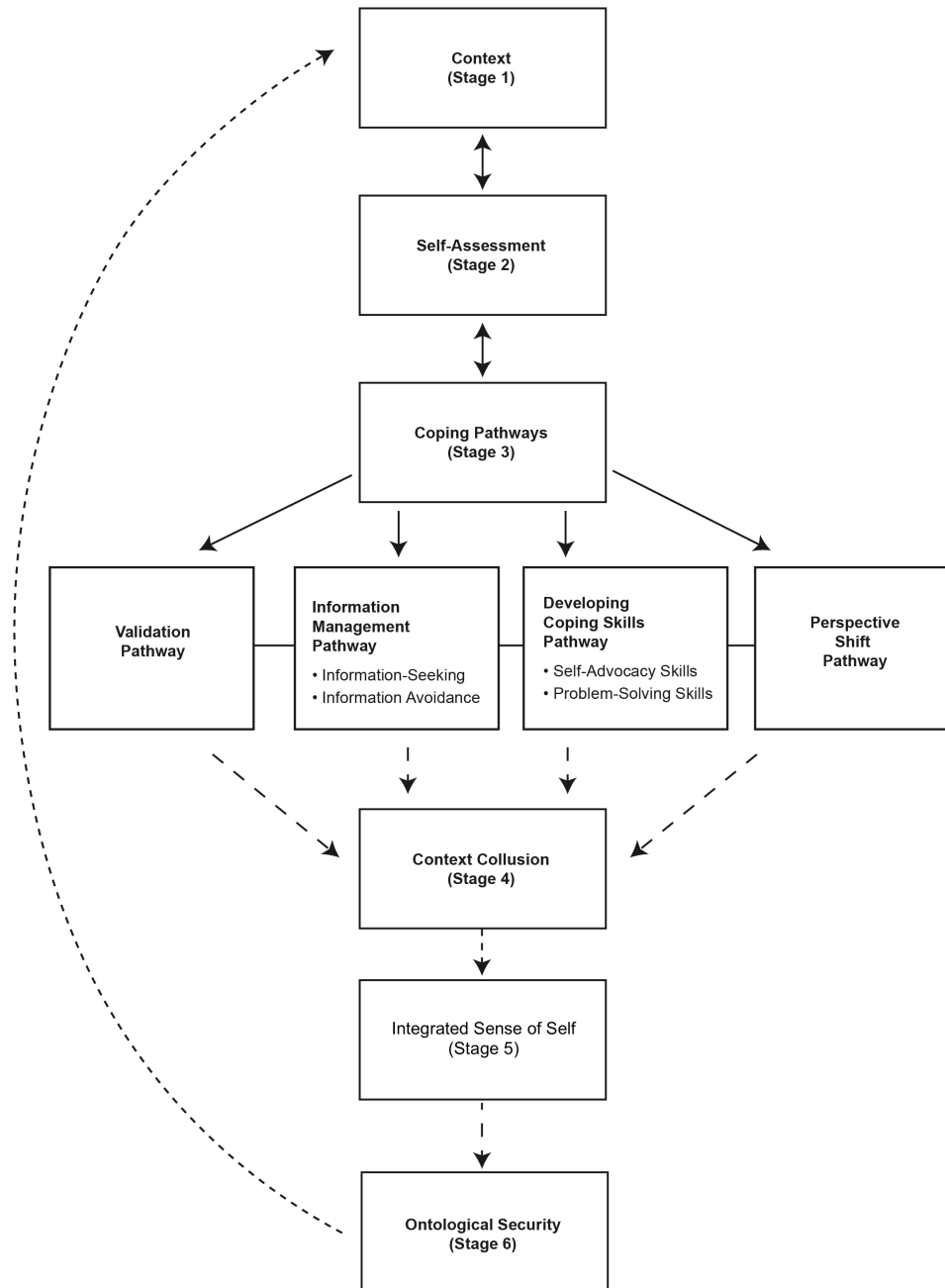
Stage One: Context

My informants believed that they would become "adults" when they engaged in certain behaviors and achieved certain goals (Pilcher, 1995; Sharon, 2015). The criteria participants considered to be "adult" involved taking responsibility for one's actions, making independent decisions, becoming financially independent from parents, and being able to support their own nuclear family (Nelson & Barry, 2005). I should point out that the idea of "adulthood" is a social construction and is based on a collection of cultural understandings and practices during this historical moment.

More specifically, globalization has provided access to alternative ideas and led to a shift away from relying on authority and following tradition. In light of these opportunities, members of Western society felt compelled to attend college to compete in the marketplace and explore various career paths (Arnett, 2000). As these trends developed, it became normative to cohabitate in a romantic relationship and explore different partners. In light of these developments, twenty-somethings in the United States started waiting longer before marrying and having children. Being part of a religious minority group in New York City also meant that my informants grappled with their desire to explore their identities and maintain a sense of religious tradition. On one hand, it is exciting to explore different possibilities in their personal lives, but on the other hand the freedom leads to existential anxiety regarding how to make the right choices or choose the best path. To cope with their existential anxiety, these young Jewish adults set out to resolve their identity tensions through the six-stage process outlined below.

Stage one involves entering a broader context, or a situation around key parts of my informants' lives that invokes different questions and considerations about their identities, specifically dating (in Chapter three) and community (and Chapter four). My informants entered

those contexts and responded to their perceptions of those contexts. Their reactions involved a process of evaluating their identities and actions, otherwise known as the self-assessment stage, discussed below.

Stage Two: Self-Assessment

Stage two of the model is the self-assessment stage. The interaction between assessing one's context and assessing one's own position in it had a dynamic tension to it that my informants updated with each experience. For instance, in Chapter three my informants either limited or opened up their "dating pool" options based in large part on stage two, which was how they assessed themselves within that pool of possibilities, reflecting a dialogic relationship between stages one and two of the model. Hence, the relationship between the context and one's self-assessment was mutually informing.

The self-assessments in stage two also informed how participants sought out social support in stage three, which I discuss in the following section. As an example, in Chapter four some participants were breaking from the traditional Judaism of their childhood and during the self-assessment stage found a friend group that shared their progressive approach to religion. In the next stage, some informants in this category dealt with parents who urged them to maintain their traditional upbringings by turning to the friends they made in stage two to affirm those new progressive beliefs.

Stage Three: Seeking Support in Coping Pathways

Following the self-assessment stage, informants turned to their strong ties to help them cope with their uncertainty in stage three of the model (Brashers et al., 2004; Heaney & Israel, 2008; Krackhardt & Stern, 1988; Wellman, 1992). They engaged in interpersonal and mediated communication with their respective communities to manage their uncertainty and develop their

identities. Mores specifically, this stage extends four different types of support for uncertainty management Brashers and his colleagues (2004) first identified that were fundamental to the coping pathways I recorded among emerging adults. Brashers et al. (2004) labeled these strategies as "social support for uncertainty management"; I call these strategies coping pathways because they include multiple paths for uncertainty management during emerging adulthood. Each of these coping pathways offered different potential routes towards becoming more secure.

The following section explains the four pathways by which strong ties can provide social support for emerging adults to manage uncertainty about their identities. Emerging adults can move through more than one of these pathways and the strategies these pathways offer can be combined together in their uncertainty management efforts. There are contingencies, combinations, and changes in what my informants do depending on their goals and unique situations, and therefore the pathways are more fluid, rather than fixed. These pathways include the following functions: providing validation, facilitating perspective shifts, assisting information management, and developing coping skills. Below I differentiate between each pathway and how it facilitates uncertainty management.

The Validation Pathway

The validation pathway refers to symbolic affirmation from strong ties that validate my informants' knowledge, goals, and feelings (Brashers et al., 2004). Emerging adults who feel validated tend to trust information, relationships, and their place in the world (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Lin et al., 2009; Rittenour, Myers, & Brann, 2007). My informants tended to look to their close friends for validation over their family members, because their friends shared their approach to Judaism and romantic exploration. Validation was a mutual pathway/coping

mechanism that friends engaged in together, in which they conveyed a sense of empathy for experiences that were endemic to this life stage transition.

For example, in Chapter three my informants circulate their "JSwipe mishaps," or dating experiences that have shock value, to find humor in their struggles (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Friends helped each other cope with their anxieties and failures by maintaining a positive outlook in an uncomfortable situation (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). Although informants could not change or control their mishaps, laughing about them with friends provides a sense of relief and put the group at ease. For instance, a participant named Silas (26, heterosexual) has a group chat with his friends in which they share dating profiles that they think are "basic" or cliché. The group laughs about the monotony of dating, in which everyone's dating profile looks the same. Silas and his buddies also use joking as a vehicle to attain intimacy in their friendships, using jokes to encourage each other to communicate their desires in a face-saving way. In doing so, they affirm each other's needs and feel valued in their friendships.

The Perspective Shift Pathway

Strong ties also facilitate perspective shifts, in which they help each other re-interpret their uncertainty more positively (Brashers et al., 2004). More specifically, friends/family may have alternative outlooks to a situation, which can cause my informants to view that situation in a new light. My informants might initially react to an event by feeling anxious but might end up feeling better after talking to their loved ones about it.

For example, Chapter four shows how Allison, 22 (hereafter, Ali) joined a more religious community because she felt connected to the group on a "spiritual level." She adjusted to the new norms of the community and decided to get engaged after a subjectively short amount of time. Ali's mother was in "culture shock" about the quick engagement and helped her realize that

the behavior was not consistent with her identity. After the engagement broke off and Ali left the community, she incorporated her mother's reaction in order to make sense of what happened (Park, 2010). She concluded that her failed relationship was a learning experience, which helped her realize that she wanted to approach religion and romantic relationships differently for the future. Ali's mother helped her overcome a challenging turning point, in which she shifted from feeling sad and lost to feeling content about the breakup.

Strong ties can also encourage my informants to adopt a perspective through which they embrace their lack of control over how others behave. These informants responded to conversations with their loved ones by learning to tolerate their friends and family's behavior or positions. For instance, Chapter four explains how Ryley, a 31, year old gay woman, coped with her family's insensitive remarks about her sexuality by viewing the situation from a broader, wider perspective. Ryley started attributing her family's lack of support to their "old school, Soviet community," culture, which had narrow-minded beliefs. Developing this new outlook helped Ryley feel less anxious when family members made disparaging comments about her masculine gender expression and gay identity. She learned to brush off certain comments with which she disagreed and responded to those cultural differences by accepting that she could not change or control them.

The Information Management Pathway

Friends and family members supported the process of seeking or avoiding information that was readily available in order to cope with certain issues (Brashers et al., 2004). If a person views uncertainty as a threat, their strong ties can help them reduce it (information-seeking), but if they view it as an opportunity, their strong ties can help them maintain it (information

avoidance). In my study, friends[9] supported information-seeking efforts by having direct

question/answer exchanges where they offered guidance in making decisions. Informants also

felt uncertain when they had access to too much or inconsistent information, which caused them

to avoid accessing more information. Therefore, loved ones supported the choice to turn the

attention away from a topic to prevent each other from feeling overwhelmed.

Information-Seeking. Information-seeking takes place when people purposefully seek

out advice, suggestions, and information from a trusted source to address a problem (Brashers et

al., 2002, 2004). In this study, friends helped reduce uncertainty by providing feedback or

assistance for handling difficult situations. For example, in Chapter three I explain how Myles

(24, LGBTQ) turns to his friend Isaac (22, LGBTQ) for advice on how to handle an ambiguous

romantic relationship. Myles shares with Isaac that his partner wanted him to delete his dating

apps and be monogamous and feels confused about his partner having made that request. Isaac

observes that Myles and his partner are looking for two different types of relationships and

advises Myles to be more up front with his partner about his interests. This conversation leads

Myles to come to terms with the idea that he is not yet ready to be monogamous and pushes him

to discuss his intentions with his partner. As a result, Myles feels less uncertain and insecure

about what he wants and where the relationship is headed.

Information Avoidance. Information avoidance takes place when strong ties support

behavior that prevents or delays accessing readily available information (Barbour, Rintamaki,

Ramsey, & Brashers, 2012; Brashers et al., 2004; Case, Andrews, Johnson, & Allard, 2005;

Lazarus, 1996; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003; Sweeny, Melnyk, Miller, &

Shepperd, 2010). In this study, some participants felt uncomfortable thinking about or focusing

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[9] Friends supported information-seeking over family members because friends shared the same perspectives and
could provide helpful advice. As shown in Chapter four, family members tended to clash with my informants'
perspectives, which is why they did not seek out information that would lead to a conflict.

on certain topics that they were not interested in dealing with at the time. To prevent feeling overwhelmed, they avoided asking their friends/family members for advice about the topic, discussing the topic in conversation, and physically putting themselves in situations where they felt compelled to discuss that topic to prevent feeling overwhelmed. As I show below, information avoidance can also uphold established relationship dynamics and prevent conflict among informants and their loved ones when they hold different beliefs or values.

For example, Abby is a 25-year old bisexual woman who learns to avoid discussing her sexuality with her mother because it creates tension in their relationship. As I discuss in Chapter four, Abby's mother does not understand Abby's sexual identity and Abby feels frustrated trying to explain/defend her perspective. Therefore, she chooses to avoid discussing her sexual identity with their mom to prevent herself from feeling anxious. For the few days that Abby is home, she talks to her mom about topics unrelated to her sexual identity, which holds off on an inevitable argument and protects the established relationship dynamic (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Thoits, 2011). Avoiding a topic to uphold relational standards provides a sense of continuity, stability, and predictability in the relationship.

The Coping Skill Development Pathway

Participants developed coping skills, including problem-solving and self-advocacy skills, in their conversations with friends and family members. Albrecht and Adelman (1987) argue that "supportive messages function to increase the skills of a recipient to achieve desirable outcomes," which also enhances their perception of control (p. 188). For example, my informants learned how to date more successfully as a result of their discussions with friends, which helped them feel that they could handle issues that arose in dating on their own.

Informants also developed coping skills when they responded to friends or family members who clashed with their beliefs by learning to speak up for their interests.

Problem-Solving Skills. My informants engaged in joint problem-solving activities with their friends and family members, which helped them develop problem-solving skills. Problem-solving skills are "systematic, goal-directed strategies designed to increase the possibility of finding the best answer to a problematic situation" (Grant, Elliott, Giger, & Bartolucci, 2001, p. 46). As a result of these conversations, my informants moved from feeling dependent on other people to feeling capable of handling future issues on their own.

For instance, in Chapter four I explain how certain informants manage pressures from their parents that they feel are unwarranted. Rather than self-advocate, which I discuss below, or avoid those relationships and conversations, my informants learn how to problem-solve by meeting the needs of multiple parties. As an example, an informant named Josh (28, heterosexual) feels pressure from his father to marry and start a family, but does not feel the same pressure from his peers or from broader society. After talking about this situation with a friend, he decides to join a dating website under the condition that his father pay for his subscription. Therefore, Josh works with his father to find a compromise that will help both parties feel more comfortable (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Developing this skill helps Josh feel confident that he can deal with pressures from his loved ones in the future.

Self-Advocacy Skills. When informants had disagreements with friends and family members these conversations sometimes resulted in the development of self-advocacy skills. Self-advocacy skills refer to the ability to speak up for one's needs and interests by expressing, explaining, or defending one's choices (Brashers et al., 2000; 2002). Responding to a strong tie

by self-advocating gave my informants the tools to think autonomously and stand up for their beliefs.

In Chapter four, for instance, my informants develop self-advocacy skills when they push back on parental pressure and communicate their own form of Judaism to their parents (Frawley & Bigby, 2015). These young Jewish adults learn to challenge beliefs that they were taught growing up and express their differences to loved ones. As an example, Yitzi is a 28-year old heterosexual man who was raised in an Orthodox household in which his mother stressed the importance of following rules and blending in with the political views of their community. Yitzi and his brother self-advocate by going against their mother's wishes and blogging about a current event in Israel that they believe is unjust. As a result, Yitzi gains the tools to defend his new form of Judaism and separate himself from his upbringing. In the following section, I explain how informants develop self-awareness after using these strategies and progress forward in their efforts to feel more secure.

Stage Four: Context Collusion

As shown, informants cope with the uncertainty that arises in the broader contexts of emerging adulthood by moving through pathways that validate their identities (i.e., *validation pathway*); provide alternatives, confirm their perspectives, or put certain explorations on hold (i.e*., information management pathway);* shift their self views (i.e., *facilitating perspective shifts pathway);* or develop new coping skills to manage these issues for the future (i.e., *coping skill development pathway*). Their responses to uncertainty may engage one, or a combination of, these pathways above, either together or during different situations. As a result of moving through these pathways these emerging adults have a better sense of situational norms and start exploring how to collapse them. Participants are motivated to bring those situational expectations

together in order to develop an integrated sense of self, which moves them to stage four, context collusion.

In this stage, informants engage in context collusion by intentionally bringing norms, symbols, information, and people from one situation into others (boyd 2002; boyd, 2008; boyd, 2014; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). Context collusion is distinctive from context collapse, which occurs when social contexts merge without an individual's control or intent (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Duguay, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2011, 2014). Context collusion can be implemented in a number of ways, whether it is "coming out" to multiple audiences or wearing a symbol that displays one's religious identity across situations, among other examples. This process can involve both online and face-to-face modes of communication.

The context collusion stage involved a process of trial and error. Some informants were inconsistent in their context collusion attempts and misread situations. In response, they moved back to stage three, the coping pathways, to learn more about how to handle those types of issues. For instance, in Chapter five I explain how Myles (24, LGBTQ) casually told a heterosexual, female friend from college that he had matched with her brother on a dating app; she responded that she did not know her brother was gay. Myles was trying to bring his Jewish and gay identity together but did not anticipate how his self-disclosure could negatively impact someone else. Therefore, he returned to the information management pathway and learned about the norms of secrecy/discretion in the gay community before feeling confident to test out context collusion once again. Below is an example of successful context collusion, which takes place when informants are intentional and receive social approval.

Example of Successful Context Collusion

During my fieldwork Isaac, a 22-year old gay man who was raised in an Ultra Orthodox home, engaged in context collusion by inviting his queer Jewish friends from his LGBTQ synagogue to meet his heterosexual sister for the first time before the entire group attended a JSwipe mixer. At dinner, Isaac chatted about his dating experiences in front of his sister (to my surprise) and the two of them debated when they planned to stay in their family's house in Israel. This was the first time Isaac's friends learned that his parents had a house in Israel and that he was considering taking time off to stay there. Isaac's friends asked him about his family's apartment in Jerusalem and tentatively planned a group trip to Israel. The conversation veered off to other topics, in which the group laughed about Isaac and his sister's quirky, religious parents and gossiped about LGBTQ synagogue members.

Isaac showcased his Jewish queer identity in front of people from distinct parts of his life who held "different views of who the actor is, and different interactional and performative expectations" (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014, p. 478). He was intentional in his efforts by coordinating a dinner that would bring people from different segments of his network together and by revealing information about his Jewish identity (e.g., discussing his family and the Israel apartment) and gay identity (e.g., his dating troubles) to the group. Isaac's sister and friends reacted supportively and did not challenge or question his integrated identity (Brandtzaeg & Lüders, 2018; Rose, 1989; Wesch, 2009). Therefore, he successfully combined different parts of his identity together that were most meaningful to him. In the following stage my informants continue to build on their integrated identities, outlined below.

Stage Five: Integrated Sense of Self

Successful context collusion takes place when participants integrate their once disparate social identities into one continuous expression, or an integrated sense of self. Participants who reach the point of transitioning to this stage are those who clearly understand and can explain their integrated identity. They recognize who they are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it (Giddens, 1984). As they continue to move through this stage they feel a sense of consistency in themselves and in the world around them. They start to trust their relationships, environment, and future, creating a foundation for ontological security, described below.

Stage Six: Building Ontological Security

Over time, some informants start to reach stage six, in which they feel more comfortable about the direction of their lives and begin to trust that they can handle the transition into normative adulthood independently. As such, my informants were working to feel a sense of consistency in their social world as they underwent the previous stages, in which they were developing their sense of self and gaining social approval for their expressions of Judaism. As mentioned, my informants had existential anxiety about how to make the right choices in the modern era, which they resolved by attaining some measure of ontological security.

Establishing this sense of security is a step towards getting through the transition into adulthood, but is not an endpoint (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). It is also important to specify that having a sense of ontologically security means that my informants trust that they can handle the transition, regardless of whether they have fulfilled the social criteria for transitioning towards the normative target of adulthood. Further, feeling ontologically secure is continuous rather than discrete—it can be short lived, levels of security change, and my informants move from feeling more or less secure at different points of time.

The participants in this study rebuild their sense of security following a crisis and move through the model's pathways repeatedly, but each time with increasing self-knowledge gleaned from their prior moves through the model. I should also point out that not all of my respondents progressed to the ontological security stage during my fieldwork.

The following empirical chapters illustrate how these young Jewish adults develop a sense of security through this six-stage process. As argued above, the informants in this study undergo an ongoing identity project, in which they respond to broader social situations and engage in self-assessments. Next, they manage uncertainty though supportive communication with friends and family members. From there, they test out context collusion in order to potentially create and sustain an integrated sense of self. After resolving these identity tensions, they feel more rooted in themselves, in their relationships, and in their environment, and feel confident that they can handle this life stage transition.

In the next two chapters, I document and explain how my informants respond to the broader contexts of their lives and deal with their uncertainty within those contexts by engaging in interpersonal and mediated communication with their closest ties (stages one through three), beginning with how my informants learn to manage their dating pools and enlist their close friends to support their dating options and choices.

Chapter 3: Managing Uncertainty in the Dating Pool

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the six stages through which young Jewish adults living in an urban setting move in their efforts to resolve identity tensions as they attempt to reach normative adulthood. This chapter offers evidence and analysis of how they move through stages one through three, using the dating pool as a context. Stage one involves entering a context, which is a situation that invokes different questions and considerations. Stage two is how my informants react to their perceptions of that context via self-assessment, or a process of evaluating one's identity and actions. Stage three involves the uncertainty management processes emerging adults then engage in, with the goal of receiving social support they desire to cope with their dating options and decisions.

Changing social mores in the last two generations means that young adults, especially if they are college educated, do not move straight into marriage after adolescence. The average age for marriage in the 1950s was around 22 years old. However, in 2019, the average age for marriage was just below 30 (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Emerging adults may date casually or seriously for many years, "trying on" different potential partners before settling on one person, if they are seeking a long-term monogamous relationship. Dating websites and apps, many of which intertwine with social media, provide a new and extended way to conceive of one's dating pool by enabling young singles to select potential partners by specific characteristics that they consider important criteria.

As mentioned, informants had the freedom to participate in modern activities in New York City, which created existential anxiety. In order to maintain a sense of tradition, many

of my informants seek to date or marry someone who is also Jewish. This is in keeping with broader patterns observed by national studies conducted by Pew Research; for instance, 64% of people who identify as Jewish by religion have a Jewish spouse (Cooperman & Smith, 2013). Dating sites and apps have made it possible to identify potential mates not only by religion, but also by level of religious observance; prior to these technologies, such traits were impossible to assess without directly asking someone about their religious identity.

I observed my informants moving through three key stages as they sought a casual or long term partner, and in some participants, observed them moving through these stages more than once (of course, for those participants, their subsequent experiences were informed by the previous ones).

Figure 2

Stages 1-3: Context, Self-Assessment, and Coping
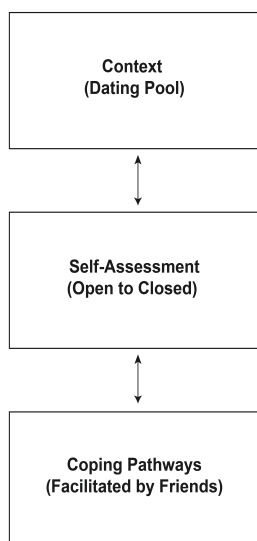
Most fundamentally, dating involved a context: the pool of romantic options, which I refer to as stage one. My informants either limited or opened up their options based in large part on stage two, which was how they assessed themselves within that pool of possibilities, reflecting a dialogic relationship between stages one and two of the model. In stage three, they utilized different coping pathways to help them manage their way through the uncertainties of dating. Similarly, the relationship between stages two and three was mutually informing, because which coping pathways participants used (i.e., stage three) was informed by the self-assessments they had engaged in in stage two.

Stage One: The New York City Dating Pool

The context at the center of this chapter is the connection between how participants manage and police their own romantic options in relation to their goals, thereby defining their "dating pool." For most of my informants, the Jewish dating pool was the only set of potential options they were willing to consider, and they defined the boundaries of possible mates within those parameters. For some, the parameters were even more limited, in that they were seeking a certain "kind" of Jewish partner, most often defined by level of religious observance. As mentioned, my informants came from a professional class and had some anxiety about the family life they would have with a potential partner and about their own financial capabilities, which they factored into these decisions as well. These young adults consider different dating scenarios and imagine how they might respond to different options through use of what Giddens would define as "the broader social environment"—in this case, their dating pool (1991, p. 14).

Participants debated the extent to which that they could find a partner who was compatible in terms of religion, social class, physical attractiveness, and other characteristics they considered

important (Bailey, 1988; Bernard & Adelman, 1990; Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). New York City is a unique environment for this process because the large Jewish population provides access to a much broader and deeper dating pool for Jewish singles that wish to date within their religious or cultural boundaries. The nature of the dating pool also enables greater levels of in-group selectivity than would be possible in cities with smaller Jewish populations.

Questions that emerged as central to participants' self-assessments included thinking through what criteria are most important for them in relation to their own identities, values, goals and desires. That process also necessarily involves a calculation as to their own "attractiveness," by evaluating their own age, religious observance, professional success, and socio-political standing. In other words, participants are self-assessing how competitive they are for the mates of their choice within their dating pool. These calculations of comparative standing influence how they view themselves within the dating pool, and inform how they draw support from strong ties to manage the uncertainties of these romantic attempts and encounters.

Participants have different perceptions of, and reactions to, the supply of dating partners in their dating pool, which they incorporate into their self-assessments. Josh, for instance, is a 28-year old heterosexual man who believes that the pool of options in New York is "bigger than literally anywhere on earth," and argues that there are more Jewish people in New York alone than there are in Israel (which is not true). At 28 years old, Josh is three years below the average age of marriage for people living in New York (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Josh's perception of plentiful options contributes to him remaining picky about his options if they do not match his political beliefs, and his decision that he can afford to postpone "serious" dating that could lead to marriage.

Stage Two: Self-Assessment

As previously mentioned, participants' dating self-assessments involved considering how competitive they felt they would be for potential mates within a dating pool they had defined on the bases of their own goals, values, and beliefs (stage two of the model). In this section, I detail the specific self-assessment processes informants went through to determine their own standing in relation to the romantic options they imagined existed within their dating pool. This stage involved managing tensions between their sense of self and sense of others, in which informants compared their own desires to those of their perceived dating options. Informants chose to broaden or limit their dating pool based on this set of self-comparison calculations. These self-assessments and, subsequently, the coping responses to which my informants engaged were often about reconciling certain tensions and contradictions in their decision-making.

Figure 3 presents the general patterns I observed among my participants' self-assessments. These self-assessments occurred along a spectrum that ranged from the most open to the most closed and become precursors to how informants sought support from strong ties (stage three of the model) in order to handle the stresses associated with their dating experiences. More specifically, those who are most open turn to friends to cope because they affiliate more closely with their friends, whereas those who are most closed turn to friends and family, because they maintain a strong identification with their religious upbringings.

On the Open End of the Spectrum

The open-closed tension in assessments of the dating pool and one's place in it was dynamic, in that participants adjusted their positioning along the spectrum with each successive experience. Participants who started at the open end of the spectrum managed a dating pool that had both Jewish and non-Jewish options. Each participant had their own constellation of characteristics that were important or unimportant to them with relation to, for example,

partners' age, race, and level of monogamy. Participants on the open end of the spectrum were less constrained by community pressures on "appropriate mates" and either had parents who did not set parameters on their children's dating decisions or did not feel pressured to conform to parental expectations in this way. This explains why these participants largely turn to friends, over parents, to cope with dating uncertainties.

Figure 3

Stage 2: Open/Closed Spectrum of Self-Assessments

Open	Middle	Closed
Dating Pool Jewish & Non-Jewish	**Dating Pool** Jewish	**Dating Pool** Jewish
General Characteristics Heterosexual & LBGTQ Men Early-mid 20's Not religiously observant No perceived pressure from strong ties to marry within the faith No perceived time pressure from strong ties to marry/find a long-term partner Open to age, race, different levels of monogamy	**General Characteristics** Heterosexual Women Late 20's Somewhat religiously observant Some perceived time pressure from strong ties to marry within the faith Some perceived time pressure from strong ties to marry/find a long-term partner Open to different levels of religious observance	**General Characteristics** Heterosexual Men & Women Early-mid 20's (Women); Mid-later 20's (Men) Religiously observant Strong pressure from strong ties to marry within the faith Strong pressure from strong ties to marry/find a long-term partner Fixated on level of religious observance
Coping Friends	**Coping** Friends	**Coping** Family & Friends

Open-Closed Spectrum

The participants on this open end of the spectrum are themselves most likely to be men in their early-to-mid-twenties, both heterosexual and LGBTQ.[10] These informants are less observant of Judaic laws and customs and are therefore more flexible religiously, further contributing to their openness. As described below, participants on the more open end of the

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[10] LGBTQ female participants tend to fall between the open to moderate position in the spectrum.

spectrum receive less pressure from family and friends to find a partner within the Jewish faith and marry or have children by a certain age. This contributes to the lack of Jewish dating parameters because they do not need to consider raising Jewish children to maintain a Jewish identity for the next generation. Lastly, these informants believe they can be more successful in finding a compatible partner by exploring within a larger dating pool.

LGBTQ Jewish, male informants tended to be the most open to different dating options in their pools. Isaac (22, LGBTQ) explained to a group at a Shabbat dinner that he felt frustrated constricting his dating pool along religious lines because the percentage of LGBTQ Jewish men available to date is extremely limited. As a result, this makes things awkward for Isaac when he runs into people he has dated in other LGBTQ Jewish contexts. Since it is difficult to keep these two worlds apart, he feels accountable if he "ghosts[11]" someone from that dating pool or blocks someone on a dating app, or vice versa, because he will "probably see them at a Jewish queer event."

As if to prove his point in real time as to how small the LGBTQ Jewish pool is, Isaac pointed to a person with whom he had matched on JSwipe earlier that same week, who, it turned out, was a member of his synagogue. In response to such experiences, Isaac opens his dating pool to a wider range of romantic options. He dates men in their twenties, thirties, and forties and tries to "date the rainbow" in terms of variations in race and ethnicity. Expanding his dating pool to a wide set of potential partners helps Isaac ultimately define his "type," which changes after each experience.

Isaac can keep his dating pool open because he feels little pressure to find a long-term partner who shares his Jewish faith. Isaac's family members do not pressure him to set religious

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[11] "Ghosting" refers to the practice of ending a romantic relationship with someone suddenly, without explanation, and withdrawing all forms of communication.

parameters on his dating pool, affording him the opportunity to remain open to different partners. This lack of pressure is the result of his Ultra-Orthodox parents having trouble accepting his sexual identity at all, and therefore avoiding discussions regarding his personal life altogether. Hence, Isaac is more anxious about receiving his friends' approval of potential partners, because they are his chosen family (Weston, 1997). Furthermore, Isaac depends on his friends to help him learn how to handle certain family relationships that were strained over the years, as I discuss in the next chapter.

Similarly, Silas (26, heterosexual) is able to maintain his open dating pool because he feels no familial or cultural pressure to narrow his options. Silas has one parent who is Jewish and one parent who is Catholic; their own choices in this regard make it easy for him to date both Jewish and non-Jewish partners. He also feels that "there's no timeline" for marriage, and therefore he freely explores his dating pool without focusing on long-term compatibility. Silas claims that religiously he has "never had a dating preference" and recently ended a long-term, monogamous relationship with someone who was Catholic. However, he notes that he ends up matching with more Jewish girls than non-Jewish girls on dating apps: "I don't necessarily pick and choose based on that, but it just happens to be that I end up dating Jewish women." Silas may be unaware that he is more attracted to Jewish women, which is why the algorithm in the app suggests women with these characteristics.

Silas comes from an interfaith household, and therefore his parents do not set any religious parameters for his pool: "I can do whatever I want; ultimately my parents know they don't make the decision." As a consequence, Silas incorporates friends into his dating decisions because his parents are less involved in his choices. Silas and his friends compare their levels of openness, and they later cope collectively through their discussions of their dating experiences and

preferences. They discuss whether they should open their pool to more religious women, but also wonder whether those women will have a more rigid personality type. The group supports each other by sharing a range of experiences to validate the diversity that comes with different types of women in their pool, as I discuss later in this chapter.

In the Middle of the Spectrum

As participants approached a normative age for marriage, they generally narrowed their dating pools to match these more serious life stage considerations. Heterosexual women in their late twenties were generally in this moderate part of the spectrum, as they became increasingly aware that they were reaching the average marriage age for women in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2019). These women continually tweaked their dating pool criteria between more open and closed as they considered how they want to raise a (generally, Jewish) family. In that process, they were influenced by certain cultural and familial expectations to marry within the faith. They turn to their friends to cope in stage three, rather than their parents, to balance the pressures they placed on themselves and those enacted by family and the broader society.

For example, Laura (28, heterosexual) adjusted her dating pool in response to life stage considerations that shifted as she approached her late twenties. Laura initially selected a Jewish dating pool once she graduated college in rural Pennsylvania and moved to New York City because she was excited by the opportunity to date Jewish singles. At the time, Laura thought to herself, "great, there's this endless pool," but then she began to notice that people around her were "marrying off" in her mid-twenties, which led Laura to self-assess once again. Hence, in Laura's mid-twenties, she believed her quality options were becoming scarcer as they "married off," and considered her own worth among her competitors. Laura began to think that she would

be "okay with a partner of a different religion, or who would convert," but only after she concluded that she had a lower chance of success finding a Jewish partner than she initially thought. As a result, she expanded to a wider pool, which would provide her a broader range of attractive options.

However, towards the end of Laura's twenties, her self-assessment shifted once more to focus more centrally on how she might want to raise a family (Brashers & Hogan, 2013). This new dimension of her self-assessment was influenced by becoming active in Jewish charities and organizations supporting Israel, which provided social situations that helped her rediscover her religious affiliation and provided her with access to a larger Jewish dating pool. She also participated in Jewish weddings with close friends, and that social comparison inspired her to believe that she could also find a Jewish husband. She realized that she has a "strong Jewish identity," and feels connected to her Reform Jewish upbringing in Manhattan. This re-established Jewish affiliation compelled Laura to re-narrow her dating pool criteria to only Jewish men. In doing so, she explores a new dimension of openness, by deciding that she is willing to adhere to a stricter level of religious observance, in that she would be willing to have a kosher home[12] if it was important to her imagined partner.

Laura's ongoing self-assessments are also intertwined with the coping strategy she invokes in stage three, in which she looks for validation from her friends. As mentioned above, Laura tends to compare herself to her married friends as a source of inspiration for finding a Jewish long-term partner. She also has conversations with her single friends to validate her experience of remaining open to different levels of religiousness within her pool as well: "we're very much in the same realm for the most part…I noticed that as some friends got older, they

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[12] A kosher home has certain foods that are certified as kosher and separates meat and dairy plates, pots, utensils, etc. Laura would keep this lifestyle at home, but eat non-kosher food outside the home, whereas those who are even more observant would restrict what they eat both inside and outside the home.

widen their thoughts on religion, and could they see themselves with somebody who might not share the same views as them." Similarly, although Laura does not currently employ kosher practices in her home, she kept her Jewish dating pool open religiously to accept a potential partner with more strict Jewish observations than her own.

On the Closed End of the Spectrum

In contrast to Laura, people on the closed end of the spectrum believe that they have a large dating pool and are at an age in which marriage is further away. These participants were relatively new to the local dating market because they recently graduated college or moved to New York City over the past few years. These participants also tended to have been raised more traditionally in terms of their religious observance, ranging from more Conservative to Orthodox denominations. They closely identified with their religious childhoods and were actively involved in their affiliated Jewish communities in New York. Informants on the closed end of the spectrum tend to turn to both friends and family to cope in stage three. Therefore, family bears a strong influence over relatively closed in-group dating preferences.

For instance, Josh is a 28-year old heterosexual man who has short red hair, works at an organization that supports Israel, and attends a young professional group with Layla, whom I discuss later on. Despite attempting to appear open and flexible in his dating choices, Josh has established narrow boundaries around the limited pool of Jewish women who share his political and Israel-centered beliefs. Josh was raised in a Conservative Jewish household and experiences pressure from his father to find a Jewish partner, which contributes to his decision to religiously narrow his dating pool after moving to New York from Ohio. Within the confines of dating within the faith, however, Josh works to assure me he is still open; he does not care where a potential partner lives, where she was raised, or what she does for a career. He also has minimal

requirements for the level of religious observance that his future partner should practice because his religious identity is primarily rooted in his strong identification with Israel, rather than with a religious denomination. According to Josh, if his future partner is "fun and cool and a Zionist," and matches his political views, other aspects matter less, because most of his "Judaism is in Zionism." This is a belief that Josh tries to assess on the first date by bringing up Israel because "if they're anti-Israel or they don't care about Zionism, it's probably not going to work out."

Josh observed that the American Jewish community has largely moved further to "the left" in its Israel stance, in which almost half of Jewish Americans believe that the U.S Government favors Israel too much (Smith, 2019). Josh's stance on Israel has remained the same, which he believes makes him more of a minority in today's "polarizing" political climate: "it's harder to find American Jewish girls who are very strongly Zionist, who don't think Trump is the cause of all the world's problems, but also aren't diehard Trump supporters." He reflected: "maybe that's one of the reasons why I haven't dated in a while, or maybe I don't really care about dating right now."

Josh's closed orientation influences how he turns to friends and family for advice. In the next chapter, I detail how Josh momentarily joins a Jewish dating website to please his father. He also turns to his friends to validate his choice to postpone pursuing a romantic partner for the time being. Josh's experience maintaining a closed or narrow criterion, deciding to take a break from dating, and briefly testing out a Jewish dating website demonstrates how emerging adults constantly adjust their goals in response to new experiences. Furthermore, Josh eventually moves between friends and family to help him cope with his uncertainty, which suggests that he values both parties as important sources of support.

In contrast to Josh, who focuses on Israel and politics, Ali (22, heterosexual) operated in a dating pool that targeted a compatible level of Orthodox Jewish observance as her defining dating criteria. Ali was raised Modern Orthodox in Manhattan but became more religious during her gap year in Israel before college. After a result of a broken engagement, Ali realizes she wants to continue to grow as a person before starting a family. She notes, "When I feel like I'm independent enough to really understand life better [I would feel ready to get married]." Furthermore, Ali believes she has access to a wide range of options because matchmakers within the religious community constantly approach her with potential suitors from her "dating pool."

Ali became slightly less closed after she ended her engagement with a partner who critiqued her level of religiousness. Ali and her ex-fiancé observed the same Jewish laws, but her fiancé told her she was not spiritual enough because she did not spend enough time studying religious texts every day. That experience made Ali reassess her dating pool boundaries and she decided to expand her religious criteria: "I would never put somebody in a box and say that they are religious or not religious…after that I was trying things out and dated someone who did not always keep Shabbat [and I keep Shabbat][13]…but that's also not for me." Although Ali tried dating people who did not keep Shabbat she decided that Shabbat was something that definitely mattered to her.

Ali continued to adjust her pool to find a partner who was religiously compatible. She had several bad experiences with men who were on the more religious side of the spectrum, which made her consider closing off her dating pool to people who she thought were less tolerant of diversity. More specifically, she was surprised when someone she dated used a derogatory Yiddish word to describe women at the bar who were dressing immodestly. Ali was shocked by

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[13] "Keeping Shabbat," means observing the Sabbath, which is a weekly 25-hour observance from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown. Jews who observe the Sabbath abstain from all forms of labor, such as cooking, driving, using technology, among other activities (My Jewish Learning).

her date's use of language: "I was like, no! It was kind of like calling someone 'the n word.'" She wondered whether this experience pointed to her date's level of religiousness and lack of experience in the secular world. She questioned, "I'm not sure [if I should adjust my criteria] because I have also dated more religious people that weren't as closed off." Ali's self-assessment reflects her ongoing comparison between religious and secular ideologies and whether one's level of religiousness makes them more closed off from the rest of society.

In the following chapter, for instance, Ali turns to her mother to cope with her breakup by helping Ali focus on the Jewish values that are more in line with her upbringing, rather than turning to her friends. Ali is more religious than her parents, who are more accepting of diverse religious options because they are divorced and her father remarried someone outside the faith. Therefore, Ali's assessment leads her to cope in stage three by having open discussions with family members who share her questions and critiques about religious observance.

At the most closed end of the spectrum are participants who fixate on a "type" of religious person that they desire to date, which they feel comfortable narrowing down because they believe their dating pool is large. For instance, Layla (24, heterosexual) observed that her dating pool was exceptionally big after she moved to New York from Chicago, which was almost overwhelming: "It's good to narrow it down."

Layla admits that her standards are possibly "too rigid" because she is interested in a partner who is "the right kind of Jewish." Layla's future partner should meet the following requirements: to have a kosher home, but not keep Shabbos (Yiddish for Shabbat), and have kosher meat inside the home, but not outside the home. She describes this person as someone who would have gone to Camp Ramah[14] and adds that they should have Shabbat dinners every

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[14] Camp Ramah is a Jewish summer camp affiliated with the Conservative Jewish movement (Correspondent, 2002). Her reference here, knowing that as someone who shares her regional and ethnic knowledge, is a shorthand for a

week as well, but not actually keep the strictures of Shabbat observance (for example, the prohibition on driving, using technology, or spending money).

Layla's very constrained list of criteria (some of which seem internally inconsistent, like a commitment to Shabbat dinners but not the other strictures of observing Shabbat) make her hesitant to date altogether because she does not believe it is likely she will find someone who embodies these criteria. She is not motivated to open her dating pool and explore different types of partners because of her recent breakup. Layla's closed orientation and consequent hesitance to date influences how she copes in stage three, as she turns to her roommate for support. She recognizes her apprehension to try out different types of partners and relies on her roommate to push her to take risks. Having that support helps Layla move beyond her limited criteria and slowly step outside of her comfort zone. As Layla continues to gain experience and ongoing support, she can reassess her dating pool criteria and adjust it to better suit her goals.

In summary, I found that my informants enter stage one—the context of the dating pool—and self-assess in stage two based on how they compare themselves to imagined competitors for desirable partners within their pool. Those on the most open side of the self-assessment spectrum are younger and feel little familial pressure to settle down or date within the faith, whereas those in the moderate part of the spectrum are generally focused on those life stage considerations. Informants on the more closed end of the spectrum tend to be younger than the average marriage age and believe they have access to a wide dating pool. These participants are more influenced by their families to find a partner who shares their level of religious observance. Below I explain how participants depend on their close ties as resources to cope with these issues (stage three of the model).

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partner whose family not only prioritized sending him to Jewish summer camp, but more specifically, to a Jewish camp that adheres to levels of Jewish education and affiliation related to the Conservative movement within Judaism.

Stage Three, Coping Pathways: Seeking Dating Support Through Mediated and Interpersonal Communication

    My informants' experiences in New York City's dating pool contribute to how they work to resolve identity tensions as they attempt to reach normative adulthood. For most participants, the uncertainties they manage around their dating experiences also involve developing their own sense of Jewish identity and level of observance, independent of those in which their parents raised them. My informants sought out social support to guide them through these unfamiliar contexts because they struggle to make choices and solve problems on their own (Brashers et al., 2004). Although some participants on the closed end of the dating spectrum turn to both friends and family members for support, most participants turn to friends[15] to help manage their dating pools. There were twinned reasons for this choice: first, friends could empathize with their dating experiences because they were muddling through the same experiences themselves. Second, for my informants who were breaking with the Judaism of their childhood in some way, their selected friend group supported them in those choices as well. The following section shows how strong ties guide informants down distinctive coping pathways. These coping pathways are more fluid than they are fixed. Some of my participants combined two coping pathways, so they should not be read as being mutually exclusive.

    Some friends helped each other normalize the wide range of experiences that come with managing one's dating pool, employing the *validation pathway*. For informants whose behavior reflected the *information management pathway*, friends either provided feedback/advice or supported the choice to avoid information related to their partner possibilities. Those whose friends provided intrusive, albeit supportive, suggestions about how to manage their dating pool

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[15] Chapter four discusses how participants find their own personal Jewish communities and seek out support from both friends and family members to define their own form of Judaism.

were supported through the *perspective shift pathway*. Finally, participants who engaged the *coping skill development pathway* interacted with friends and learned to defend their approach to their dating pool and handle different challenges that arose. Figure 4 outlines the coping pathway characteristics in more detail.

At times, my informants combined these coping pathways as strategies for seeking support. For instance, participants and their friends often used the *validation pathway* and the *information management pathway* together by both guiding and affirming each other's choices. Information management involved a "dyadic effect," in which reciprocal disclosures allowed friends to provide empathetic (i.e., validating) responses and establish deeper friendships over time as a result (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Jourard & Landsman, 1960). Therefore, friends sometimes chose to provide suggestions to each other or to avoid discussing certain issues, even as they worked to affirm each other's feelings, hardships, and choices.

Alternatively, some informants integrated the *perspective shift pathway* with the *coping skill development pathway* because they considered different perspectives when problem-solving and communicating their needs. In contrast to the information management and validation pathways, these two pathways were likely to involve friends who did not come from the same vantage points or share the same beliefs. In order to effectively explain their position or collaboratively come up with new solutions my informants needed to look beyond their own points of views and consider other people's thoughts, choices, and motivations.

Figure 4

Coping Pathway Characteristics

Validation Pathway	Information Management Pathway	Perspective Shift Pathway	Coping Skill Development Pathway
Definition Providing symbolic affirmation that validates knowledge, feelings, and choices	**Definition** Focusing on or avoiding certain topics to reduce, maintain, or increase uncertainty	**Definition** Learning to view a situation in a new light as a result of communication	**Definition** Encouraging others to develop coping skills
Example Engaging in mutual disclosures that normalize a bad romantic experience	**Example** Asking friends to help narrow down one's dating pool	**Example** Realizing that friends cannot provide support for dating	**Example** Defending a dating decision; learning how to manage dating pool more effectively
Key Characteristics Associated with open-middle end of the spectrum Affirms the issue	**Key Characteristics** Associated with both open-closed ends of the spectrum Confronts the issue (Information seeking) Avoids the issue (information avoidance)	**Key Characteristics** Associated with both open-closed ends of the spectrum Views the issue differently	**Key Characteristics** Associated with both open-closed ends of the spectrum Solves the issue (problem-solving skills) Defends the issue (self-advocacy skills)

The Validation Pathway

The validation pathway involves strong ties symbolically affirming each other's

knowledge, choices, and feelings (Brashers et al., 2004). Friends provided each other with

validation to affirm the wide range of experiences, both positive and negative, which are

endemic to dating. Informants whose behavior exemplified this pathway strategically chose to

discuss dating experiences with friends who supported their ideas of romantic exploration.

Among my participants, the validation pathway was characterized by mutual disclosures about dating; in that way, validation was a mutual pathway/coping mechanism that friends engaged in together. My informants and their friends took turns sharing details about dating that expressed understanding of their troubles, provided reassurance, and communicated respect and support for different views (Howland & Simpson, 2012). They used humor to create a safe space for disclosing their anxieties and reducing tension, which put friends at ease and provided a positive outlook during times of stress.

It was common for my informants to circulate what Yitzi (28, heterosexual) calls "JSwipe mishaps," or shocking dating stories. Friends helped each other cope with their fears, failures, and shame by maintaining a humorous outlook in an uncomfortable situation (Martin, et al., 2003). Although informants could not change or control their mishaps, they redefined them through humor, which provided a sense of relief (McGhee, 2010). An event is perceived to be funny if it is inconsistent with situational expectations, which was why my informants laughed at their dating blunders (LaFave et al., 1996). For instance, Cam (24, LGBTQ) commiserates with friends about her lackluster options in the Jewish lesbian dating pool by sending each other the "stupid and ridiculous openers" they receive on dating apps. Cam's heterosexual female friends receive offensive comments from heterosexual men and she responds by laughing, "Who the fuck raised you? This is how you talk to women that you want to be with?" The idea of initiating a romantic relationship by sending a crude message is both baffling and funny. Although Cam cannot completely relate to managing misguided romantic advances from men, she uses humor to convey perspective-taking empathy, which reduces the distance between Cam and her friends' experiences, and subsequently reduces their feelings of isolation and distress (Hampes, 2010).

Not all joking occurred in response to horrible or bizarre situations. As humor can have multiple meanings, it distances the person from the message, allowing my informants to share their emotions in a face-saving way (Goffman, 1959; Lefcourt, 2001; McCreaddie & Wiggins, 2008). It was common for heterosexual men in my study to fuse humor with serious discussions to express their feelings of joy, love, guilt, and appreciation, while appealing to norms of masculinity (Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Swartz, 1995). For example, Silas and his buddies use joking as a vehicle to attain intimacy in their friendships:

> In a group setting it's a lot more surface level and a lot more joking. I'd be lying if I said we didn't look at girls' profiles and laugh. Every girl wants to travel the world and go to some exotic place like Iceland or Ireland. Sometimes we'll show the positive stuff, like a girl that has great answers, too, or a really witty conversation. It's not always joking. In person it gets more in depth—we talk about the person as a whole, not just what she looks like or where we went on a date. My friends don't hold back in terms of talking about sex and different types of personalities they get along with or not. Nothing is off limits.

Not only are Silas and his friends using humor to validate their concerns over finding a compatible romantic partner, but they are also encouraging each other to communicate their romantic and sexual desires. This creates a comfortable rapport for these informants to share what they value, what they find frustrating, and what they are willing to tolerate in their relationships (Chu, 2004; Korobov & Thorne, 2006). Establishing an environment that provokes thought and self-insight enables emerging adults to explore their qualities of character, such as becoming self-reliant and learning to make independent decisions (Arnett, 1998; Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004). In summary, mutual disclosures that incorporated humor provided encouragement and reduced interpersonal tensions, while creating a safe space for self-expression.

The Information Management Pathway

The information management pathway refers to strong ties supporting the process of seeking or avoiding information that is readily available (Brashers et al., 2004). In my study,

friends supported information-seeking efforts by having direct question/answer exchanges where they offered guidance in making dating decisions. Participants also felt uncertain when they had access to too much or inconsistent information, which caused them to avoid accessing more of it. In these cases, friends supported the choice to turn the attention away from their dating issues to prevent each other from feeling overwhelmed.

Information-Seeking. Information-seeking refers to purposefully looking for advice, suggestions, and information from a trusted source that a person can use to address their problems (Brashers et al., 2004; Heaney & Israel, 2009). Information-seeking was most common for informants whose dating pools were most open, as they sought friends' assistance to help narrow down their options. Other examples of assistance in this study included interpreting a potential dating partner's behaviors and suggesting a course of action in a relationship.

For example, Brian is a 26-year old heterosexual man who identified as culturally Jewish and had a relatively open dating pool that included both Jewish and non-Jewish options. He felt overwhelmed by his choices and turned to his friends to support his decision-making. Brian matched with three women on a dating app whom he found "equally attractive," so he sent pictures of the women to his friends in a group text. He asked for his friends' guidance, writing:

> "Boys, it's extreme, it's almost wedding season, and I need a date for my sister's wedding. Which one of these three [women] should I go on a date with?" One of the three women was the clear winner with my friends, so I went on a date with her.

Brian felt he could not differentiate between his three choices, so he enlisted his friends to guide him through the selection process. He also invited the woman to meet his friends in order to gather more feedback and affirmation for his decision: "I brought her to a pregame and she knew a couple of my friends from college, so there was a 'Jewish geography' aspect to it, where everyone knows everyone. She wasn't a complete stranger." "Jewish geography" refers to

a conversation starter wherein Jewish people meet each other and try to identify people they know in common. Brian's partner was Christian but grew up in a neighborhood with Jewish friends who overlapped with Brian's network, which provided a sense of familiarity. The more Brian felt he had in common with his partner the more certain he felt about the relationship, which lasted for several months (Fiore & Donath, 2005; Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010; Parks & Adelman, 1983; Toma, 2014).

My informants also consulted friends when they debated opening up their dating pools. These conversations sometimes involved both validation and information management pathways because informants were looking to their friends for guidance as well as confirmation that they were making the right decision. As an example, Autumn (26, heterosexual) moved to New York from Chicago to find an "awesome Jewish husband" but realized over time that it was difficult to find a partner: "people think that New York City is going to be really easy to find somebody considering the Jewish population, but my friends and I don't think that that's the case." Autumn periodically wondered if she should also include non-Jewish options in her dating pool and asked a friend to weigh in on her decision:

> One of my friends who got married last summer, she's always my person whenever I meet a non-Jewish guy and I'm like, "Oh, I really like him." She's like, "No. Stop. It's a different feeling when you connect with a Jewish soul. It's a different connection. And you want that Jewish soul connection."

Autumn struggled to make her choice independently until she talked through the decision with her friend. She worried about limiting her options in her dating pool but was reminded that she did in fact, want a Jewish partner: "My friend talks to me about having that Jewish connection and it's like, 'yes that's what I actually want.' And you can't have that with a goy.[16] It's just—it's not the same." Autumn and her friend strongly affiliated with their in-group, as

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[16] Goy is a derogatory word that derives from Biblical Hebrew to describe a gentile, or a non-Jewish person.

exemplified by their discussions of "Jewish soul connections" and using the word "goy" to label a non-Jewish partner as inherently different. In summary, Autumn's friend incorporated the information pathway with the validation pathway because she was affirming Autumn's in-group preferences and validating the difficulties of minority dating.

Lastly, participants relied on friends to help them decipher relationship signals when they felt unable to do so on their own. Myles (24, LGBTQ), who recently "came out of the closet," asked his LGBTQ synagogue friends for insight because they understood the norms and conventions related to gay dating. During a group dinner in Hell's Kitchen, Myles shared that he was hooking up with someone named Jack, whom he met on a dating app. Myles explained that Jack asked him to delete his Grindr app, which Myles decided not to do because he wanted to continue exploring his romantic options and "make up for lost time from being in 'the closet.'" He admitted that he felt "kind of bad [about not deleting his Grindr app]," but shrugged while saying it. In response, Isaac (22, LGBTQ) guided Myles towards a conclusion about his relationship with Jack.

Isaac offers his opinion, which is that Myles and Jack seem incompatible because they want different types of relationships: Myles is interested in having a casual hookup, whereas Jack is interested in having a monogamous relationship, as illustrated by their conflicting ideas about using dating apps. Isaac observes, "it sounds like you're kind of 'meh' about this guy, but he seems into you. At a certain point you should probably tell him that you are not looking for something exclusive." He recommends that Myles share his intentions to avoid leading Jack into thinking that the relationship could blossom into something more substantial. Myles asks Isaac when he should have this conversation, to which Isaac replies, "You'll know when it's the right

time." Isaac suggests that the conversation happen sooner rather than later so that Myles can find out whether he and Jack can be on the same page.

Myles mulled over Isaac's advice about discussing his intentions over the next week. He started to grow annoyed with Jack, who texted him frequently throughout the day and continued asking Myles for more of a commitment than he was willing to provide. Jack inquired for a second time whether Myles stopped using dating apps; in response, Myles told Jack that he did not want to be monogamous, and the conversation culminated in a breakup. He reflected, "Isaac was right about what was going on. I realized Jack had 'the feels,' so I ended things." In summary, my informants and their friends were both interested in and motivated to explore their dating issues, which was why their uncertainty reduction efforts were successful. Friends also supported each other's lack of interest in focusing on dating, which I discuss below.

Information Avoidance. Information avoidance takes place when strong ties support behavior that prevents or delays accessing readily available information (Lazarus, 1996; Skinner, et al., 2003; Sweeny et al., 2010). In this study, some participants felt torn about whether they should put more effort into dating or adjust their dating pool criteria but lacked the motivation to deal with those issues. To prevent feeling overwhelmed by too much or conflicting information, they avoided having conversations about dating, asking their friends for advice about dating, and physically putting themselves in situations where they felt compelled to discuss their dating life.

As an example, Ned (26, heterosexual) is somewhat conflicted about the lack of effort he puts into his dating life, which makes him anxious when the topic of dating arises: "If I'm around married people or the topic comes up in conversation I start thinking, I probably should be putting more resources into this." Ned constantly wonders whether he should be going on more dates or putting more effort into his dating profile. He fantasizes about paying an assistant to

help him online date and jokingly asks if I would be willing to do so, illustrating his desire to find a partner without putting in the work. He feels uncomfortable when he is forced to think about his dilemma: "when you're put in certain situations, like group trips where you're the only single one, that's when it comes to the forefront. That's when it hits you." In those situations, Ned notices that he is the only single one in the group, which is a comparison that activates his insecurity (Collins, 1996; Festinger, 1954).

In response, Ned feels at ease around his single friends who tend to avoid talking about dating. He explains, "it doesn't come up compared to Trump or politics or work or things like that. Maybe on Friday nights or Saturday nights when we're going out we'll talk about it, but on the average weekday, it just doesn't come up." Ned and his single friends chat about dating when the situation calls for it but primarily talk about other issues, such as politics, career ambitions, and problems at work. He jokes that perhaps his friend group is "asexual…there are so many important things to talk about and do." Avoiding the subject in most everyday interactions helps keep the dating issue in perspective, as it is lower on the list of Ned's priorities. Ned's single friends share his interest in not making dating the focal point of conversation, which prevents him from thinking about an issue that contributes to his anxiety.

The Perspective Shift Pathway

My informants use the perspective shift pathway when they learn to re-interpret a situation in a new light as a result of communicating with strong ties. Close friends can encourage each other to view their uncertainty in a different way, such as learning to accept things they cannot control and putting stressful circumstances into a broader, wider perspective. Sometimes friends held opposing opinions about how each other should date, which caused my informants to cope by tolerating their differences of opinion. In doing so, they could respond to pressure from their

closest ties by viewing their interactions in from a new vantage point, rather than feeling insecure about their shortcomings.

For example, Lily is a 25-year-old heterosexual woman who has straight strawberry blonde hair and has multiple tattoos. Lily was raised Conservadox (a denomination between the Orthodox and Conservative traditions) and was one of the few Jewish students in her school growing up. "I'm from Long Island, but not the, quote-unquote, Jewish part of Long Island. My town was working class and was not a very Jewish place. I didn't have any Jewish friends until I moved to New York." When Lily moved to the city, she established a religious support system and new level of observance at her egalitarian community service group. Lily's community service group followed a philosophy of religious pluralism, which encouraged inter-faith dialogue and held the view that different religions should discuss their perspectives and traditions. Prior to moving to New York, Lily did not have access to Jewish dating options and was accustomed to inter-faith dating. After moving to New York she gained access to a larger pool of eligible Jewish men and explored dating both Jewish and non-Jewish partners. She reevaluated her approach to inter-faith dating over the past five years.

More specifically, Lily revised her dating pool criteria after ending a two-year relationship with a man who was not Jewish. Throughout the relationship Lily tried to learn about her ex boyfriend's religious practices and she demonstrated her support by attending church with his family. Lily's ex-boyfriend, however, did not reciprocate and try to understand her Judaism, which wore on her over time. Lily started working for a Jewish organization and was increasingly exposed to Jewish traditions. In contrast to the past, she began spending her weekends "doing all kinds of rituals and attending different [Jewish] services," and felt sad that her partner did not support those activities. Lily's ex boyfriend refused to go to Shabbat dinners

with Lily and her friends or attend Jewish holidays with Lily and her family. "I thought he would be like, 'this is outside my comfort zone, but it's important to you, so I'm going to go.' But he said no to almost everything." Lily's resentment built up over time and she finally concluded that she and her partner "didn't match and were definitely not going to make sense in the long-term."

After the breakup, Lily self-assessed and decided that she wanted to limit her dating pool criteria to consider only Jewish partners. She reflected on the lessons she had taken from dating her ex, noting, "We definitely had different values. I work in the Jewish world and I'm also very involved in the Jewish world outside of work, and I think that you have to [have a partner] understand that world, otherwise it isn't going to work." Lily determined that it was important for her to find a long-term partner who was religiously compatible; "my lifestyle would be more cohesive with someone who has a similar upbringing." She responded to this re-assessment by turning to her friends for affirmation. However, she quickly realized that her high school friends from Long Island did not support her choice:

> It's very confusing to my high school friends that I only want to marry someone who's Jewish now, because it's such a different world from what they're used to seeing. And I was part of that world because that's how I grew up and I dated all these people very seriously who were not Jewish in the past. So for them, it's just—they don't get it.

Lily turned to her high school friends in an attempt to enact a validation coping strategy, but found they were unable to understand why she closed the boundaries of her dating pool. Rather than try to explain the importance of finding a Jewish partner or convince her high school friends to respect her approach, she instead turned to her post-college friends in New York City, who guided her through the validation pathway because they actually understood her motivation to search for a Jewish partner. She concluded that her post-college friends were most empathetic to her decision than her high school friends from Long Island were because, "they're all Jewish and they're way more diverse than the people I grew up with. They get that it would make my mom

sad if I didn't have a Jewish wedding and things like that."

Having that support from her post-college friends helped Lily recognize the reasons why her high school friends' viewpoints would clash with her own viewpoints. To maintain her connections to her high school friends, she engaged the perspective shift coping strategy by changing her own interpretation of the situation as being less harmful than she initially thought. As shown below, the perspective shift took place by identifying the causes of Lily's high school friends' behavior and shifting the blame away from her high school friends to outside forces. In doing so, Lily subsequently shifted from feeling uncomfortable about their differences to tolerating their differences because they were uncontrollable.

Lily began the perspective shift process by thinking about the source of her high school friends' beliefs about dating. She started attributing her high school friends' behavior to their upbringing and environment, observing that being raised in a small town did not provide them with opportunities to interact with different cultures: "I had no access to diversity growing up and I feel like I really got hindered of [being] the kind of person that I am until I moved to the city. " This homogenous environment prevented Lily's high school friends from learning about Jewish values, beliefs, concerns, and experiences (Allport, 1954). "It's important to be in an urban setting, to be around more Jews, and to be around more people in general." Lily's high school friends never left their small working-class suburb, to which she credits their lack of awareness about the challenges of dating as a young Jewish adult (such as feeling pressure from family to have Jewish children/raise a new generation of Jewish people in order to maintain the cultural cohesion of the group) (Chiswick, 1999; Hitsch et al., 2010; Kalmijn, 1998). She concludes:

> I realized they just wouldn't get some of my dating choices. There's a certain aspect of being where I come from that's a little bit anti-Semitic so I think I'm aware of that

[now]—I've known that my entire life—these are people where I know their limitations, so it is what it is.

Lily learned to consider her high school friends' lack of support for her choices in a way that allowed her to discount their views on her dating choices without damaging their overall relationship. She reframed her perception of her high school friends by viewing them as being limited because of their surroundings, rather than blaming them for having internal bias or prejudice (Tennen & Affleck, 1990). As a result of this perspective shift, Lily was able to accept the reality of their differences because it was beyond the scope of her control.

The Coping Skill Development Pathway

The coping skill development pathway refers to friends encouraging each other to develop coping skills, including self-advocacy skills and problem-solving skills. My informants learned to discuss their preferences, speak up for their choices, and solve problems in their conversations with friends, which contributed to their coping skills. Their dating discussions led to them acquiring essential coping skills for independently transitioning into adulthood, which established a sense of confidence in their relationships.

Self-Advocacy Skill Development. The self-advocacy skill development pathway refers to emerging adults understanding how to speak up for their needs and interests. Participants who discuss dating with friends learn to take a self-advocating orientation by expressing, explaining, or defending their choices (Abbey et al., 1985; Brashers et al., 2002; Hays, Magee, & Chauncey, 1994; Suls, 1983). In doing so, they are given a chance to share their needs and boundaries, which is an important step towards becoming an autonomous adult and a skilled communicator.

For instance, Isaac cares very much about his friends approving of his romantic relationships but learns to self-advocate when he feels they are intruding on his personal life. Isaac's friends thoroughly question him at Shabbat dinner one night to show their interest in his

new partner, Jamie. They push to see photographs of Jamie and investigate his profession as an engineer (for instance, clarifying, "does he build things? Does he do computers? Is he still in school?") and ask where Jamie lives, which is in Williamsburg. The group wonders aloud how Isaac and Jamie connected on Grindr because Isaac lives in Queens and the app is based on a geo-location. Jordan (28, LGBTQ) jokes that Jamie was paying extra for a feature on Grindr that provides access to people outside their radius. Isaac defends against the accusation, arguing that they probably matched because Jamie was passing through his neighborhood or vice versa. Larry suspiciously points out that Isaac does not go to Williamsburg and Isaac responds that he lives near a bus line and visits the neighborhood quite often.

Isaac also justifies his decision to create boundaries with his friends: "See this is why I haven't brought him to synagogue, because I knew you would grill him." Jordan continues to tease Isaac about the relationship and jokes that the relationship is fake because no one at the synagogue has met Jamie. Isaac responds by defending, "he's real, I promise," and then teases back by countering that the group has yet to meet my fiancé, so he must not be real either. Isaac's friends react by laughing and concluding that neither Jamie nor my fiancé exists because they have not met them in-person. The group moves onto a different subject in which Jordan starts talking about his long-lost lover in Africa, and breaks into smaller group conversations.

The exchange between Isaac and his synagogue friends resulted in Isaac developing self-advocacy skills. Isaac defended Jamie and expressed that he felt uncomfortable by the group's intrusive questions. He also took an active role in his social decisions by explaining his choice to wait until the relationship progressed to introduce his boyfriend to his friends. Isaac's friends eventually accepted his boundaries, as illustrated by them laughing at his joke and moving onto a different topic of conversation. The exchange resulted in Isaac feeling more empowered in

communicating his needs. For example, in Chapter four Isaac shifts from a position of avoiding his estranged family members to actively repairing their strained relationships.

Problem-Solving Skill Development. Emerging adults develop problem-solving skills, or the tools to resolve issues, as a result of discussing dating with friends (Morgan & Korobov, 2012). Friends engaged in joint problem-solving activities, such as responding to relationship dilemmas, finding ways to attract more eligible partners, and handling rejection. In these examples, the emphasis was placed on the cooperative effort of both parties to engage in activities that would enable my informants to come to a conclusion independent of their friends' opinions. As a result of these conversations, they moved from feeling dependent on friends to feeling capable of handling future issues on their own. As my informants engaged in this interpersonal communication, they debated, learned, and tried to reconcile various social norms and expectations that were often in tension with one another.

As part of developing problem-solving skills, my informants engaged in information-seeking by asking their friends for assistance. Autumn explains how her friends turn to her for guidance, which results in a joint problem-solving effort: "my friends ask, 'do you think I can text the guy now?' And I'm like, 'well, what time was the last text? Send me screenshots.' And we have whole conversations about it." Rather than Autumn advising her friends when to send the text, the exchanges shift to two-way discussions about strategizing to achieve the best results. Autumn's friends also act as a sounding board for exploring different ways to handle issues in their relationships, incorporating the perspective shift pathway with the coping skill development pathway: "we all talk to each other and help each other because it's always easier to have a good perspective if you're not inside the relationship." Autumn and her friends draw on both insider and outsider perspectives about their relationships, in which they find multiple ways

to tackle their problems and eventually come to their own conclusions.

Sometimes my informants were concurrently experiencing similar struggles and jointly working through the problem, making sense of it as they experienced it together. For instance, two of Layla's friends (a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman) discuss how to improve their JSwipe dating profiles at a party, which turns into a joint problem-solving effort. They spend twenty minutes going through their photos on their phones and re-doing their JSwipe profiles to appear more desirable. They provide each other with quick suggestions for improvement, such as "you have too many pictures with that pose" or "you have too many group shots," and make their own decisions after taking in the feedback. They search for alternative photos to post, which is more productive to do together than it is to do separately. Both friends were highly engaged in the process and left the party with increased problem-solving abilities, in addition to better dating profiles.

Finally, friends encouraged experiential problem-solving in which they pushed each other to solve problems by doing (Chang, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This strategy was helpful for informants who had a closed dating pool and needed an extra push to try something new. For instance, Layla was apprehensive about starting to date after a traumatic breakup and turned to her roommate Janessa for encouragement. Layla and Janessa hosted a Shabbat dinner at their apartment, which resulted in Layla hooking up with someone she met at the dinner. The hookup "ghosted" Layla following the hookup, which caused her to feel confused as to why she was rejected. This led Layla to turn to Janessa to help her solve the problem.

Janessa encouraged Layla to reach out to her hookup to find out why she was rejected. First, she gave Layla a confidence boost by reminding her that when they met, her hookup said that he thought Layla was cool. Layla doubted herself, and insisted, "I'm not that cool," but

Janessa persisted: "Layla, this is ridiculous. You must reach out to him. Stop being silly." The conversation resulted in Layla sending her hookup a Facebook message to find out why he "ghosted" her after they hooked up. Layla's hookup replied that he was looking for something very specific in a long-term hookup, which was why he did not call Layla after their one-night stand. He explained that he was trying to find a serious relationship with someone who was also part of the Persian Jewish community, whereas Layla did not fit that criterion. In other words, Layla was beyond the scope of her hookup's dating pool.

This experience involved a combination of the perspective shift pathway and the coping skill development pathway because Layla practiced taking chances and exploring the unknown, which resulted in her viewing dating as less of a threat. She was pushed to confront a problem, which resulted in her feeling more confident that she could solve future problems by engaging in direct confrontations. Despite the rejection, Layla concluded that the hookup was a healthy first step towards moving on from her ex-boyfriend. Layla was initially nervous to start dating but learned that dating was not as scary as she thought. She had a perspective shift by realizing that she could handle the rejection or discomfort that came with dating. With each successive experience, Layla added to her problem-solving skills, which led to her feeling more secure over time.

Conclusion

As shown, the context of the dating pool allowed participants to manage different dating options and make difficult decisions. My informants entered the dating pool context in stage one and self-assessed the extent to which they should adjust their criteria based on how they compared themselves to their dating pool options in stage two, which reflected a dialogic relationship between stages one and two of the model. They then moved down and through the

coping pathways in which they handled different types of dating situations by drawing on support from their closest friends in stage three.

Friends played a crucial role in helping each other handle their dating pools, as my informants considered how to date in "the right way." This process took place by engaging in mutual disclosures that affirmed their vulnerable feelings and experiences, employing the validation pathway. Friends helped each other make and maintain certain decisions through use of the information management pathway. They pushed one another to re-interpret a situation from a broader perspective and accept their lack of control when they utilized the perspective shift pathway. Lastly, they encouraged each another to self-advocate for their choices and solve problems through the coping skill development pathway. My informants established a sense of self-awareness about how parts of their identities fit into different situations with their closest friends and continued progressing forward in their efforts towards feeling more secure.

Chapter four re-examines the stages of the model that I focus on in this chapter, (i.e. stages one, two, and three), but applied to community development experiences rather than dating. I describe how participants self-assess in comparison to their social networks which leads them to select the friends who fit their new form of Judaism. After developing their personal Jewish communities they create new relationships with their parents in order to continue establishing themselves as independent, Jewish adults.

Chapter 4: Finding One's Place Among Communicative Communities

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the three stages by which emerging adults respond to the context of the dating pool. Participants engage in self-assessments that shape how they manage their dating pool and turn to their support networks to navigate the process. This chapter explores how participants undergo those very same stages in the context of establishing a Jewish community that fits and supports their own form of Judaism independent of their parents.

Industrial and technological changes over the past generations have facilitated a shift in the structure of community from tightly knit groups to networks of loosely connected individuals; in the modern era, a network and a community are one and the same (Raine & Wellman, 2012). Today, people often relocate for education and work, and mobile phone and social media use allow for ongoing contact and information sharing among social ties rooted in different locations and points of life (Hampton, 2016). By moving to New York City, the participants in this study—an affluent set of emerging adults—experienced the freedom to establish their own groups of friends based on vast access to new relationships and the ongoing maintenance of selective, previous relationships.

The possibility to engage in modern activities in New York City was both exciting and anxiety provoking for my informants, who were exploring their gender and sexual identities and trying to figure out how to do so in the right way. To maintain a sense of tradition, they set out to find their personal Jewish communities, which represented a subset of their network/community that had a shared set of behaviors and practices. As mentioned, communicative communities are groups of people who strive to exchange information through communication, both online and

face-to-face; this chapter captures the initial stages my informants went through to engage in identity formation in those communication practices (Zammuto et al., 2007)

Participants moved through three key stages in this context of personal community formation, which again, is a process that can take place more than once. Stage one refers to engaging with a wider set of Jewish networks in New York. In stage two, my informants self-assessed by searching for their own compatible Jewish community, taking inventory of the ties they had already and deciding if they needed to expand their network to support their own kind of Judaism—a religious identity that aligned with their gender, sexuality, and other aspects of themselves that marked their adulthood. This process involved a dialogic relationship between stages one and two of the model. As informants moved through this stage to find a community of their own, they grew close to friends who supported their evolving approach to religion (Axelrod, 1997; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Their evolving sense of Judaism was a product of their social participation and experimentation, which involved a co-constitutive relationship between the informant and his or her community options.

In stage three, the coping pathways, participants negotiated new relationships with their parents to further establish their own, original Jewish identities. They sought out support from either friends or family based on the types of assistance that each relationship provided (Bellotti, 2008). They responded to parents who questioned their choices by turning to friends for validation and for help negotiating family relationships that were strained. Conversely, other participants turned to their parents over friends to assert their new beliefs, working together towards solutions, managing crises, tolerating differences, and avoiding uncomfortable subjects as a means of coping. Finding a community in New York City points to an underlying desire to establish one's Jewish identity outside the home and involves a co-constituting relationship

between the person and the community options with which he or she interacts. In summary, communication binds the social actors together from the communities my informants participated in and contributes to their identity formation. Figure 5 illustrates the three stages participants go through when establishing a Jewish community of their own as they settle further into their lives in New York.

Figure 5

Stages 1-3: Context, Self-Assessment, and Coping
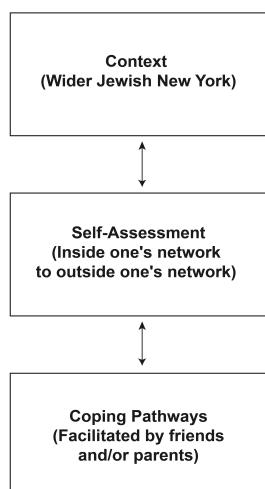
Stage One: The Wider Jewish Community in New York City

The context I discuss in this chapter is the formation of one's own community, or finding one's place in Jewish New York. As mentioned, participants' networks[17], which informants either broadened or looked within, provided links to other like-minded people to form their personal, Jewish. This context pertains to the ongoing relationships between an informant and his

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[17] I define a network as a cluster of ties/relationships that provides access to a community and links different communities together, rather than being a community itself.

or her network in their efforts to find friends who can support their Judaism. As they located and participated in various activities, these interactions shaped how informants viewed their own Jewish identities and beliefs. Similarly, these changing dynamics informed how the different groups evolved as well.

My informants settled into a city after college and enjoyed freely socializing with new people outside their networks and reconnecting with established friends within their networks (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005). New York City is a unique environment for this process because it has a large Jewish population and a vast pool of emerging adults that are Jewish. The city provides inhabitants access to a wide range of community options and Jewish events to explore and establish a sense of belongingness (Sales, 2019). My informants responded to the context by looking for a compatible Jewish community that supported their evolving choice to break from and adapt the Judaism they were raised with.

Informants interact with the context of wider Jewish New York by comparing their community options to their identities, ambitions, and desires, which evolve along with the communities with which they interact (Festinger, 1954). This has similarities to the process in Chapter three, in which informants had a dialogic relationship with their "dating pool." Here, my informants respond to their community options by evaluating whether the people around them support their standpoints on Judaism as well as their politics, gender, and sexuality (McPherson et al., 2011). These interactions and experimentations with different social groups inform how participants later draw support from their friends or family to manage uncertainty about cultural differences. More specifically, some participants accept differences, move forward in their friendships, and navigate those differences down the road.

Participants expand their networks when they have formulated a new approach to Judaism and feel unsupported by friends who do not understand their new identities (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2017; Thoits, 2011). Many participants began to search for friends within Jewish communities because that shared religious affiliation provided a fundamental sense of commonality. As Myles (24, LGBTQ) explains, "if you move to a new city, [connecting based on religion] is a very easy way to find 'your people' without even knowing anyone." Participants approached different structured events at religious organizations, such as synagogues, community service groups, and young professional groups, to establish an aligned friend group that supported the way in which they wanted to live out their faith.

Participants did not look beyond their networks when they already felt close to friends that supported their unique Jewish values during this life stage (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006). Instead, they looked within their networks for friends or friend groups with whom to become closer. However, as young, Jewish people who were evolving and responding to turning points in their identity development, such as breaking up with a serious romantic partner, "coming out," or converting, they redefined their approach to Judaism and reconsidered their friendships as well. They felt less close to certain friends who could no longer provide them with support and expanded beyond their network to find new friends that can support those changes (Bauman, 2003; Wiseman, 1986). This illustrates how personal, Jewish community formation is an iterative process, which is contingent on the ongoing relationship between the person and their network.

Stage Two: Self-Assessment

In this section, I discuss how participants compared their Jewish identities with members of their networks and within the wider setting of Jewish New York (stage two of the model). Below

I share how informants found friends who supported their new forms of Judaism and continuously evaluated whether their friends could support their beliefs. As previously mentioned, my informants ranged in the degree to which they looked outside their networks for new friends, narrowed down their options, or reevaluated their closest friends. Their changing sense of their Jewish identities was also a product of their social participation and experimentation, which involved a co-constitutive relationship between the informant and the community options they tested out. These self-assessments also became precursors to how informants sought out support from friends/and or family later on when they continued defining their own form of Judaism as separate from their parents (stage three of the model).

Looking Outside One's Network

The relationship between one's community options and one's place among those options was dynamic, in that my informants updated their Jewish community criteria with each successive experience. Participants searched for friends outside their current networks when they started perceiving a lack of existing, like-minded Jewish community options at a certain point in time. As mentioned, participants were often debating, learning, and trying to reconcile various social norms and expectations that are in tension with one another, maintaining tradition and exploring modern practices. Therefore, they were looking for friends who shared a more progressive form of Judaism that was accepting of different backgrounds and fit in with their current religious, gender, and sexual development. Participants who looked outside their networks were usually breaking from the Judaism of their childhood. This explains why they largely turned to friends to validate their Judaism in stage three and learned to accept, push back on, or avoid discussing their differences with parents. Below I share how participants went outside their networks to find friends that understood their new form of Judaism.

Overlapping Identities. Community self-assessments involved a dynamic interplay between my informants and their Jewish community options. After major transitional moments, such as "coming out" or converting, my informants reacted to the experience by looking for new forms of Judaism that complemented their new, overlapping identities. As they started to develop these new approaches to religion, they also looked outside their networks for a different set of friends that shared or understood their new religious faiths. They attended a variety of social events, tested out new relationships, and took note of whether or not they could form close relationships with the people around them.

Myles, for instance, is a 24-year old gay man who "came out of the closet" in the beginning of my fieldwork. He was raised in a traditional, Conservative Jewish household and broke from that upbringing to find a new community of gay friends. He considered different social options by exploring an LGBTQ synagogue and attending different parties held by gay men. Myles learned that he felt more of a connection to members of the LGBTQ synagogue as opposed to the "typical sea of Fire Island gays" with whom Myles lacked a connection outside of party or hookup situations. Myles believed he would "always have a connection with a gay Jew" because they shared multiple, overlapping experiences and sought more such connections. Therefore, Myles began regularly attending the LGBTQ synagogue to develop friendships where he could discuss "the gay stuff and the Jewish aspect, and how that's a funny, weird situation." In summary, the group understood Myles' experience being young, single, gay, and Jewish and helped him handle issues that were unique to that experience.

Similarly, Abby is a 25-year old bisexual woman who was converting to Judaism and looked for new friends who respected her decision and shared her religious outlook. She entered more traditional Jewish events and felt stigmatized because her mother was not biologically Jewish,

she was new to certain customs, and she did not know Hebrew. She failed to receive the

acceptance she sought and continued to self-assess until she found a group that was more aligned

with her newfound Jewish identity.

Abby developed close relationships with a liberal, egalitarian Jewish community service

group because she thought it was a "safe space" that allowed people to feel "comfortable in their

Judaism." She elaborates, "you can walk in and you can have your kippah[18] on or your belly

shirt[19] and nobody's going to look at you and judge you." The community attracts emerging

adults who appreciate different approaches to religion and the way it intersects with gender and

sexual expression, as illustrated by Abby's "kippah" and "belly shirt" examples. Abby liked this

community because she believed she could relax and not worry about or question her status as a

Jewish convert and the way in which it connected to her bisexuality. Having that support helps

Abby deal with the fact that her parents are unable to understand her new beliefs later in this

chapter.

Similarly, Alana (24, LGBTQ) came out as trans several years ago and responded to that

transition by looking for a Jewish community that was compatible with her identity as an

Orthodox trans woman. Alana was not raised with any religious background but became more

religious on her own during college. She learned that it was difficult to find a community that

shared her standpoint on Orthodox Judaism and was also trans friendly. Searching for a Jewish

community involved a constant process of trying out different groups to find the most welcoming

response (Dibb & Yardley, 2006). Alana learned to assess whether a Jewish group was

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[18] A kippah is a skullcap worn by Orthodox Jewish men (Chabad.org), also known as a yarmulke; I use the word kippah or yarmulke interchangeably.
[19] A belly shirt is a short shirt, or a crop top.

compatible by observing how people responded when she sat on the women's side[20] of Orthodox spaces of prayer. First, she noticed that congregants at the synagogue would stare at her, which made her feel like an outsider. As Alana tried out alternative community options, she also discovered that when people did not acknowledge her she also felt excluded. She started exploring communities that did not affiliate with Orthodox Judaism because she believed they were less trans phobic. However, these communities were incompatible with Alana's religious practice: "they'll openly insult people who are more [religiously] observant."

Alana was excited when she finally found an Orthodox Jewish community in Washington Heights that embraced her trans identity. This community actively invited Jewish people from all sorts of backgrounds to engage with Jewish life and their mission was focused on acceptance and inclusivity. "There were no questions asked about what side [of the synagogue] I can be on [as a trans women]. They just want to make you feel welcome—it's an 'open tent' mentality." The "open tent," which stems from the religious notion of being hospitable to strangers, meant that the group was accepting of outsiders who deviated from the norm. Receiving a welcoming response from friends was particularly important for Alana because her parents were less supportive of her sexuality and her interest in Judaism. For example, Alana's father had trouble embracing her transgender identity, and called her by her old name, Allen, until very recently. Therefore, Alana establishes a community distinct from her parents and subsequently deals with her family differences in light of that support.

Religious Enrichment. My informants also searched outside their current networks to connect with other people who shared their desire to learn about more progressive forms of Judaism in the self-assessment stage. They were searching for more diverse and inclusive Jewish

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[20] In traditional Orthodox spaces of prayer men and women are not permitted to sit next to each other, and therefore there is a divider between both sections (MyJewishLearning.org).

communities, which complemented the expressions of gender and sexuality that they were exploring during emerging adulthood. As a result, they looked for new friends who had a common interest of exploring liberal interpretations of Judaism (De Carolis & Saparito, 2006; Hampton, Lee, & Her, 2011; Vitak, 2012).

For example, Yitzi (28, heterosexual) grew tired of his Orthodox network and was drawn to the same community service group as Abby because it provided access to people who shared his new interpretation of Judaism. Yitzi and his brother were raised in a small Orthodox Jewish community on Long Island; during college, they wanted to explore different approaches to Orthodox Judaism and started attending the community service group in its early formation. "Orthodox settings are more homogenous. So I liked getting outside of that. The rabbi at the community service group has a more egalitarian and open approach to Orthodoxy, which I think is awesome." The rabbi, who was also in his twenties, incorporated a focus on global issues and gender equality in his religious teachings. Yitzi and his brother enjoyed this rabbi's type of Judaism because it was refreshing and exciting compared to the traditional, older rabbis with whom they studied with growing up.

After joining the group in its early formation, Yitzi accumulated friendships over the years: "it is nice for me to interact with people who are not like me and learn about how different people practice and connect with Judaism." Yitzi felt close to this group because he saw himself as open minded and liberal, both religiously and politically (Prior, 2003). He compares, "if you are strict about the way you dress [for religious purposes] or the way you interact with non-Jewish people, you won't be open to other things, such as reading novels." Yitzi's friends supported his interest in breaking outside those homogenous worldviews as a Jewish adult. Having outgrown his traditional community of origin, Yitzi and his brother's politics clash with

some of the Orthodox Jewish people from their hometown, who lean towards the Republican Party; they learn to express those differences later on in this chapter.

Like Yitzi, Ryley (31, LGBTQ) expanded beyond her network because she felt she was lacking friends who shared her interest in connecting with Judaism in a much more progressive way. After "coming out" in college, Ryley attended the LGBTQ synagogue in New York City with a heterosexual friend from high school, which she enjoyed; however, being a busy college student, Ryley forgot about the synagogue until she graduated and moved to New York City full time. Ryley realized that she was having trouble making friends outside of work, which motivated her to go online and find the LGBTQ synagogue that she went to all of those years ago. She connected with a synagogue member on Facebook and began attending services weekly. She reflects:

> I felt like I had this whole new community and new group of friends, and we had this special thing that we share by coming to Shabbat weekly and taking a break from our workweeks. I found people who are okay with me being the type of Jew that I am, while being deeply connected to my roots.

As shown, Ryley expanded outside her network to establish a community that shared her own form of spirituality. Ryley's friends accepted and appreciated her approach to Judaism, which provided a compatible support system. By contrast, Ryley's family was not as comfortable with her sexual identity, which she learns to come to terms with later on. In summary, informants like Ryley broke from their religious upbringings to connect with Judaism in a way that reflected their new lifestyles in New York. As I show below, informants did not feel the need to look beyond their networks when they felt they had enough options within their networks that fit with their evolving sense of religion.

Looking Within One's Network

Rather than looking for new friends outside of their network, some participants looked more closely within their network to narrow down their friendships to a core group of friends. In this pattern, emerging adults formed a network of Jewish friends in college or after college that supported their lifestyle and religious beliefs. As their faith evolved, they narrowed down these friendships even further by comparing their existing and potential friend groups to determine which group was more supportive. Other participants reassessed their friendships and friend groups in response to life changes, such as a breakup and realized their current friends could not offer the support they needed.

Informants who looked within their network were usually maintaining or reconnecting with their Jewish upbringing in their own autonomous way. Informants in this category were likely to use coping strategies in stage three that involved rebuilding their family relationships or learning to view their Judaism as similar to their parents. For instance, Ali, whom I discuss below, realizes her college friend group does not share the Jewish values that she learned growing up in Manhattan. This self-assessment explains why she eventually relies on her mother over her college friends to help her move on from the breakup in the next stage. The following section describes how participants self-assessed in stage two of the model as it related to comparing groups within their networks and reassessing their established friend groups.

Inter-Group Comparison. Some participants formed their Jewish networks in high school and college and looked within their networks to find their closest group of friends. This involved a process of comparing an existing friend group to potential friend groups, which were usually groups who traveled in the same Jewish circles but subtly differed based on their attitudes, interests, hobbies, politics, and lifestyles. The ongoing comparison resulted in either a) switching from the existing group to the potential group or b) keeping their existing group after

concluding that they were part of the better group (Collins, 2000). My informants were in constant contact with potential friend groups online and at various social events, which facilitated these inter-group comparisons (Hampton et al., 2016; Liu, Li, Carcioppolo, & North, 2016).

As an example, Isaac (22, LGBTQ) established his personal Jewish community at the LGBTQ synagogue and looked within that network to find his friend group, one that supported his unique version of Judaism and maintained some religious traditions without taking religion "too seriously." He was initially part of the LGBTQ synagogue happy hour group, which held non-religiously oriented events for people in their 20s and 30s. Isaac started with these activities because he enjoyed socializing with Jewish peers but, having cut ties with his Ultra Orthodox family, he was wary about the religious part of the synagogue. He explains, "I'm not so into structured events where I have to be on my best behavior. It gives me [bad] childhood flashbacks."

After establishing himself with the happy hour group, Isaac engaged in inter-group comparison as he tested out attending Shabbat services and considered a potential friend group who went to the services as well. Isaac realized he appreciated the familiarity of the ritual and actually felt comfortable in that religious space. He liked laughing with friends about the rabbi's depressing sermons and the cantor belting out songs like Aretha Franklin, which he thought was an entertaining and bonding experience. Isaac then started to grow closest to the group of friends who regularly attended Shabbat services (the Shabbat group), rather than the happy hour group, because the Shabbat group shared his attitude about maintaining Jewish rituals in a personalized way.

Isaac further substantiates his shift from the happy hour group to the Shabbat group during a conversation with his friend Rachel (23, LGBTQ), who affiliates with the happy hour group. Rachel checks in with Isaac after a 20's and 30's event to find out how his perception of the Shabbat group has changed since he started attending services more regularly and spending time with the group outside of synagogue: "do you still think those kids from the LGBTQ shul[21] are not your crew?" Isaac responded, "I really like them at shul, but didn't like them at parties before I really knew them…I used to think Hannah was kind of serious and judgy, but she's not." Isaac explains that he changed his point of view about the Shabbat group after realizing that he, too, can have fun at services and urges Rachel to consider trying out the Shabbat service as well. Rachel declines Isaac's invitation and responds, "it's not my thing, but I'm glad you enjoy it." Isaac continued to solidify his relationships with the Shabbat group, who best supported his Judaism.

Isaac also periodically compared his new primary group with a different potential group from the LGBTQ synagogue, whom he called the popular group. The popular group and the Shabbat group had friends in common; however, the popular group did not attend services as regularly as the Shabbat group and was more active in LGBTQ nightlife instead. Isaac and his friend Charles engaged in this comparison and concluded that they were part of the better group (Turner, 1975). For instance, Isaac argues that the popular group acts like they are "too cool" because they post photos online of their fancy share houses on Fire Island. Charles responds, "you're, like, actually rich…so you don't care about the same things or need to prove something." Isaac concurs and shares that he plans to stay in Queens no matter how much he makes and hopes to save 18,000 dollars a year when he lands his first job; Charles responds by

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[21] shul is Yiddish for synagogue.

agreeing that staying in Queens is a smart idea financially. This contrasts with the popular group, who would (according to Isaac and Charles) rather live in fancy apartments in Hell's Kitchen than contribute to their savings. This conversation helps Isaac conclude that his lifestyle choices fit in best with Charles and other members of the Shabbat group, who appreciate frugal spending, in contrast to the popular group, who live more lavishly.

In summary, Isaac considered multiple groups from his LGBTQ synagogue before landing on the Shabbat group. He initially hung out with a group who attended happy hours but not services. He joined the Shabbat group after realizing that he enjoyed participating in synagogue services with friends and spending time with them throughout the week. He periodically compared the Shabbat group to another potential group (the popular group), which confirmed his belief that the Shabbat group best supported his approach to Judaism. Isaac's Shabbat group provided empathy for his experience growing up gay in a religious home, among other similarities, and he later enlists this group to help him rebuild his complicated family relationships.

Reassessing One's Friend Group. Some participants reassessed their friend groups and realized their friends did not provide the support they needed. These reevaluations took place when my informants responded to stressful situations such as a conflict or a breakup and they saw their friends around them as different from them and unable to help. In contrast to the Isaac example above, which was about exploring multiple potential groups, this process involved joining a group and leaving the group or rejoining a different group after recognizing major differences.

For example, Ali (22, heterosexual) was raised in a secular community in Manhattan and

made college friends from Long Island during her gap year in Israel. Ali studied with rabbis in Jerusalem during her gap year and felt more religious as a result, which caused her to bond with her new college friends over their shared spirituality: "I really wanted to be a part of that [college group] because I resonated with their religiousness." As shown below, Ali responded to a breakup and developed a newer, less religious approach to Judaism, which clashed with her college friends. This resulted in Ali concluding that she felt closest to her high school friends from Manhattan, with whom she remained connected, over her college friends.

Ali noticed some cultural differences between her and her college friends during the demise of her relationship with her ex-fiancé in her senior year of college. More specifically, Ali was hoping to work on the relationship as a couple and learned that her fiancé decided to terminate the engagement after consulting his rabbi by himself. She critiques, "This wouldn't happen here [in Manhattan]. The rabbi doesn't have a psychology degree, but there it's like, 'whatever the rabbi says, goes.'" Ali began to realize that this type of behavior was common among her college friends and started to think that they were part of a community that followed rigid, "closed-minded" norms and traditions and views: "I'm not the only story. My friends from that community have had the same thing, like, this guy breaks up with her and then she finds out later that he talked to the rabbi that morning. So that happens a lot."

Ali did not feel as comfortable turning to her college friends after her breakup because she felt pressure from those friends to marry and did not believe they fully understood her choices: "I'm 22 and my college friends literally feel old and that they're never going to get married because they're so old. Anything that is deviated from the norm is so far off for them. I was really overwhelmed." She continued to notice how she differed from her college friends, which she attributed to being raised in two separate Jewish communities: Ali's community of

origin in Manhattan, which was more modern, as opposed to her college friends' communities of origin on Long Island, which were more religious. She explains, "they're from tight knit communities and just end up doing whatever their parents say or whatever they were raised with."

This conclusion informs how Ali later copes because she relies on her mother to help her view the breakup in a new light. More specifically, Ali's mother pushes her to see the breakup as a learning experience that allows her to reconnect with certain values from her New York City upbringing. As discussed in the following chapter, Ali also grew closer with her friends from high school in her last semester of college, who bonded over their goal of living together and exploring their identities in the city after graduation. Like Ali, her high school friends were raised in Manhattan and share her updated approach to Judaism, which she identifies with her mother following the breakup.

In summary, participants entered stage one (the context) and navigated the diversity of New York City during stage two through self-assessments. These self-assessments were ultimately about distinguishing their Jewish identities from their upbringings and creating a group of friends that supported that distinction. Participants expanded beyond their networks and attended different structured Jewish events when they were looking for friends that shared their new approaches to Judaism. Others maintained strong connections to friends from high school or college that provided ongoing support, and therefore they did not feel the need to look outside their networks. Still others started to feel dissatisfied with their friends when they realized those friends could no longer provide them support as their lives and Judaism evolved. In stage three, below, participants create alternative relationships with their parents, who sometimes question or

disagree with their new form of Judaism. In the following section I will discuss how informants enlisted both friends and family members to help them deal with these issues.

Stage Three, Coping Pathways: Seeking Community Support Through Mediated and Interpersonal Communication

As described, self-assessments in stage two involved finding friends who were most sympathetic and compatible to one's form of Judaism; my informants had a co-constitutive relationship with the groups they were exploring, in which their Jewish preferences were a product of their social participation, while the groups constantly shifted in response to new dynamics. In stage three, informants continued breaking from, adapting, or re-connecting with the Judaism of their childhood, turning to close friends and/or family to guide them through the coping pathways. As mentioned in Chapter three, these pathways are more fluid than they are fixed and can be combined together; therefore, they should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Figure 6 illustrates the pathways that informants went through with their friends over their family members, and vice versa.

Participants responded to their parents, who often pushed them to comply with religious and cultural expectations, in a variety of ways. In addition to the tensions my informants had between their religious desires and the desires of their parents, they also reported stress resulting from comparing their current class positions to that of their upbringing, and the need to sometimes ask their parents to financially support their lives in New York City. For the informants who felt their parents lacked empathy for their experience, they turned to friends to affirm their life ambitions, employing the *validation pathway*. Participants asked friends to help them rebuild family relationships, through the *coping skill development pathway*. They also engaged the *coping skill development pathway* with their parents, who pushed them to defend

their independent decisions. For informants who used the *information management pathway*, their parents supported the choice to avoid topics that would cause conflict. Finally, informants were able to view their parent-child relationships in a new light, employing the *perspective shift pathway*. Below I describe how participants continued defining their Jewish identities and communities.

Figure 6

The Role of Friends and Family in Community Support
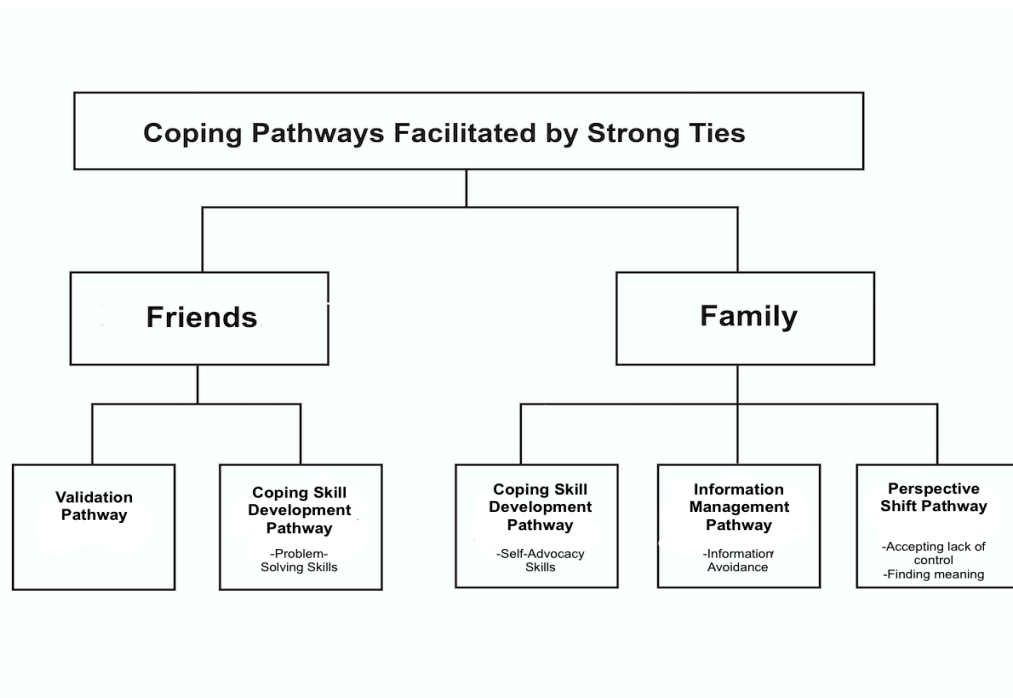
Coping Pathways: Friends

The following section highlights how informants turned to friends to affirm their current life ambitions through the *validation pathway* when they felt that their family members did not understand their experiences. They also turned to friends for help in rebuilding family relationships and developed problem-solving skills in the process, using the *coping skill development pathway*. Their friends were better equipped to provide support for these issues

because they had experience in addressing similar familial challenges and matched their life stage outlooks. Informants turned to their friends by default when they felt their parents were incapable of providing support for their independent form of Judaism.

The Validation Pathway

The validation pathway refers to close friends symbolically affirming each other's knowledge, decisions, and feelings (Brashers et al., 2004). Being part of communicative communities meant that these groups exchanged validating messages in their communication, which contributed to identity formation. In the context of forming a Jewish community, friends supported each other's life choices that were consistent with their newfound approach to Judaism. Friends had a sense of empathy for dealing with parents who pressured them to engage with Judaism in a certain way. Informants whose behavior exemplified this pathway prioritized their friends' interests and opinions over parents who objected to their Judaism, below.

Prioritizing Friends Over Family. Participants made independent decisions that their parents tended to challenge, such as exploring inter-faith dating, becoming politically active, and putting their dating lives on hold to consider other possibilities (Lefkowitz, 2005). These emerging adults looked to their friends to put them at ease when parents pushed them to behave in a way that was out of line with their new Judaism (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Wellman, 1982). They dealt by venting those frustrations to friends who could relate to their position. These mutual disclosures provided a collective experience of comparable friends from their communicative communities who provided each other with a sense of psychological comfort.

For instance, Josh is a 28-year old heterosexual man who maintains aspects of his Conservative Jewish childhood, such as following a kosher diet, while creating his own form of

Judaism in which he identifies as a Zionist. Josh became active in a young professional group after moving to New York from Ohio, where he made friends who supported his interest in Israel advocacy. Josh's friends had a mindset in which they felt they should enjoy being young professionals in the city; they dated women casually, played video games, attended Shabbat dinners, and palled around. Therefore, Josh turned to those friends for reassurance when his parents made comments that caused him to question his approach.

Although Josh embraces certain parts of his upbringing, he differs from his parents in his choice to put off finding a romantic partner. He tells me, "My parents would say I should have been married five years ago, but I don't have a date when I want to be married by. My dad just wants grandkids more than anything." Josh laughs and tries to assure me that his parents pressure him to find a partner in a joking and fun-loving way, so he does not take their comments too seriously. Despite attempting to appear unfazed by his parents' pressure, Josh feels the need to defend his relationship status to me by arguing that being single is common among his friends. He claims, "If I were the only 28-year-old Jewish male who was single I'd feel a little worried, but I'm not. Most of my friends are single, male and female, and don't feel pressure to get married."

Josh distinguishes his friend group from his family, which further supports his Judaism as being most in line with his friends more than his family. He places himself and his friends in a different category than his parents, who married at the age of 26: "back then people married younger, it was just part of the habit. In New York being 28 and Jewish and single is totally normal by today's standards." In this example, Josh is justifying his decisions, while separating his identity from his parents. In contrast to his parents' generation, who married and started their families directly after college, Josh's generation explores their identities and careers before

taking on the responsibilities of adulthood. Josh's closest friends share his thoughts and actions related to dating/marriage timelines, which helps him ward off and disregard his family's pressures.

Unlike Josh, whose friends were delaying their marriage timeline, other informants felt pressure to find a romantic partner when the friends from their personal Jewish communities started partnering off. Brian, for instance, is a 26-year old heterosexual man who was raised inter-faith but grew connected to the Jewish culture during emerging adulthood. "Where I grew up it was very common to be Jewish and I associate with a primarily Jewish circle from high school. I identify with those friends the most and would say I'm Jewish culturally." Brian is the kind of person who wants to fit in with his friend group and feels sensitive when he is left out. Therefore, he started to worry when most of those friends started settling down in their romantic relationships:

> I have friends that probably aren't far off from being engaged and are starting to plan logistically about when they might move in with their girlfriends. I'm at a stage with my single friends where we're like, "why am I the only single one out of my friends?"

As shown above, Brian's personal Jewish community evolved over time; in response, Brian evolved with them through their ongoing communication. Brian and his single high school friends facilitated an exchange of information, both advising and encouraging each other to find a romantic partner, combining the validation pathway with the information management pathway (Bearman, Moody, & Stovel, 2004; Cawyer & Smith-Dupre, 1995; Miller & Zook, 1997). The group circulated a tip in which they learned that meeting women on dating apps, rather than at a bar, and having one-on-one dates, rather than group dates, signaled this preference to potential partners. "We focused on discussing better ways to date and realized it is important to actually take girls out for drinks or dinner, rather than just casually meeting up at a bar. That was big

learning curve for us." In summary, informants like Brian and their friends were engaging in these kinds of discussions to provide empathetic (i.e., validating) responses and establish deeper relationships with the people whom they considered part of their personal Jewish communities. In doing so, they strategically focused on friendships that supported and upheld their own kind of Judaism. Below I share how informants turn to friends to help them compromise with their parents as well.

The Coping Skill Development Pathway

As participants continued to define their independent forms of Judaism with friends and family, they sometimes developed coping skills in the process. Below I share how friends helped each other develop problem-solving skills by encouraging each other to negotiate with their parents. Not only were these emerging adults able to communicate their Judaism as it compared to their upbringing, but they shifted from feeling helpless and defensive to feeling more capable of handling family conflict down the road.

Problem-Solving Skill Development with Family and Friends. Friends provide advice on handling complicated family relationships, while supporting each other's independent forms of Judaism. Specifically, participants turn to friends to assist them in managing new relationships with parents, which lead them to develop problem-solving skills or the tools to resolve issues. In doing so, they learn to show that they appreciate their parents' support without significantly compromising their new independent approaches to Judaism (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997). In these examples, my informants engage in conversations that would enable them to come to a conclusion on their own.

As an example, Josh learned to problem-solve how to maintain his independence while complying with his father's intrusive suggestions. As mentioned, Josh's father was explicit about

his wish for Josh to find a romantic partner and have a child. Although Josh looked to his close

friends for validation, he was unable to receive that support when he went home and continued to

face his father's ongoing pressure. Josh and his father were aligned on many aspects of their

Judaism and respected each other's opinions. After discussing this dilemma with his friends, he

found a compromise with his father that suited both of their needs. He explains:

> I thought about joining JDate but I didn't want to pay for it. My friend gave me this idea, because he had done this with his parents, and so I called up my dad and was like, 'hey, Dad, how would you like to help facilitate your receiving grandkids from my JDating?' He was like, 'touché. Alright.' So he paid for six months of joining the site and I met one girl on it, but I didn't renew the subscription.

 After coming up with this idea with a friend, Josh asked his father to pay for a

subscription to test out the Jewish dating website. He gave in to his father's request to seek out a

partner, but negotiated the agreement by asking for financial support. He met one woman on the

website, dated her for several months, and concluded that they were more compatible as friends.

Josh tried the service out to show his father that he was willing to meet his demands but decided

not to renew his JDate subscription. He explored, made a conclusion, and negotiated his father's

acceptance for his independent choice (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). He continued

establishing a form of Judaism that overlapped with his father's approach in some respects, while

reserving his right to make his own choices.

When my informants attempted to rebuild family relationships, they also turned to friends

to help them navigate the process. Friends offered an extra form of support to help these

emerging adults rekindle a relationship that needed repairing when they did not feel capable of

repairing the relationship on their own. For instance, Isaac (22, LGBTQ) found friends at his

LGBTQ synagogue Shabbat group who shared his interest in adapting Jewish traditions in an

accessible and LGBTQ friendly way. As he continued creating a Jewish community outside the home, he turned to those friends to help him tackle issues in his family relationships.

More specifically, Isaac's Ultra Orthodox family historically did not accept his gay identity as illustrated by their attempt to "fix him" in high school by trying to send him to conversion therapy. Isaac's friends from the LGBTQ synagogue had similar experiences with their own parents, who subscribed to traditional forms of Judaism and believed that it was a sin to be gay. As a result, Isaac drew from their past experiences and knowledge to help him reconnect with his family, despite their differences. These friendships helped Isaac learn to connect with his family in ways that he did not think were possible. As shown below, Isaac's friend Larry used a combination of the coping skill development pathway and the perspective shift pathway by encouraging Isaac to rethink, and subsequently rebuild, his family relationships.

I went to lunch with Isaac and his friend Larry (35, LGBTQ) in Hell's Kitchen and watched them debate whether Isaac should attend his sister's engagement party later that day. Isaac was apprehensive about attending the party and concluded that he did not want to go, whereas Larry argued that Isaac would regret the decision. Larry shared how his own family relationships became stronger over the years in order to encourage Isaac to consider ways that he could change his own family relationships. Larry reveals, "When I 'came out' I thought my parents would be those parents marching in the front of the Gay Pride parade, but they weren't." Larry disclosed to Isaac that his parents also wanted him to consider conversion therapy at the time; however, over the years he learned to rebuild his relationship to where it is today, in which his mother proudly accompanies him to LGBTQ synagogue services. In summary, Larry convinced Isaac that he and his family members could learn to appreciate each other's differences.

Larry and Isaac kept arguing back and forth, and Larry traveled to the engagement party with Isaac for moral support. After taking the subway with Larry to the engagement party venue, Isaac panicked and decided to go home and skip the event. However, he continued to talk through different alternatives with his friends, his parents, and his siblings, and ended up deciding to attend his sister's wedding. Isaac participated in the wedding and did all of the rituals that were required of him, even if he no longer subscribed to his family's type of Judaism. He surprisingly had a great time with his siblings, in which he smoked pot with his brother as a bonding experience and was happy that he attended the event after all. In summary, Isaac realized that he could, in fact, redefine his family relationship dynamic in a way that was compatible with his Judaism today.

Coping Pathways: Family

Other informants responded to parental pressures and advice without the help of friends. Informants developed coping skills, or self-advocacy skills, when they defended their independent decisions to their parents (*coping skill development pathway*) and engaged in information management when they avoided conversation topics that conflicted with their own approach to Judaism (*information management pathway*). Lastly, they learned to shift their perspectives in which they started viewing their relationships with parents in a new light (*perspective shift pathway*).

The Coping Skill Development Pathway

As mentioned, people develop self-advocacy skills when they learn how to call attention to their needs, boundaries, and interests (Brashers et al., 2004). When my informants responded to parents who disagreed with their sense of religion, they took a self-advocating stance to argue for their new beliefs. This had similarities to the previous chapter, in which informants reacted to

friends who challenged their approach to dating by learning to express their interests. In this case, these emerging adults defended their new Jewish communities that differed from their upbringing, and developed their self-advocacy skills in the process.

Self-Advocacy Skill Development With Family. Participants took a self-advocating position when they rejected parental pressures that did not suit their new form of Judaism (Brashers, Haas, & Neidig, 1999; Lehr & Taylor, 1986; Zoller, 2005). For example, Ashley (27, heterosexual) was raised in a family that was socially active within their synagogue and their affiliated Reform Jewish movement, to which she no longer identified with today. Ashley learned to separate herself from her Jewish upbringing and demonstrated that she had developed self-advocacy skills when she responded to parents' frustrating advice, below.

Ashley self-advocates when her parents give their unsolicited opinion against interfaith marriage: "whenever I share that I'm dating someone new, the first question my parents ask is, 'Is he Jewish?' I immediately respond, 'Does it matter if I'm happy?'" Ashley states that her family members are hypocrites for this request because they intermarried and therefore have no right to set parameters on her dating life: "my mom converted to be with my dad, and both my siblings' partners' converted for them...so what does it matter if the person I date is Jewish?" Rather than questioning herself during family disagreements, Ashley adopts this new defensive position in order to continue defining her Judaism in her family relationships.

Participants found that some family members understood their new form of Judaism, while others did not. Therefore, they took a position of self-advocacy and made it clear to everyone what their new beliefs were to further establish those differences. For instance, Yitzi (28, heterosexual) and his brother found new friends who shared their interests in exploring and liberally interpreting Judaism. This helped them establish a new progressive approach to Judaism

outside their Orthodox upbringing. Yitzi's father appreciated his sons' new religious interpretations and the three of them partook in conversations in which they questioned different aspects of Judaism. By contrast, Yitzi's mother was a Jewish convert and followed religious rules more rigidly; she did "everything by the book," and encouraged her children to "not make a fuss" [by disagreeing with the ideologies of the religion]. Yitzi and his brother responded to those differences by self-advocating relative to their mother in a public, online forum.

Yitzi learned to self-advocate by ignoring his mother's requests to stay silent about his beliefs when he became publicly outspoken on his blog. The purpose of this choice was to clearly define his Jewish identity as distinct from his traditional upbringing and continue expressing his progressive Judaism. Yitzi and his brother were writing an article critiquing a religious organization for its connection to the Trump administration and anticipated that their mother would disagree with that choice. The siblings decided to avoid initially disclosing to their mother that they were writing the article because she "probably doesn't want her kids to be calling people out," but also knew that she would ultimately find out about the article. Yitzi eventually revealed the information to his mother to illustrate his beliefs, which created a more confrontational relationship dynamic. However, as shown below, Yitzi struggles with confrontation and tends to deal with certain pressures he receives from his mother by choosing to avoid those discussions.

The Information Management Pathway

As mentioned, information management refers to strong ties supporting the process of seeking or avoiding information that is readily available (Brashers et al., 2004). To prevent themselves from feeling overwhelmed by conflicting points of view, participants avoided conversations with their parents about topics that clashed with their unique forms of Judaism. In

doing so, they prevented inevitable arguments that caused them more distress. This established a parent-child dynamic that accommodated multiple approaches to religion and respected each other's differences.

Information Avoidance With Family. Participants found compatible Jewish communities where they felt comfortable openly discussing their sexual identities, their dating lives, and other intimate information that they did not feel they could discuss with unsupportive family members. For some participants, their families were less understanding about these topics and therefore they learned to avoid these topics of conversation, or to engage in information management (Sweeny et al., 2010). Informants used this strategy with parents over friends in this context because friends did not push back on or clash with each other's Judaism.

For example, Abby (24, LGBTQ) found friends who supported her conversion to Judaism and validated her bisexual identity. "I realized that I was bi at a very young age, and with my friends here, it's so normal to me to be LGBTQ that I don't even think about it." By contrast, Abby's parents have never validated or affirmed her bisexual identity. She recalls that when she first told her parents that she was bisexual they responded by belittling her experience: "they said, 'If you're bi, you're confused.' My parents kind of deny it and say, 'you're one [sexuality] or the other [sexuality],' so there's no point in talking to them about it."

Abby reacted to her parents' lack of support by choosing to avoid having conversations with them about her sexuality moving forward. She explains, "I kind of brush it off for now. When I go home and I'm staying with my parents, what's the point of talking about it? I don't feel like bothering them about my sexuality unless I get serious with a woman. " Abby decides there is no need to discuss her sexual identity with her parents because she does not currently feel compelled to confront them about it. Rather than self-advocate or look for an alternative solution,

Abby would rather not talk about her sexual identity with her parents in order to prevent an unnecessary conflict (Martin, Pryce, & Leeper, 2005). As discussed in Chapter five, Abby is still figuring out how to incorporate her sexual identity with her Judaism, which explains why she chooses to withhold explaining her sexuality to her parents at this moment in time.

Lastly, other participants avoided certain activities to turn the focus away from topics that clashed with their new form of Judaism. As mentioned, Yitzi found friends who shared his own, progressive form of Judaism and supported Yitzi's interest in exploring his identity in New York City rather than focusing on marrying and having children. This contrasted with Yitzi's family and community of origin, who urged him to find a partner ever since he could remember. This emphasis came from multiple, overlapping ties beyond family, which made it harder for Yitzi avoid the subject: "it's a whole communal pressurized thing, it's not just the parents…it's the rabbi, the rabbi's wife, my parents' friends [and] people I grew up with."

Yitzi chose to manage his family pressures by prioritizing school to communicate his new interests. He learned that being busy in college and law school gave his family the signal that he had less time to date. However, school did not last forever, so when Yitzi neared graduation he started receiving more text messages from people he grew up with that "now you have time, [so] you should just date everybody in the world." Luckily for Yitzi, his brother's new romantic relationship took the attention and pressure away from his personal life: "It has been nice recently because my brother started dating somebody, so the focus went on to him." By shifting the focus, Yitzi was able to temporarily postpone unwanted pressure from the people from his hometown who no longer understood or accepted his choices.

The Perspective Shift Pathway

The perspective shift pathway takes place when informants re-interpret a situation in a new light as a result of communicating with their loved ones. Similar to Chapter three, in which my informants learned to accept contrary opinions about their dating lives, these participants learned to deal with parents who clashed with their new Judaism. Informants also turned to their parents to help them reframe a difficult situation by viewing it as an experience of growth. Below I share how my informants engaged in perspective shifts with family members in order to create new relationships as adults.

Accepting the Lack of Control Over Family. Participants felt encouraged to cope with family differences by putting those differences into a broader, wider perspective. When my informants found friends in their personal Jewish communities who supported their own form of Judaism, they subsequently learned to recognize that their family members were incapable of providing those types of support. They responded to their families' lack of identity support by viewing the relationship differently and learning to acknowledge those differences (Folkman et al., 1986; Rood, Roelofs, Bögels, & Arntz, 2011). My informants could not change their parents, so they learned to establish new, more accepting relationships as they grew into adulthood (Arnett, 2007b).

For instance, Ryley is a 31-year old gay woman who came from a family of Russian Jewish immigrants and broke from the Conservative Judaism of her childhood when she joined an LGBTQ synagogue that had a progressive approach to Judaism: "they have social justice interwoven into the fabric of the synagogue. I identify with the community, and it's very accessible to me." She was able to rediscover her religion, practice Judaism in her own way, and hang out with other LGBTQ Jewish friends who appreciated her identity. Having that support helped Ryley come to accept the fact that social justice was *not* interwoven into her family's

culture: "My family's very resistant of my gayness." To maintain her connections to her family without feeling hurt by their comments, Ryley engaged the perspective shift coping strategy by viewing their lack of support in a more empathetic light.

Ryley explains to me how she realized she was gay in college when she had an affair with her female roommate. She responded to that event by breaking up with her boyfriend at the time and decided that it was time to "come out" to her loved ones. When she went home to her family to break the news that she was gay, her family reacted unsupportively. She recalls:

> I told my parents that I'm in love with a girl and that I'm gay. And then my grandparents found out, because I guess my mom told them, and they took me to dinner. And I remember them saying that I have a hormonal imbalance and that I need to get pregnant immediately to fix that, and then I'll be straight again.

Ryley initially felt shocked and upset by her family's response to her gay identity but eventually reframed the situation to feel better about it. She began the perspective shift process by considering the source of her family's lack of support. She started attributing her family's behavior to their "old school Russian" culture, which was simply less understanding of sexual minorities compared to the progressive Jewish community she surrounded herself with. She pointed out how ridiculous her grandparents' beliefs were as a way of finding humor in a difficult memory and to discredit their hurtful views. She rolls her eyes and mentions sarcastically, "I thought, 'It seems like a bad idea to get pregnant in the middle of college just to fix my gayness real quick.' So I just didn't take my grandparents seriously."

Ryley added to her perspective shift by considering how her parents and grandparents came from a tight-knit culture that was mistrusting of outsiders. She defends, "I have an understanding of how my parents and grandparents grew up because there are certain things that are very specific to the Soviet upbringing and the Soviet mentality. There's a built-in homophobia and there's a built-in racism in the community." Ryley decided not to fault her

family for responding poorly to her sexual identity because homophobia was so deeply ingrained into their culture. She started believing that her family's lack of support was not a reflection of their character or relationship. This helped her deal with her mother's ongoing off-color remarks about her sexuality:

> My mom recently stopped saying things like, 'when you're going to find your future husband," because I would always correct her and tell her that's never going to happen. But she'll still make comments when I get a haircut because she doesn't like that my hair's so short. She still wants me to be this straight femme woman, and that's not me. So it's fine. Like, we figure it out, but she'll still make those comments. And it's all very funny. But I know that she loves me.

Ryley learned to consider her mother's lack of support for her choices in a way that allowed her to overlook her mother's criticism without hurting their overall relationship. This enabled her to keep establishing her progressive form of Judaism while remaining close to her roots at the same time. She rethought her perception of her family by viewing them as being limited due to their culture and insisting that they loved her regardless of her sexuality. As a result of this perspective shift, Ryley was able to accept the reality, which was that her family was never going to appreciate or understand her Judaism. She responded to their differences by concluding that there are "some things you're never going to change—so you have to pick your battles."

Crisis Support From Family. Lastly, my informants experienced breakups and falling outs, which caused them to react by questioning their Jewish identities. They turned to their parents to facilitate a perspective shift in order to find meaning in those stressful situations and build a sense of resilience (Walsh, 1996). For instance, Ali (22, heterosexual) initially developed a group of friends and a fiancé who were more religious than the Judaism she was raised with in Manhattan. She reacted to the life-altering event of her failed engagement and started to notice that those friends were incompatible with her new, more secular approach to Judaism. She

handled the falling out by turning to her mom for support, who helped her reconnect with her upbringing and view the breakup in a positive light.

More specifically, Ali navigated unfamiliar norms among the friend group regarding the age and timing of marriage that did not feel compatible to her approach to Judaism. Ali and her boyfriend of a month and a half were secretly touching[22] and her boyfriend suggested that they marry so that they would not be tempted to have sex [before marriage]. He brought up getting engaged, which Ali was uncertain because they had been dating for a short amount of time. This pressure coincided with a backlash from Ali's family, who believed the engagement was rushed. She recalls, "my mom was in culture shock, and said, 'no one does this here [in Manhattan] …how could you possibly do that so soon?'" Ali tried to appease her mother and asked her boyfriend to push off the engagement but succumbed to the pressure from her boyfriend three months later.

After the engagement broke off, Ali reflected on her worldview to make sense of what had happened (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). She realized that her mother's approach to Judaism and marriage timelines was much more compatible to her own perspective. She recalls, "My mom was just like, there could have been so many things that you learned about your ex that you wouldn't be happy about, and things in your life that you would not have accomplished before marriage." She took her mother's stance against responding to religious pressures to marry too early because she concluded that those religious pressures impeded on other portions of life. In doing so, Ali adapted her Jewish upbringing in Manhattan, which had more cosmopolitan values. She explains:

> My friend's sister wasn't allowed to be on birth control for more than a year because her rabbi told her and her husband that she couldn't be on birth control. She was in her first

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[22] This refers to the religious practice of shomer negiah, in which it is forbidden to touch someone of the opposite sex who is not a spouse, child, parent, or sibling (myJewishlearning.org).

year of dental school and had to drop out or take a semester off because she had a baby. So getting married too early just gets in the way of things. It could've been bad for me [to get married so young].

Ali pointed to an acquaintance who missed out on professional opportunities as a cautionary tale of what her life might have looked like had she married her ex fiancé. After talking the situation through with her mother she shifted from feeling sad and confused about the breakup to feeling content with the outcome. Abby felt better about the breakup because she reframed it as an opportunity to get in touch with her authentic Jewish beliefs and values. For instance, she concluded that she would not succumb to a religious pressure again to which she did not subscribe, whether that is following a rabbi's orders or touching in private but not in public. As a result of this perspective shift, Ali understood who she was in relation to her past experience, what kind of person she wanted to become, and what behaviors she would engage in, and why. In the following chapter, I discuss how Ali uses this self-awareness to build a positive, secure, and integrated sense of self.

Conclusion

As shown, my informants reformulated their approach to Judaism by finding a community that suited their beliefs and developing new relationships with their parents. They were managing their Jewish community options in New York City in stage one and were self-assessing where they belonged among their options in stage two. They then moved down and through the coping pathways, with support from friends and family, to continue building on their Judaism in stage three. Hence, these three stages were about adapting or pushing back on one's religious upbringing in an independent way. Upon conclusion of stage three, these participants established more self-awareness, in which they had a better sense of how their identities fit into situations with friends and family members from separate parts of their lives.

In summary, participants had the privilege to independently explore what it means to be modern Jewish adults living in an urban setting and how to resolve the identity tensions that came with that position. In contrast to cultures in the past, in which transitions to "adulthood" were clearly staked out, these informants engaged in a process where they explored and constructed their own sense of religion as they attempted to reach normative adulthood. In the next chapter, participants like Abby, Yitzi, and Ali use this opportunity to intentionally bring their religious identities into different situations with the goal of developing a positive, integrated, and secure sense of self. I evaluate the extent to which these participants successfully undergo the final three stages of the model (stages four through six): context collusion, developing an integrated sense of self, and ontological security.

Chapter 5: Developing an Integrated Sense of Self

Introduction

The previous chapters documented how participants manage uncertainties regarding dating and finding a sense of community. First, they establish their context by entering broader social situations (stage one) and manage the context based on how they assess themselves (stage two). Based on those self-assessments, participants move through coping pathways, managing their dating options and establishing their sense of community with assistance from their strong ties (stage three). The strong ties were family and friends that participants knew from different settings or the range of life stages, from growing up to college and post-college in New York City. Each of these ties knew the person differently, which depended on the person and their social role, and each tie held different implicit or explicit expectations for how the participant would date or establish a community. My informants were motivated to resolve identity tensions related to their sense of religious tradition and modern practices in New York City, integrating different identity expectations together through the process of context collusion. Context collusion takes place by intentionally bringing norms, symbols, information, and people from one situation into others (stage four) (boyd 2002; boyd, 2008; boyd, 2014; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). This chapter maps how and under what conditions participants attempted and tested these unified identities on the people they cared about the most.

After their self-assessing and coping pathways, many participants gain a sense of self-awareness, or an increased understanding of "aspects of the self in a specific situation" (Sassenberg, Boos, & Rabung, 2005, p. 363). Participants who managed uncertainty within a context in ways that led to such self-awareness began to bring contexts together through context collusion, which is stage four of the model. Context collusion takes place when participants bring

different parts of their networks together that hold varied expectations for their disparate social identities and use verbal symbols (e.g., "coming out" as gay or lesbian) or non-verbal symbols (e.g., wearing a yarmulke) to thread their social identities into the diversity of the city. This process of identity formation involves both interpersonal communication and mediated communication, face-to-face and online. These disclosures highlight the interplay between individuals, their networks, and their day-to-day lives.

I considered context collusion successful when participants (a) demonstrated intentionality about how they presented their coherent sense of self and when they (b) received social approval for those integrated identities. Unsuccessful context collusions resulted in my informants returning to stage three and moving again through coping pathways, thereby potentially gaining greater self-awareness to test out context collusion once again.

Once participants can clearly define their integrated identity and engage in ongoing behaviors to sustain that identity across situations, they transition to stage five of the model: developing an integrated sense of self. In this process, informants engage in ongoing behaviors to sustain their sense of self and recognize a sense of order in their actions; they understand who they are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it, which in turn creates a foundation for ontological security (stage six of the model). Ontological security is a dynamic state that involves a sense of confidence in "the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens, 1991, p. 92). Hence, in this stage, emerging adults feel grounded in themselves, their relationships, environment, and in the direction of their future. They build on and test their sense of ontological security as they move through their life course and encounter challenges that require further work on that sense of security. The examples from this chapter evaluate the extent to which my participants transition through stages four, five, and

six of the model. Figure 7 outlines the transition indicators between each of these stages in more detail.

Figure 7

Transition Indicators: Stage Progression
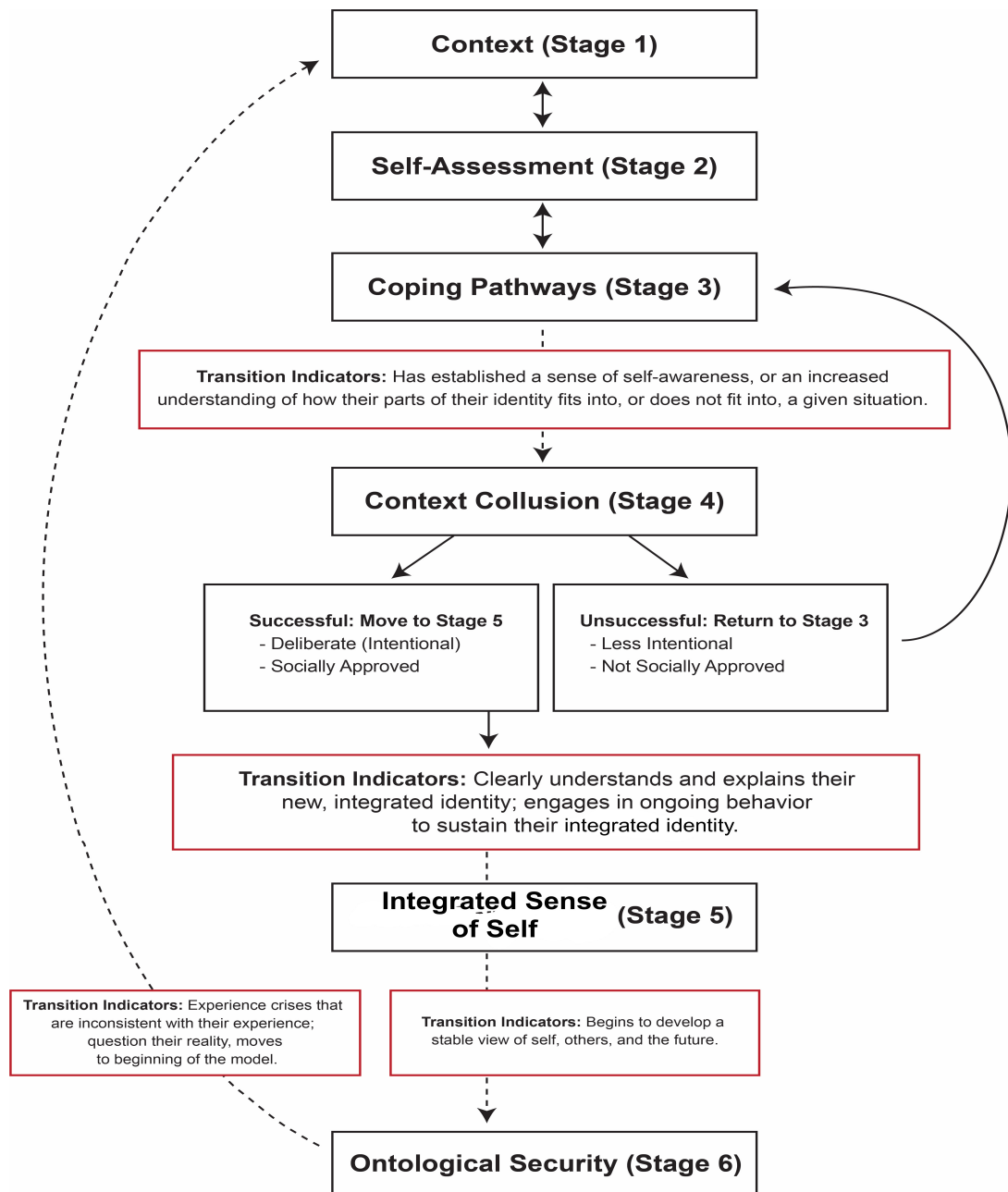
Stage Four: Context Collusion

In this section, I explain the two hallmarks of context collusion based on my fieldwork interviews and observation, which are intentionality and social approval. Participants who employed context collusion less consistently did not manage to combine their social identities in stage four. Others began to merge their social identities more intentionally in different social situations, but their identity avowals did not receive social approval. Participants who were both intentional and received social approval were able to move to stage five, integrated sense of self.

Intentionality

Context collusion takes place when informants creatively combine contexts to redefine their identities; this is distinctive from context collapse, which occurs when social contexts merge without an individual's control or intent (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Duguay, 2014). Each of my study participants had intentionally moved to New York City after college to explore and define their identities within the diversity of the city. During their leisure time, my informants voluntarily attended Jewish social events and explored different friendships and romantic experiences. Participants used this time and space as an opportunity to break from the Jewish foundation and family traditions they had been raised with, in order to determine how they wished to define their relationship with those traditions as adults (Côté & Levine, 2002). In summary, they were trying to incorporate their sense of religion with modern social practices. Informants had existential anxiety about how to be both "be Jewish" from a traditional sense and participate in modern practices at the same time, and whether both worlds were reconcilable.

After responding to their dating and community contexts via self-assessments and coping pathways, many of my participants had acquired a sense of self-awareness that prompted them to deliberately collapse their social identities across different contexts and relationships, thereby

testing a unified sense of self on the people whose opinions they cared about most. Participants who developed this sense of self-awareness exhibited it by being able to describe how aspects of their identities fit, or do not fit, into a given context. For example, informants had a general idea of what topics they could discuss with their parents and whether to defend or negotiate their new sense of Judaism in those conversations. Once a participant established this sense of self-awareness, they sought to test out context collusion. If these tests proved unsuccessful they moved back to the coping pathways, after which they tried new, deliberate attempts to engage in context collusion. Therefore, intentionality is one hallmark of context collusion. The second hallmark is gaining social approval for one's integrated identity.

Social Approval from One's Communicative Community

Participants who test out context collusion cannot fully anticipate how other people will respond to their identity disclosures (Duguay, 2014). The social reactions participants receive, whether they are approved or rejected, dictates whether they can establish an integrated sense of self (stage five). If a participant's integrated identity does not receive social approval from the people whose opinions they prize most, they question that formulation of an integrated identity and return to the coping pathways—after which, they may test out context collusion once more in their bid to gain social approval. As highlighted below, my informants have to learn how to "be Jewish" in the right way to gain that social approval, in addition to learning how to present their gender and sexual expression in the right way as well. They learned these forms of practice by exchanging information with their communicative communities.

The following section outlines the process of context collusion, starting with the less intentional, inconsistent attempts I observed, which Yitzi's case (28, heterosexual) reflects. I then document more intentional attempts that nonetheless did not generate social approval with a case

study on Abby's experience (25, LGBTQ). Finally, I detail the successful context collusion that Myles (24, LGBTQ) enacted. I describe how my informants progress in their integrated identity efforts using the example of Alana (24, LGBTQ) and illustrate how these informants continue building a sense of security with a case study of Ali (22, heterosexual).

Inconsistent Attempts at Context Collusion

The first hallmark of context collusion is intentionality. Participants who employ context collusion as a sporadic testing exercise do not manage to combine their social identities in stage four, and therefore, do not transition to stage five, the creation of a new, integrated identity. Yitzi, whom I discuss below, engaged in inconsistent context collusion efforts, resulting in his regression to stage three of the model to once again move through coping pathways to gain greater self-awareness. Although Yitzi's context collusion generated social approval from his respective communicative communities, he felt obligated to make these collusion attempts, rather than doing so from a sense of confident self-motivation.

I met Yitzi and his brother at the same egalitarian community service group where I met Abby, whom I discuss below. Yitzi is a 28-year-old heterosexual man who was raised in an Orthodox community, remains close with his parents, and has been living with his brother in New York City for almost a decade. He was in his last year of law school and had a blog with his brother about law, politics, and Jewish comedy. Yitzi has brown hair and blue eyes, is soft spoken and has a laid-back sense of style. He establishes his Jewish identity incorporating parts of his religiously observant upbringing with his new progressive form of Judaism as he progresses through the model.

Yitzi's self-assessments with regard to community-building lead to expanding beyond his Orthodox, Jewish network and identifying with his community service friends because they

support his more progressive approach to Judaism rather than the strictures in which he was raised (stage two of the model). Yitzi enjoys exploring his identity in the city, which contrasts with his friends from growing up who married and had children directly after college. His high school friends are in keeping with broader patterns of Orthodox Jewish Americans who have four or more children by the age of 40 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Yitzi explains how his community of origin expected him to adopt those values as well:

> When I got to junior year of college that's when the pressure to get married started ramping up. I think people thought once you're done with college you're an adult, and that's when you should get married and start a family. And then when I was out of college the year before law school it was another heavy pressure year. I started law school and then the pressure started dropping off again because I was busy. And now that I'm getting close to the end I get more texts and calls from people trying to set me up.

Yitzi started to focus on school and other interests in his twenties, reflecting his new, progressive approach to Judaism: "A few years ago, the narrative I was striving for was raising a family, but then I found all these outlets and things I wanted to accomplish, which I wouldn't be able to do if I started a family right after college." However, he still receives overbearing pressure to focus on finding a romantic partner: "If I say no to a family friend who wants to set me up, my mom will subtly push, like, 'Why don't you just go out with her? It's only a few hours of your day.'" Yitzi reacts to those pressures by accepting some matchmaking requests when he is available and declining other matchmaking requests when he is busy, employing the information avoidance or information management pathway (stage three of the model).

Yitzi also moved through the coping skill development pathway by advocating for his political opinion about a religious organization online (stage three of the model). He ignored his mother's suggestions to remain private about his opinions, which further established his independent, progressive approach to Judaism in contrast to his more traditional Orthodox upbringing. He becomes more self-aware about how parts of his Jewish identity fit into situations

with groups of friends from different parts of life: "I'll discuss Talmudic[23] passages with my brother and high school friends, but the community service group doesn't care about that. We talk about the news, immigration, other stuff." Hence, Yitzi appeals to the religiously observant part of his identity with his brother and friends from growing up and appeals to the politically progressive part of his identity with his community service friends.

Yitzi's self-assessments with regard to dating cause him to conclude that he wants a partner who adheres to a similar level of religious observance, leading him to operate on a more closed end of the dating pool spectrum (stage two of the model). Although Yitzi is politically progressive, he still maintains certain parts of his religious upbringing, including following a kosher diet and observing the scriptures of Shabbat. He plans to continue those traditions when he raises a family, which helps him define his dating pool:

> I think about long-term family life and having a Jewish home when I date, so I look for someone who keeps Shabbat and eats kosher meat and kosher dairy.[24] Those are my two biggest deal breakers.

Yitzi has support from his single friends, who guide him through the validation pathway and connect over the shared difficulty of finding a compatible Jewish partner (stage three of the model): "I have friends who are Orthodox like me and are looking for a specific level of observance and I have friends who I went to college with who are more secular and don't care how religious someone is." Yitzi's friends are all on different ends of the dating pool spectrum and affirm the difficulties of navigating the dating pool. He understands how his identity fits into his dating pool, which provides self-awareness for testing out context collusion (stage four of the model).

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[23] Talmud refers to documents that expand on religious law, which Jewish men and some Jewish women study and debate.

[24] People who eat strictly kosher products only eat at restaurants or buy foods that have a kosher certification, also known as a hechsher.

Yitzi tries to bring his Jewish identity into different situations with women from his

dating pool, but struggles to merge the religiously observant and politically progressive parts of

his Jewish identity. For instance, we review Yitzi's JSwipe profile one morning and I ask him

why he checks off the "non-kosher" box when he, in fact, keeps kosher, and the "just Jewish,"

box, as opposed to other options that might be more consistent with his religious observance,

such as "Orthodox" or "Traditional." Yitzi explains: "I identify as Orthodox in practice[25] and I'm

on the Orthodox spectrum, but I'm not sure that I want to be instantly labeled and filtered out

because someone has a pre-conceived notion of what Orthodoxy means." Yitzi feels that the

Orthodox label does fully capture his approach to Judaism. However, the "non-kosher" and "just

Jewish" JSwipe labels are not consistent with his primary kosher and Shabbat criteria. For

example, 93% of Orthodox Jewish Americans keep kosher, whereas only 14% of Jewish

Americans outside the Orthodox population keep kosher (Pew Research Center, 2015). As a

result, Yitzi questions whether his profile is authentic to his religious identity:

> Yitzi: I always wonder about it because then I think I might be presenting myself
> incorrectly. But then I try to tell people right away what my religious status is. Well, not
> right away. I think it depends on the situation.
>
> Me: So how do you share your religious status?
>
> Yitzi: I usually wear my yarmulke on the date, that's the most obvious [signal of my
> religious status] and then I sort of let the conversation take it from there.

Yitzi tests out context collusion by usually wearing his yarmulke in person on dates and,

"depending on the situation," disclosing more information about observing the strictures of

Shabbat and keeping kosher on each date. However, he does not seem to do it from a sense of

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[25] Orthodox in practice refers to Yitzi's religious practices, such as keeping a strict level of kosher and not traveling or using electricity on Shabbat. Yitzi is not Orthodox in politics, which refers to the fact that the majority of Orthodox Jewish Americans lean towards the Republican Party (Pew Research Center, 2013). By contrast, Yitzi aligns with the Democratic Party and supports LGBTQ rights, immigration, and other progressive social issues.

confident self-motivation that reflects intentionality about the context collusions he engages in. This is further supported by other settings where he elects to present himself as less religious by not wearing a yarmulke. For instance, he explains: "when I'm at a party on a Saturday night I don't always wear my yarmulke if I don't feel like it's the best venue for it." These inconsistent decisions about how to present his religious identity in different contexts suggest that Yitzi want multiple expressions of Judaism that are not compatible with the different communities in which he participates.

Despite the apparent lack of intentionality, Yitzi still receives social approval for the context collusion. For instance, after revealing on a date that he keeps kosher, his date does not question why he nonetheless labeled himself as "non-kosher" in his profile. Although it is possible that women feel misled by Yitzi's dating profile, the absence of a reaction leads Yitzi to feel that he has gained social approval for his inconsistent strategy.

In summary, Yitzi engages in context collusion as a sporadic testing exercise in situations when he feels he must share the religiously observant part of his identity to women in his dating pool. Yitzi's identity avowal garners social approval but he still questions his approach in terms of whether it is authentic to his identity. He struggles to reconcile his identity tensions and goes back to the coping pathways to decide whether or not keeping kosher and observing Shabbat are important characteristics for his dating pool. After re-defining those dating pool criteria and strengthening his views, Yitzi can more confidently integrate the most meaningful parts of himself together once again. The following section explores how informants combine intentionality with the second hallmark of context collusion, which is social approval.

Becoming Intentional About Context Collusion

Other study participants were more intentional about context collusion but did not receive social approval for their integrated identity avowals. For instance, Abby is a 25-year-old bisexual woman whom Isaac (22, LGBTQ) introduced me to while we cooked dinner for a homeless shelter at the community service group. She has long, brown, curly hair and dresses in ripped jeans and tank tops when she attends group meetings. Abby was raised Reform and secularly Jewish; her father is Jewish and her mother is Christian. At 18 years-old Abby went on a Birthright Israel trip, which is a free, 14-day trip to Israel for Jewish young adults. "I was really connected to the teacher and wanted to explore more about Judaism because I grew up so disconnected and my parents didn't give me any kind of [Jewish] background." Abby converted to Conservative Judaism after the trip and began the process of converting to Orthodox Judaism. She started to feel more confident in herself after establishing a Jewish community in New York.

Abby entered the broader community context and looked for a group of like-minded friends who accepted her for being a Jewish convert and supported her bisexual identity (stage two of the model): "I found the community service group 'cause I needed a community as part of the conversion process. I started going every week and I just loved it and thought everyone was so great because they weren't judgmental." Abby appreciated this group because it consisted of Jewish people of all backgrounds, allowing her to feel welcomed as a convert. She felt close to other group members and moved through the validation pathway, in which her friends affirmed her bisexuality (stage three of the model). Abby recalls:

> I remember one time we were cooking and people were talking about liking girls and I was like, 'yeah, I like girls too,' and it wasn't a big deal. I actually hooked up with a female friend from the community service group and told Isaac and a couple other people about the experience.

Abby liked the group because they supported both her Judaic and sexual identity explorations, as illustrated by testing out a hookup with a female friend and feeling comfortable sharing her sexual preferences in a Jewish setting. She developed a stronger sense of self-awareness about how parts of her identity fit into, or did not fit into, situations with her rabbi, parents, and community service friends. On that foundation, she attempts to integrate her social identities across contexts (stage four of the model).

Abby tests context collusion by entering different social encounters, including Shabbat dinners with groups of young professionals and dates with men, and presenting herself as a Conservative Jew with a secular upbringing. Abby is intentional in her approach to integrating her Jewish identity into different situations in the city. However, she feels ostracized when people do not socially approve of her identity as being Jewish:

> When I go to Shabbat dinners at Columbia [University], I'll introduce myself and say I'm a Conservative Jew and people will say, "So how did you grow up?" I say, "Reform and secular," and they say, "Oh, is your mom Jewish? You don't really look Jewish." So I say, "No, my mom's not Jewish and my dad is Jewish, and they're like, "Well then you aren't Jewish, because your mom's not Jewish."[26] I'm really insecure about it because I feel so strongly that I am a Jew, I know that I'm Jewish in my soul, but I'm constantly questioned. It feels like I have a weight on my back.

Abby does not receive the social approval she seeks for her avowed Jewish identity, resulting in insecurity both because her religious identity is central to her sense of self and because, as she admits, she cares very much about other Jewish people accepting her identity as Jewish. In response to these challenges to her identity, she reverts to stage three, the coping pathways. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Abby moved to Israel temporarily and considered converting while there, because Orthodox rabbis would recognize that conversion as kosher. More specifically, these rabbis believe that in order for a conversion to be seen as proper, the person must convert with an Orthodox rabbi in Israel. She moved through the information

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[26] According to traditional Jewish law, being Jewish is based on matrilineal descent.

management pathway, in which her rabbi at community service group gave her advice about

whether she should undergo the conversion process in Israel rather than New York:

> I kept calling my rabbi in New York, like, "I don't know whether I should convert here
> [in Israel], and be halachically[27] Jewish, or continue the process back in New York." He
> said, "it sounds like you care to be halachically Jewish, so just do the conversion while
> you're in Israel. It makes sense for you to convert there." I decided if I'm going to do it
> I'm going to full force, do it and be accepted as a Jew, so that no one can ever question
> me.

Abby made the decision to undergo the Orthodox conversion in Israel so that her Jewish

identity could not be questioned, under Jewish Law, for its validity. She started to become more

religious and felt more confident in her Jewish identity during the Orthodox conversion process

in Jerusalem. Abby also led an LGBTQ Birthright Israel trip in order to establish a clearer

connection between her Jewish and bisexual identity. She tested out context collusion again by

posting photos from the trip on Facebook, illustrating her integrated identity to her network

(stage four of the model):

> It's pretty obvious that I'm LGBTQ because I staffed the LGBTQ birthright trip—you
> can't lead the trip unless you identify as LGBTQ. But I recently found out that rabbis are
> gonna go though my Facebook to make sure that everything is kosher for me to convert. I
> have one rabbi in Israel who is always like, "delete this, delete that." I had to delete the
> Birthright pictures and it kind of sucks that I don't have those pictures anymore. The
> rabbis in my program tell you that it is wrong to be LGBTQ and it definitely makes you
> question things a little.

Abby started to question the compatibility of the bisexual and Jewish aspects of her

identity when her rabbi did not approve of her Facebook posts. She therefore returned to the

coping pathways for the second time via the information management pathway, in which she

learned how her friends in Israel combined their religious and sexual identities (stage three of the

model): "I'm friends with a lesbian couple who take on different masculine and feminine roles in

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[27] Halakha refers to following a collective body of Jewish laws. If a Jewish conversion is not according to Halakha,
then the person is not seen as Jewish. Some people believe that in order for a conversion to be seen as proper, the
person must convert with an Orthodox rabbi in Israel.

Judaism, so there's different ways people do things. Now that I'm more religious I have a different perspective about being bi." Abby decided that still identifies as bisexual; however, her bisexuality is not as salient because she had settled into a new romantic relationship with a man in Israel:

> I'm still proud of being bi, but it's not really part of my life in Israel anymore. I'm not lusting after women right now because I have a boyfriend who I really like and could see myself marrying. I always thought that I would end up with a man over a woman because I'm more emotionally attracted to men over women.

Abby talks about her sexuality with the people she feels closest to, including her friends from her Israel program and her friends at the community service group back home. As she continues to cope, Abby can keep learning how to integrate her Judaism and bisexuality in a way that feels authentic to her identity across situations, and thereby garner the social approval she seeks in her context collusions when she makes intentional attempts to do so in the future.

Successful Context Collusion

Some study participants were able to engage in context collusion intentionally and also receive the social approval they sought for them. Myles (24, LGBTQ), below, made multiple intentional attempts at context collusion, moving back through varied coping strategies when he did not receive approval for each of those attempts. Ultimately, his attempts at context collusion were met with social approval, enabling him to move toward establishing an integrated sense of self (stage five). I met Myles at the LGBTQ synagogue three months after he came out as gay. He has short, brown curly hair and wears khakis, Polo t-shirts, and sneakers to synagogue services.

Myles first entered this community context to find friends who supported both his Jewish and gay identities (i.e., stage two of the model). He felt excited when he found the LGBTQ synagogue as a place to establish his community: "I feel like religion and homosexuality don't

always go hand-in-hand but in this community, it does. This is a community where everyone will

always feel safe and will always feel a part of." Myles believes the group includes and accepts

his own form of Judaism. He turns to those friends for social support, employing the information

management pathway to compare their upbringings and religious practices (i.e., stage three of the

model). Over time, Myles realized that he disagreed with certain religious rituals at the

synagogue, particularly those that broke from his traditional Jewish upbringing. However, he still

enjoys attending services for social reasons, as opposed to religious ones: "I go to services for

the community part more than I do for my own religious involvement."

Myles also entered the context of the dating pool. He looked for casual hookups on dating

apps and, when I met him, he had started to open up his options beyond the Jewish faith based on

his self-assessment of what he was seeking at this stage in his life (stage two of the model). He

debated whether it was important for him to find a Jewish partner. On one hand, as a gay man he

felt less pressured to marry by a certain age or to have children. On the other hand, Myles

thought that having a Jewish partner would help him integrate different parts of his life together:

> As of right now, it's not a deal breaker if they're Jewish or not. Right now I'm just seeing
> what's out there and I'm not emotionally invested in dating. But if I found a partner who
> was also Jewish it would make life a lot easier for my parents, for my community, and for
> my friends—not that I should do any of that for any of them. I mean, this is my decision
> on who I date and who I don't date, but it's attractive in that sense.

Myles identifies how having a Jewish partner would enable successful context collusion

because his Jewish and gay identity would be socially approved by his loved ones. He presents

an ambivalent attitude about this desire by admitting "it would make life easier" to incorporate a

Jewish partner with his family and friends but also points out that he should not make decisions

based on their preferences. The reason for this tension was that Myles was still figuring out how

to merge his LGBTQ identity with his Judaism. For instance, Myles recognized that his LGBTQ

synagogue did not fit in with his Judaism but had not acted on that realization and tried to find a more suitable connection between those parts of himself. However, he became more deliberate in his efforts as he gathered more information and support over time.

More specifically, Myles copes with the tension above by receiving validation from friends who are going through similar dating experiences (stage three of the model). He matches with his friend Isaac on JSwipe multiple times over the course of several months, which illustrates how few options there are in their dating pool. They deal with that awkwardness by sending each other funny messages on the dating app, using humor to distance themselves from the suggestion that they could be romantically attracted to each other. Myles develops a sense of self-awareness about how aspects of his identity fit into, or do not fit into, different situations with friends and family members. He tests out context collusion (i.e., stage four) multiple times before eventually merging his Jewish and gay identities into an integrated sense of self (i.e., stage five).

Myles tries out context collusion by attempting different forms of self-expression to demonstrate his propensity for risk-taking and testing out a newfound sense of flamboyance. He adjusts his wardrobe to convey his sexual identity in different situations after a stranger at a gay bar told him that he was "the straightest looking gay man someone had ever met….He was like, 'change it up a little.' I was like, 'alright, I will.'" In response to this directive, Myles starts buying polo T-shirts, khakis, and jeans in less conventional colors. He buys the same styles he usually wears but adds more color, wearing red jeans as opposed to blue ones. He wears these new outfits to synagogues, gay bars, and to meet friends after work, as a way to start incorporating a more visible demonstration of his gay identity into different contexts around the city.

Despite those adjustments to his sense of style, people continue to assume Myles is a heterosexual, Jewish man, rather than a gay, Jewish man in most encounters. For example, when I attended LGBTQ synagogue and community service events with Myles on multiple occasions, people inquired whether Myles was my fiancé, thereby indicating their assumption of his heterosexuality. Myles consciously shifted his behavior in response to those types of misunderstandings, reverting to stage three and employing the information management pathway to explore possible ways to present himself as more recognizably gay. He started taking more fashion risks. He asked Isaac for thrift store and barbershop recommendations and tried out a tapered haircut and vintage outfits with funky patterns and more diverse colors. Having settled into a more visible presentation of his sexuality, he then attempted context collusion in stage four, once again.

Myles also consciously tested out context collusions between his LGBTQ and heterosexual friend groups in order to create "connections between previously disconnected social worlds" (Oh & Kilduff, 2008, p. 1158). This was not always a smooth experience. For example, he casually told a heterosexual, female friend from college that he had matched with her brother on a dating app; she responded that she did not know her brother was gay. Myles' unintentional outing of his friend's brother as a byproduct of attempting to foreground his own gay identity led to him realizing new social norms. In that case, it was acknowledging that although a dating app is technically public, there are norms of privacy he had to adopt: "That's a strange concept for me. That's something that you would never expect on a straight dating app." This experience led to him returning to the coping pathways for a third time. This time, he employed the information management pathway by adhering to the differences between gay and straight dating norms to more smoothly navigate the process. In essence, Myles became more

attuned to needing to manage the challenges that come with visibility when contexts collapse

(Lane, 2019). As a result, Myles developed a firmer grasp on the need for discretion within the

gay community before he could integrate his social identities.

Toward the end of my fieldwork, Myles establishes a clear integration between his gay

and Jewish identities. He attempts context collusion once more by bringing his father to an

LGBTQ synagogue that is aligned with their shared traditional approach to Judaism, rather than

the one where he had first formed a sense of community himself. Myles' father and the

synagogue members accept his integrated identity avowal. He interweaves aspects of his past,

namely his father and the liturgy from his Conservative Jewish upbringing, with his LGBTQ

identity. In this way, he creates one continuous personal narrative as he transitions into stage five

of the model, wherein an integrated sense of self is formed. Myles' successful context collusion

over time enables him to continue building an integrated sense of self, rather than returning once

more to the coping pathways in stage three. The following section underscores the dynamic

nature of developing an integrated sense of self, which is continually built and reworked over

time.

Stage Five: An Integrated Sense of Self

Participants who reached the point of transitioning to stage five of the model were those

who clearly understood and could explain the aspects of identity they were integrating after

successful context collusion. They engaged in ongoing behaviors to sustain their sense of self

and recognized a sense of order in their actions; they recognized who they were, what they were

doing, and why they were doing it (Giddens, 1984).

As these informants started to develop a deepening sense of confidence about their lives,

futures, and relationships, they transitioned to the sixth stage of the model, wherein they began to

feel ontologically secure. Young Jewish adults' integrated identities do not have to be absolute

for them to build a strong foundation for ontological security; identity formation is a lifelong

endeavor. One of the key indicators that suggested a participant was ready to transition to the

sixth stage of the model was when they felt more settled in their environment and felt more

secure in their relationships.

Alana's experiences are emblematic of the progression from integrated sense of self

(stage five) to ontological security (stage six). Alana is a 24-year-old Orthodox, bisexual trans

woman I met through a Facebook group for LGBTQ Jewish adults. I first interviewed her during

a break from her summer program in which she was studying to become a rabbi. Alana's family

was Jewish but was non-practicing and had emigrated from Germany to a working class town in

the Midwest where she was born. In seventh grade, Alana came out as gay and in high school she

concluded that she was bisexual instead: "I realized being gay wasn't an accurate description of

who I am. I was also starting to question my gender." She started questioning whether she

identified as a woman at that point in time. Alana also connected with Judaism during college:

> I grew up pretty irreligious. I've always been attracted to religion starting in elementary school. When I reached the bar mitzvah[28] age I asked my parents for a bar mitzvah and they said no. I told myself that if I ever got the chance I would explore a Jewish community and then I came to college and I met a rabbi and I met people at Hillel.[29] I became more involved in learning and I felt connected on a deep level. The community, the spiritual practices, the text, and the intellectual exercises became more and more meaningful for me as time went on.

Alana developed her Jewish identity and found a Jewish community in college, while

continuing to explore her gender identity. She tried following Jewish practices that are

traditionally required of, and limited to men, such as praying three times a day and wearing a

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[28] A bar mitzvah is a religious initiation ceremony of a Jewish boy who reaches the age of 13.

[29] Hillel International is a Jewish campus organization in over 550 colleges and universities in the United States and around the world (Hillel.org).

yarmulke. However, those practices did not feel authentic to her gender, as she was starting to identify as a woman. When Alana came out as trans at age 20 she was unsure of how to integrate her developing gender identity with her religious practices: "Back then, I was firmly in the Orthodox camp. Now I'm a little less religious. 'Coming out' as trans threw a wrench in it for me because I didn't know how Jewish law applied to me as a woman."

For Alana, moving to New York City and eventually establishing a support system has been key to developing an integrated self-identity. Alana described how she explored different community options, beginning with multiple Orthodox Jewish community contexts that were less welcoming of her trans identity; people ignored her or stared at her when she sat on the women's side of the synagogue. She also tried communities that were trans friendly but did not support her level of religious observance: Alana observes the strictures of Shabbat, whereas members of those communities did not. Her trans and Jewish identities would not be supported in either space, which meant that she was unable try out context collusion. In those settings, she was incapable of establishing a support system that would provide social approval for her integrated identity. As a result, she continued to self-assess until she found the support she needed to progress forward through the model.

Alana finally found a progressive synagogue in Washington Heights that welcomed her Orthodox, trans identity. This community accommodates both her religious and gender expressions. "They had a sign in the bathroom that said 'use whichever bathroom you identify with,' which was amazing. I've never seen that in a synagogue, let alone an Orthodox one." Alana made new, close friends at the synagogue, who guided her through the information management pathway to learn different ways to practice Judaism as a trans woman (stage three of the model). "It is great to discuss problems and situations that are unique to me and people

like me. We talk about how to interact with different synagogues and which rabbis are accepting

of trans people, and which ones are not." The result is that she gains a sense of self-awareness

because she has a better sense of how parts of her identity fit into, or does not fit into, different

situations with her friends and in synagogues around the city. Buttressed by these supportive

experiences, she starts to test out context collusion by connecting with a large group of LGBTQ

Jewish peers at a gay pride event in Manhattan (stage four of the model):

> One of the great things about living here in New York is pride weekends. I connected
> with other LGBTQ Jews from our Facebook group and we all had lunch on Shabbat—it
> was probably the largest group of queer Jews I had ever seen [in person]. It was like 50
> people, which isn't necessarily huge, but for me I've never interacted with a group of
> queer Jews that large.

Alana attended the pride Shabbat because she was trying to intentionally bring her trans

identity into her religious practice and show that she was proud to be trans and to be Jewish at

the same time. This is an example of context collusion in a collective setting where everyone is

engaging in the process together and trying to merge their LGBTQ identities with their Judaism.

The group purposefully selected the pride weekend to have their Shabbat lunch to collapse

LGBTQ and Jewish contexts, which encouraged connections between those social identities. She

recalls: "We talked about how we're asserting our right to be in a Jewish space and showing that

we refuse to be kicked out." In Alana's case, she was specifically collapsing her trans identity

with her Judaism, as described below.

Alana interweaved her trans and Jewish identity together by joining those discussions at

the pride event and explaining what the implications were for being trans and Jewish. She

brought her trans identity into the situation by describing the process of testing out different

Orthodox communities and explaining how other Jewish people responded to her trans identity.

Alana was the only trans woman among the group, which caused the group to be interested in

hearing her unique story. They wanted to know what rituals she engaged in, how she responded to discrimination, and how other trans people could learn from her experience: "There aren't a lot of trans people entering Orthodox spaces, so I'm leaving a trail for other people."

Alana felt empowered to continue exploring different Jewish spaces around the city and threading her trans identity with her Judaism. For example, she is not allowed to enter a women's mikveh[30] due to being trans and considers how "it's a whole issue and debate with trans women and lesbians who feel left out, myself included. We had an event at my synagogue where we all raised questions, like, 'what does the mikveh mean in those cases if it's for family purity?'" As a result of having these debates with other LGBTQ women, Alana realized she could explore an alternative way to still use the mikveh: "I live near a river and rivers can act as mikvehs, so I've used that before."

Alana still has moments where she feels uncomfortable but she is able to push past the discomfort. She explains: "it's definitely still hard to find places where your identity is respected, but I think most Jews experience that. You have to kind of test your boundaries with Judaism." Alana is drawing on the commonality between herself as a trans Jewish woman and the shared history of the Jewish people. On one hand, Jewish people have had moments where they were included in mainstream society and on the other hand, they have had moments where they were excluded and discriminated against. Making this connection helps Alana prepare herself for social acceptance or rejection, which gives her the courage to move forward in future context collusion attempts. In making those connections, Alana remains motivated to keep trying out new Jewish spaces and events to test those boundaries.

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[30] The mikveh is a ritual bath designed for Jewish rite of purification. Mikvehs are separated based on gender and have different purposes for each gender; for instance, religious women use it after each period cycle.

Alana clearly understands her integrated identity as she reflects on her life narrative, illustrating an integrated identity (stage five of the model). She establishes a sense of continuity and can clearly articulate who she is today, as compared to the past:

> I've never been happier with myself than I am now. And "coming out" as trans didn't solve that, and it wasn't instant. It was a process getting here. A year after "coming out" I tried to kill myself and after that, you know, I was just so happy to be alive that I started doing more life affirming things and really embracing life, instead of being scared to be who I was–who I am.

Alana describes the intentional efforts she has made to build an integrated sense of self since "coming out" as trans and attempting suicide, and how she has developed a Jewish identity and a support network compatible with her emerging gender identity. At the end of my fieldwork, Alana was also considering how to integrate a fairly new romantic relationship into her narrative, which again illustrates that the work of achieving an integrated identity is a foundation that emerging adults build on over time. "I'm still learning what it means to live authentically as myself and doing that in conjunction with another person is sort of a process," she said. Alana's integrated identity (stage five) has created a foundation for ontological security (stage six), as demonstrated in her starting to feel more comfortable about the direction of her future. Alana was working hard to become a rabbi and was also proud to be paying for her graduate program on her own. She explains: "I still don't know how Jewish law applies to me as a trans woman, but I think I'm more comfortable with not knowing. I want to be a rabbi and I know that I am going to do the things I want to do and not simply say, 'oh I wish I could do these things.'" As Alana continues to feel comfortable about her trajectory and her new relationship she can keep adding to her sense of security. Below I share how emerging adults build on and negotiate their sense of security.

Stage Six: Building Ontological Security

In stage six, participants experience a sense of continuity as they sustain their self-identities and become more ontologically secure, building on the integrated identity established in stage five. Ontological security refers to a state that provides an underlying sense of "'faith' in the coherence of everyday life" (Giddens, 1991, p. 38). Participants who had reached the stage of building ontological security felt more rooted in themselves, in their networks, relationships, in New York City, and in the direction of their future. That does not mean that sense of security does not get challenged; a breakup or a major financial setback could shake that sense of security and require work to rebuild it, as informants move through new dating experiences, coping pathways and context collusions, back to an integrated sense of self. Emerging adults are constantly re-evaluating and move through the model's pathways repeatedly, but each time with increasing self-knowledge gleaned from their prior moves through the model. I describe how this process takes place for Ali below.

Ali is a 22-year-old heterosexual woman who was raised Modern Orthodox in Manhattan and became more religious during her college years. Ali graduated from college three months prior to our interview and was living at her mother's apartment uptown (she went to college in Manhattan and lived with her mother throughout those four years). Ali earned college credit during her gap year and graduated college a year earlier than most of the people in her class. She was planning to move out of her mother's apartment and move into her own apartment with friends a week after our meeting. Ali is tall and slender, has glasses, and light brown, straight hair. She wears long dresses and skirts, which reflect her adherence to the Jewish laws of modesty. When I met her, she had recently broken off an engagement, which shook her integrated identity. She found herself questioning her religious beliefs, practices, and

associations, which brought her back to the beginning of the model to rebuild the sense of self-trust she had had prior to the experience.

The break-up moved Ali back to the community context. She actively compared herself to her ex-fiancé and college friend group, all of whom shared her level of Orthodox religious observance as she engaged in self-assessment (stage two of the model). As a result, Ali realized that her existing friend group could not or would not support her newly developed approach to Jewish observance, in which she felt more open-minded and integrated into secular society than she had with her fiancé. "I realized that group wasn't really for me. I just find that they are extremely close-minded. I mean, obviously this is a generalization, but I feel like they're not really good people." As mentioned in Chapter four, Ali coped with distancing from her peer support networks by turning to her mother rather than her college friend group (stage three of the model). Ali's mother helped her reconnect with cosmopolitan values from her upbringing: "My family is pretty modern, like much more modern than a lot of [Orthodox] families."

Ali grew closer to her friends from high school during her last semester of college and started to have discussions with them about their plans for moving back to Manhattan after graduation. She had several friends from high school who also attended a similar gap year program and then used those credits to graduate early from college. Ali's high school friends were also raised in Manhattan and shared the values to which her mother helped her reconnect.

Ali also re-entered the dating pool context and expanded her dating pool by including potential partners who were less religious than her ex-fiancé. She concluded that she wanted a partner who observed Shabbat but who was more open-minded and progressive than her ex. Ali's high school friends struggled with similar desires for balance between religiosity and secularity, affirming her experience through the validation coping pathway and sharing their

experiences and providing advice through the information management coping pathway (stage

three of the model). "My high school friends are all from Upper East Side and Upper West Side

kinds of families, so they're a lot more open-minded when it comes to dating, and just have

different ways to do things."

Ali has a better sense of how parts of her Judaism fit into situations with her friends from

high school and college friends/ex fiancé. She expands on her awareness of the differences,

below:

> I think with my ex and his community everything was really centered on religious
> politics, like having dinner table discussions where we discussed the d'var torah[31] and
> what their rabbi said that week. For me, personally, and the rest of my friends, it's not like
> that at all. If we're at Shabbat table we're discussing Trump or whatever else is going on
> in the world. It's very different. It's not better or worse. It's just different.

Ali can explain how her Jewish identity fits in with her high school and other religiously

compatible friends, who are interested in talking about current events on Shabbat. By contrast,

with Ali's ex and with most of her college friends she engaged in conversations that revolved

around religious learning, which she was not as interested in discussing during her spare time.

Despite Ali's negative experience during her breakup she adopted a more accepting approach

towards her ex and his community by declaring that they were no better or worse than she was,

they were simply different. She started to appreciate the different parts of her network that

connected with Judaism in different ways. For instance, Ali explains how she attended an Israel

program in high school that was more on the religious side and still remains in touch with her

rabbis and her friends, despite some of their religious differences: "I still have my systems from

that program, I have my family, and I have my group of [high school] friends that I've had since

I was little." With a strong support network to fall back on, Ali tested out context collusion and

brought different parts of her network together (stage four of the model).

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[31] A d'var Torah is a discussion or idea about a portion of the Torah.

Ali engaged in context collusion by choosing to move into an apartment with Jewish friends from different parts of her life, and therefore, disparate levels of religious observance. "I'm going to live with one of my good high school friends and two other people, one friend from my [high school] Israel trip, and another girl who was in my gap year program." Ali's three roommates were tied to distinct life stages (high school, post-high school) and settings (Manhattan, Jerusalem). Each roommate ranges from being more religious (the gap year friend), to more secular (the high school friend), and is associated with distinct Jewish communities. She intentionally bridges these parts of her network to exemplify her newer, more inclusive approach to Judaism, which encourages connections among people with different affiliations (Burt, 1992; Ellison, Vitak, Grey, & Lampe, 2014; Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). Ali's roommates socially approve her integrated identity by choosing to move in together, despite not being as familiar with one another or sharing the same approach to Judaism.

To illustrate why Ali appreciates this overlap, she compares that "in New York you can easily go your entire life without meeting a Jew that's different than you, but in smaller towns there's only one place to congregate and people interact with other Jewish people who are different." Ali likes bringing her Jewish network together because it pushes her to explore alternative opinions and views. She notes, "I feel like I'm pretty open-minded as a religious New Yorker, but that's because I make an effort to be open-minded." In summary, Ali intertwined friends from distinct groups that held particular expectations for her Jewish identity and collapsed those expectations to form an integrated sense of self.

Ali had established an integrated sense of self in her almost-marriage; her subsequent progression through the model enabled refinement and rearrangement of the aspects of herself that she was more and less comfortable avowing in the aftermath of that breakup. She learned to

think more independently and to make decisions based on her authentic religious beliefs, rather than following group norms. This was in line with her new, open-minded approach to Judaism, which embraced religious observance as a personal choice:

> I thought if I was in a religious group then that means I'm a religious person. But now, it's so not like that. As long as I'm trying to grow as a person I would consider myself a religious person, whether or not that means keeping every law or not. As long as I'm trying my best.

As shown above, Ali describes how she used to feel that she needed to be part of a more religious community and follow strict rules to fit into a religious standard. Today, Ali is more secure in her definition of Judaism, with a more liberal view on what it means to be religious. She remains secure in her identification as an observant Jew, regardless of her newfound flexibility. She also starts to feel more secure in other aspects of her life and in her relationships by the end of my fieldwork, re-establishing a foundation for ontological security (stage six of the model).

Ali was gearing up towards moving out of her family apartment on the Upper East Side in order to live in her own apartment for the first time in her life. She had some friends who, like her, graduated early as a result of earning college credit during a gap year program in Israel. She also had some high school friends who were graduating within the next year and were planning to live on their own or move back in with their parents, who lived in Manhattan. She explains: "My friends [that graduated] just started moving to the West Side. They all invite me for meals and there's a 'home-y' community aspect to the neighborhood." Ali had several friends who invited her to different events in the neighborhood, which helped her feel more rooted in her Jewish network: "I feel like there's a real Orthodox community here." She was excited to start a new life living independently of her parents and reconnecting with other Jewish friends who

were planning on moving back home to New York after they graduated: "Pretty much all my friends are going to live in the city."

Her sense of ontological security was also evident in starting to take risks and trust that things will work out. For example, she decided to take a year off before applying to graduate school for psychology so that she could save money and decide which program was the best fit for her career path. She found a job at an elementary school and was excited to become more financially secure and continue establishing her professional trajectory: "I feel a lot more independent now. I'm paying for an apartment myself. I feel like I know a little bit more about what I want to do with my life and how to get there." Ali felt more equipped to handle this new life chapter, having rebuilt her sense of security following her broken engagement, by interacting with the broader contexts of emerging adulthood, enlisting her mother and friends in New York to help navigate those contexts, and threading her Jewish identity across contexts.

Conclusion

These participants' experiences demonstrate how emerging adults attempt context collusion (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014), successfully or unsuccessfully, to try to integrate their once disparate, social identities into a cohesive self-expression. Successful context collusion depends on intentionality and social approval. Informants who were less intentional and did not receive social approval revisited the coping pathways and enlisted their friends or family for more support before testing out context collusion again. They eventually became more intentional and received social approval for their context collusion attempts. As a result, they successfully threaded their social identities together into an integrated identity, or a integrated identity (stage five). As these informants moved forward, they came to understand who they were and where they were going in life, while continuously bringing their identities into different situations with

their networks. Some participants started to feel more grounded in themselves, in their relationships, in their environment, and in their future, which created a foundation for ontological security (stage six). They built on their sense of security over time.

It is important to point out that the context collusion stage required more identity work for my LGBTQ informants than it did for my heterosexual informants. LGBTQ participants were more careful and calculated in their context collusion attempts, in which they assessed the norms of different contexts before engaging in identity disclosures. These informants were much more concerned with their privacy and how each person might respond to their identities (Liang, 1997; Orne, 2011; Plummer, 1994; Sedgwick, 1990). Therefore, they made their best effort to predict successful outcomes in their context collusion attempts. For instance, rather than "coming out" and immediately bringing his father to different LGBTQ synagogues, it took time for Myles to act on this decision. He took months exploring LGBTQ synagogues on his own before a) deciding to bring his dad to an LGBTQ synagogue and b) concluding that his father would be most comfortable at one synagogue over the other. By contrast, the heterosexual informants in this study were less thoughtful about social acceptance/rejection and acted less deliberately.

LGBTQ informants also took more time building a network of people who would encourage and support their context collusion attempts (Taylor, Falconer, & Snowdon, 2014). Young people who engage in LGBTQ identity disclosures in unsupported contexts experience "rejection or victimization, thus leading to diminished well-being" (McConnell et al., 2018, p. 2). Therefore, these LGBTQ informants ensured that they had a solid support network to fall back on before choosing to engage in context collusion. As an example, Alana could not test out context collusion in the Jewish settings she first explored because she was unable to build a

support network in those spaces but eventually found friends whom engaged in LGBTQ and

Jewish activities with her.

I should also point out that there were certain coping strategies in stage three that were

more likely to lead to successful context collusion in stage four. Participants who directly

confronted an issue by problem-solving, self-advocating, or seeking out advice were often

successful at context collusion because they knew how to change a situation to meet their needs

and felt they could handle the challenge (Carver & Scheier, 1994). Similarly, informants who

shifted their perspectives were able to deal with the lack of control they had over their

environment, which prepared them for the ambiguity of social acceptance versus rejection. By

contrast, informants who only coped by avoiding a topic or looking to their friends for validation

were less inclined to move outside their comfort zones and deliberately bring contexts together.

As mentioned, informants often combined two coping strategies or used different strategies for

each situation; the more strategies they used the more aware they became of situational norms

and how to collapse them.

Lastly, I did not observe all of my informants reaching the integrated sense of self and

ontological security stages (stages five and six). Emerging adulthood involves a period of

prolonged identity exploration where young people consider different possibilities and deepen

their sense of self with each experience. The participants in this study moved through the stages

of this model repeatedly; these young people were self-assessing, coping, testing out context

collusion, and gathering support from friends and family multiple times. The following chapter

recaps how this process plays out from start to finish, underscores the theoretical contribution,

and discusses its limitations.

Chapter 6: Discussion & Conclusion

Review of Findings

I began this study wanting to understand the role of dating in emerging adulthood. I centered my fieldwork on structured Jewish events, where my insider position provided access to singles. Early on, however, I learned that for young Jewish singles, uncertainty about dating pointed to broader dilemmas about their own identities and attempts to achieve normative adulthood. These participants were breaking away from their families and communities of origin to become independent adults. For the first time in their lives, they had the freedom to explore parts of themselves that were otherwise concealed or constricted at home. However, they were also faced with the challenging task of maintaining a Jewish identity, which remained central to their lives in New York City. As they tried out new romantic experiences and made new friends, they sustained their Judaism, adapting their lives and their faith. By the conclusion of this study, I learned that the transition into normative adulthood for young, Jewish persons in New York City was a complex process in which they navigated multiple contexts and resolved identity tensions with the help of friends and family members.

To make sense of the patterns I was seeing in my fieldwork, I developed a heuristic model of uncertainty management that divides the process into a series of stages. In stage one, participants interacted within a particular context, by which I mean situations around key parts of their lives, specifically dating and community that invoked different questions and considerations about their identities. In stage two, they self-assessed, which involved managing their options for dating and community in New York City while constantly evaluating how they compared to others in these contexts. Stage three included coping with uncertainty in response to one's self-assessment, which required the enlistment of strong ties for support. Many participants emerged

through the coping pathways of stage three with a sense of self-awareness, indicating that they were ready to transition to stage four of the model, context collusion.

My informants learned to adapt and maintain their religious identities and threaded this part of themselves through each stage of the model. In their decision-making, they were dealing with questions about maintaining tradition and engaging in modern practices in the city. They then tested out context collusion in stage four by intentionally linking once disparate social identities across different social situations and segments of their network. They fostered identity formation through mediated and interpersonal communication, using both online and face-to-face modes of interaction. Context collusion was successful when it was approved socially and participants gained confidence in presenting themselves more holistically in front of different communicative communities.

Upon conclusion of stage four, context collusion, participants were able to clearly understand their integrated identities, or their adapted/maintained sense of Jewishness. Participants' ability to explain their narratives and participation in ongoing behaviors to sustain their integrated identities was an indication that they were ready to transition to stage five of the model, integrated sense of self.

Participants in the next stage developed an integrated sense of self. They kept engaging in behaviors that affirmed their narrative, in which they continuously illustrated their updated and integrated sense of Judaism in their interpersonal and mediated communication. They exhibited their readiness to transition to the next stage in the model by establishing trust in their relationships, environment, and future. There was no endpoint for the integrated identity stage and the attainment of ontological security. Participants continued to build on their foundation of self-identity and ontological security, which was an ongoing endeavor. At certain times

participants faced different crises, which caused them to move back through the model and build up to ontological security again.

On the whole, participants managed to find in the diversity of New York City their own slice of Jewish New York and a sense of their own capability as adults. At a certain point, my informants shifted from a sense of contexts collapsing on them, and an anxious, defensive posture, to becoming more purposeful, confident actors and intentionally combining contexts by linking their once disparate social identities. They initially relied on their support networks to help them handle unfamiliar contexts because they did not feel capable of doing so on their own. They responded to friends and family members who held separate expectations for their identities and intentionally brought those identity meanings together to establish an integrated sense of self. After resolving these tensions, they felt more comfortable about the direction of their lives and started to trust that they could handle the transition into adulthood independently.

Managing Uncertainty in the Dating Pool (Stages 1-3)

In Chapter three, I offered empirical data for how my informants progressed through stage one to the end of stage three of the model. I defined the dating context in stage one in terms of presumptively available romantic options, or the "dating pool." I illustrated how participants either limited or opened up their options, based in large part on stage two, which was how they assessed themselves within that pool of possibilities, reflecting a dialogic relationship between stages one and two of the model. I outlined a spectrum of participants who managed on one end a more open and on the other end a more closed dating pool and highlighted the ongoing relationship between the person and his or her dating pool. Those who were on the most open end of the spectrum experienced less pressure from strong ties to engage in in-group dating and adhere to marriage timelines, whereas those who were grouped on the closed end of the spectrum

experienced pressure from strong ties to eventually marry someone with a specific form of religiousness. These self-assessments informed how participants enlisted their strong ties for support in stage three.

In stage three, I shared how participants utilized different coping pathways to manage uncertainty about how to handle their dating pool, engaging in identity formation through mediated and interpersonal communication. In contrast to family, who often provided overbearing advice about maintaining their religious upbringings, friends tended to have similar perspectives about dating. Therefore, informants trusted their friends to guide them through one or a combination of the coping pathways, including the *validation pathway, perspective shift pathway, information management pathway,* and *coping skill development pathway*. Friends engaged in mutual disclosures that affirmed each other's vulnerable feelings and experiences, offered advice and assistance, pushed each other to view their issues in a new light, accepted their differences, and solved problems collaboratively. Participants emerged through the coping pathways with increased self-awareness, providing a foundation to integrate their disparate social identities in the context collusion stage, or stage four. These emerging adults understood the context of the dating pool and how parts of their identities fit into the context, allowing them to start merging their social identities across contexts.

Finding One's Place Among Support Networks (Stages 1-3)

In Chapter four, I explored how informants navigated assorted networks in New York City in their efforts to establish their own community and form of Judaism. As in Chapter three, I brought the reader from the context stage (here, community options available within Jewish New York) through to the coping pathways. I illustrated how participants either limited or opened up their networks to find a subset of friends that could support their independent, Jewish identities.

This was based in large part on stage two, which was how they assessed themselves in terms of their community options, again illustrating a dialogic relationship between stages one and two of the model. I stressed how the relationship between the participant and his/her community options was co-constitutive, in which both the person and the groups evolved in response to each person's participation.

I outlined a spectrum of participants who looked outside or inside their networks for friends who could support their Jewish identities. Informants looked outside their networks for new friends when they did not believe they could find that support within their networks. Those who looked within their networks were narrowing down or reevaluating their friends based on whether or not those friends could support their evolving identities. These self-assessments informed how participants sought out social support from friends, family, or both, to cope with peer comparisons and family pressures related to their new Jewishness.

In stage three participants continued to separate their unique Jewish identities from their upbringing and developed new relationships with their parents in the process. Not only did they manage uncertainty, but they developed their identities as they interacted with their communicative communities. They turned to friends and family to continue establishing their own Jewish identities and sense of community beyond their hometown, and moved through the *validation pathway, perspective shift pathway, information management pathway* and *coping skill development pathway.* These pathways were not mutually exclusive and were sometimes combined together as well. Friends offered validation for participants' new forms of Judaism and helped participants problem-solve how to repair their strained family relationships. Participants created new relationships with parents by self-advocating for their beliefs, avoiding topics that

caused conflict, accepting that they could not control differences, and refocusing on shared values.

Participants responded to their parents' expectations for how they should establish a Jewish community and learned how to communicate their new identities in different ways. They negotiated their parents' acceptance, defended their identities, avoided certain subjects, and accepted their differences. Upon conclusion of stage three, participants knew which parts of their upbringing they would uphold or reject and how to integrate their new form of Judaism into adulthood. They developed a sense of self-awareness, in which they had a rough sense of how parts of their identities fit into, or did not fit into, situations with their friends over their parents, indicating their preparedness to transition to stage four of the model, context collusion.

Developing an Integrated Identity (Stages 4-6)

Chapter five evaluated how informants tested out context collusion in stage four and reviewed whether they could develop an integrated identity in stage five and build a foundation for ontological security in stage six. I noted that after self-assessing and coping in stages two and three, many participants understood how they compared to their dating pools and Jewish community options and how to manage those contexts with strong ties. After engaging in interpersonal and mediated communication with their communicative communities, they knew their roles and group memberships in each of their relationships with parents, siblings, friends from high school, college, and from New York. As a result of these communication exchanges, they apprehended how the expectations for each relationship fit into the context of their dating pool and Jewish community.

As a result, they had acquired a sense of self-awareness in which they had a rough sense of group and situational norms and started exploring how to combine them. On that foundation,

they could begin using context collusion in stage four. I argued that context collusion was successful when it was consistent and socially approved. I explained how participants were not able to develop an integrated sense of self when they were less intentional and inconsistent in their attempts at context collusion. I also shared how some informants were intentional and consistent but did not always receive social approval for their integrated identity disclosures from their communicative communities. In both cases, informants turned back to the coping pathways in stage three to gain more self-awareness before attempting to merge their social identities across contexts again. I illustrated how context collusion took place through a process of trial and error, which could be successful after multiple attempts.

Following successful context collusion, some participants could clearly understand and explain their new, integrated identities and engaged in ongoing behavior that affirmed their identities moving forward, indicating that they were ready to transition to stage five in which they developed an integrated identity. In stage five, participants continued to interweave their social identities together, which was an ongoing process that was constantly updated and revised, rather than being an endpoint.

Through this development process some informants felt more grounded in themselves, in their environment, and in the direction of their future, indicating their preparedness to transition to stage six as they created a foundation for ontological security. In this stage, my informants built on their sense of ontological security and continued to feel confident over time. I pointed out how crises could rupture those feelings of stability. When participants responded to situations that shattered their sense of security, they moved back to the beginning of the model to rebuild their sense of trust. Given the fluidity I observed, the stability of the ontological security stage is

relative and these stages are likely to require identity work on an ongoing basis over the life course of my participants.

Broader Implications

Theoretical Implications

        Uncertainty Management in Emerging Adulthood as a Cross-Contextual Process. Scholars typically study uncertainty management strategies within a single domain, such as managing changing symptoms and unclear outcomes in chronic illness (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000; Mishel, 1988; Mishel & Braden, 1988), dealing with ambiguity in dating and romantic relationships (e.g., Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Knobloch, & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011), or handling shifting roles in family relationships (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). I found, however, that uncertainty cuts across multiple domains simultaneously and that uncertainty management entails a cross-contextual process.

        I learned from my participants that it was impossible to study uncertainty about dating without considering the role of personal identity formation when interacting with their communicative communities. As an example, making choices about whether to consider Jewish or non-Jewish romantic options pointed to how my informants conceptualized their broader beliefs, values, desires and affiliations in their communication. Informants who were wrestling with whether they should delay their focus on a marriage timeline to explore their personal and professional interests were responding to a wider set of peer comparisons and family pressures. Therefore, uncertainties about dating and community affiliations are interrelated and cross-contextual problems. This has implications for studying emerging adulthood and uncertainty management, which I discuss below.

Emerging adulthood is a period in which young people delay adult responsibilities to explore different possibilities in areas of love and work. Viewing emerging adulthood as a cross-contextual process highlights the relationships between different contexts that make up this life transition as a whole. Managing uncertainty in a broader situation helps emerging adults solve problems in other parts of their lives. For instance, emerging adults learn how to make decisions and speak up for their interests at work, which helps them establish autonomy in their personal lives. They learn to resolve conflicts and collaborate with their friends and their parents, which are skills that they also use to develop intimate romantic relationships (Dhariwal, Connolly, Paciello, & Caprara, 2009; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). Thinking about uncertainty as a cross-contextual process illustrates how emerging adults handle uncertainty across the board. As a result, I do not think researchers can study a process such as romantic relationships in emerging adulthood without thinking about how peer comparisons and family expectations fit into that same process.

There are also theoretical implications for building on uncertainty management research from a cross-contextual standpoint. Research suggests that uncertainty about health seeps into uncertainty about family roles, romantic relationships, and community acceptance (e.g., Brashers et al., 2003; Martin et al., 2010). For instance, receiving a medical diagnosis causes people to wonder whether they can perform the same tasks at work and at home, whether they will be accepted or rejected in their established communities, and whether or not they should find new support networks. Studying uncertainty management as a cross-contextual process points out relevant issues that connect to the broader experience of and implementation of social support across contexts. In the following section I focus on the theoretical implications for uncertainty management of social support in strong-tie relationships.

The Significance of Strong Ties. One of the key findings of this dissertation was that social interaction with strong ties provided a central mechanism to cope with uncertainty. I expanded on four of Brashers et al.'s (2004) functions of social support for uncertainty management, which I called "coping pathways." I rethought how Brashers et al. (2004) conceptualized social support for uncertainty management by considering how it takes place outside the health context and by focusing on the strength of ties within one's support network.

Managing uncertainty in the health context involves new forms of reliance, shifting roles, and unpredictable social responses, which are also issues emerging adults face during their transition. Brashers et al. (2004) identified how social support took place among a range of relationships that varied in tie strength, including support groups, friends, family, healthcare providers, and colleagues. Rather than look at support networks more broadly, I chose to focus on intimate relationships with close friends and family members because my research participants really gravitated towards those close ties. My informants had deep relationships with those ties and felt they could support their identity exploration and commitment as independent, Jewish adults.

Effective coping among strong ties helped this religious minority group undergo developmental tasks that were most central to their life stage transition. Participants leaned on their friends and family for guidance as they considered what kind of person they wanted to be and what kind of life they wanted to live as independent adults (Arnett, 2004). With friends, participants could explore new parts of themselves, such as their gender, sexualities, and religious affiliations. They turned to friends to support their approach to Judaism and to help them handle romantic endeavors. With parents they could establish new parent-child dynamics that allowed them to establish their Judaism outside the home.

Each friend and family member held different expectations for participants' social identities, which motivated participants to start testing out context collusion. These family and friend relationships were tied to particular life settings and stages and anchored on different understandings of a given participant. These ties held different expectations for how my informants should date or the company they should keep and my informants responded to those expectations in various ways. Informants became more aware of how their identities fit in with each relationship and started merging different identity meanings together in different situations. They looked to the people they cared about the most to learn more about themselves and establish more self-awareness. Having support from distinctive ties that knew their different social identities the best provided a basis for bringing their social identities together.

Building an Empirical Model of Identity Formation Through Communication. Understanding the pathways in which a religious minority group can resolve identity tensions as they attempt to reach normative adulthood adds further support to Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security. This study supports the concept by using an actual data set of people who sought to create a narrative during a major life transition. Rather than simply theorizing, this study outlines the various pathways through which Jewish adults living in an urban setting attempt to achieve an integrated identity by engaging in interpersonal and mediated communication.

To account for how my informants manage uncertainty about their identities, I have proposed a heuristic model that integrates uncertainty management theory and the concepts of context collusion and ontological security. This model extends extant research on uncertainty management that has narrowly focused on health information to enable its application to the developmental project most central to emerging adulthood (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000; Brashers

et al., 2003; Brashers et al., 2004). I incorporate the idea that bringing disparate social identities together through context collusion (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014) can help minority groups develop an integrated sense of self. As a result of these processes, my informants experience a sense of stability in themselves and in their relationships and feel comfortable about their trajectories.

I was able to build upon this model as a result of the study design and multiple types of data collected. I started collecting data through participant observation at structured Jewish events. From there, I attended more intimate gatherings where I observed participants give and receive dating advice and discuss how they managed their relationships with their parents. I spent time with participants one-on-one and among their close friends, family members, and acquaintances. Observing these interactions provided insight into how emerging adults manage their identities in each relationship. Given the observation across settings, modes of communication, and audiences (from group text message chats, to spaces of prayer, to bars and clubs, to drag shows, etc.), I was able to witness participants incorporate their Jewish identities into different situations across the city. This brought me to realize that context collusion could take place face-to-face as well as online, with the purpose of linking once disparate social identities.

I conducted the fieldwork for almost a year and a half, which allowed me to track how participants developed their identities and felt more settled over time. I incorporated the interview method, which offered insight into how participants made sense of their life narratives. I expanded my recruitment criteria in terms of gender, sexuality, and level of religiousness, which helped me understand the different social identities my informants were trying to converge. As discussed later, the interview method had its limitations in terms of my ability to triangulate the data, gain intimate access, and make judgments about inconsistencies in the data.

Study Limitations

The Role of Privilege

  New York City as a Privileged Field Site. New York City is an unusual population for studying the LGBTQ and Jewish population compared to most other locations in the United States (U.S.). New York City has the highest number of LGBTQ and Jewish residents compared to other major cities such as Portland, Oregon and San Francisco, California (Della Pergola, 2000; Leonhardt, 2015). As a result, participants had abundant access to a wide range of social events and locations where they could find other people who shared their religious beliefs and lifestyles.

  The romantic exploration in this study might not be possible in locations that have a smaller percentage of Jewish Americans. Threading one's disparate social identities into the diversity of the city might look different in a place that has fewer options of similar others. These locations might not provide as many opportunities to explore the connection between Judaism, gender, and sexuality. As a result, young Jewish adults could feel compelled to pick between their Judaism and romantic or sexual exploration because they do not have access to as many communities that support progressive interpretations of Judaism.

  Hence, these research findings may not be applicable in other locations with smaller and less diverse populations of Jewish and LGBTQ residents. The speed with which participants from this study were able to progress through the stages of the model could have been significantly influenced by New York City's opportunities for social collaboration. Participant progression through the model's stages could be significantly slower in less diverse locations.

  Financial Privilege and Access to Resources. Part of the reason some participants were able to overcome their uncertainties has to do with the privileges and securities (especially

familial and financial) that they enjoy to a much greater extent than most people in their age cohort. My informants do not represent the financial struggles of emerging adults in the United States. Therefore, young people who receive less attention from family members and have fewer resources within their networks may have a different experience trying to reach normative adulthood (Coleman, 1988; Katz, Moran, & Gonzalez, 2018; Morrow, 1999; Sims, 2017).

Emerging adults who lack financial resources tend to feel frustrated that they are unable to explore their goals and feel less hopeful about the future and their ability to reach normative adulthood (Silva, 2012). More specifically, working class participants might feel burdened and limited due to racial inequality, uncertain labor markets, loans and rising costs for which they were responsible, or any combination of these factors. In turn, these meant they have to come "to terms with an impending sense of constraint toward their adult identities and futures" (p. 35). Arnett's (2016) survey echoed those frustrations by noting that almost half of emerging adults who came from poorer backgrounds do not feel they had access to the education they feel they needed, which they believe is "an enormous waste of human potential" (p. 4). In summary, other people in this age bracket have less financial freedom and would probably be worrying about other issues than my informants.

Population Limitations. As a result of the Jewish population consisting of only 1.8 percent of the total U.S. population, the group examined in the present study represents a small cohort of emerging adults of Jewish descent (Brandeis University, 2019). Given this minority focus, the reader should take into consideration that ethnicity and culture can affect how people cope (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). These informants are different from a mainstream sample of young American adults because they are members of a minority group living in an

urban setting try to reconcile their identity tensions as they navigate the mainstream and their respective religious communities.

I tried to cover a wide range of sexual identities and levels of religiousness in order to circumvent dominant, hetero-normative ideologies of adulthood. However, the group consisted of White, Western, and mostly middle or upper middle-class young adults who had at least a bachelor's degree. Most participants in the study grew up with some combination of religious and secular upbringing and their parents were part of a professional class in terms of education and occupation. This means that they had access to social and financial resources that allowed them to engage in prolonged identity exploration (Swartz, 2008).

Snowball sampling has limitations, including a lack of randomization, "generalizability to the target population as a whole," and inherent bias of the research findings (Crouse & Lowe, 2018, p. 1532). The use of snowball sampling resulted in participants with similar characteristics in terms of cultural background, ethnicity, and class. Further, the targeted sample of participants may not have referred participants that were isolated from the group thereby "excluding a subset of the population" (Crouse & Lowe, 2018, p. 1532). I constantly refined and reevaluated my understanding of the underlying phenomenon, which informed how I selected additional cases to which I was referred (Small, 2009). I selected each case to build on different aspects of uncertainty management and identity development until I reached saturation. Therefore, I ended up with cases that varied in the characteristics that were relevant to my understanding of uncertainty but were more homogenous in terms of demographic characteristics (Robinson, 2014).

Duneier (2011) points out that "when ethnographers don't have to worry about hearing from the witnesses they have never met or talked to, they more easily sidestep alternative

perspectives or deceive themselves into thinking that these alternative perspectives either don't exist or don't have implications for their developing line of thinking" (Duneier, 2011, p. 3). Therefore, considering the perspectives that I did not include in this study can expose whether or not certain facts may lack evidence, certain informants might be unreliable, and different details that could be incompatible with one another (Lubet, 2018).

In light of the above, for future research I would consider how informants' parents and siblings would react to my claims. I also interacted with many religious organizations but looked at those organizations from the perspective of young adults. The organizational leaders could have alternative perspectives about the issues with which my informants were struggling and how they overcame them. Lastly, there are very religious young adults in NYC who are part of tight-knit Jewish communities that I excluded from my study as well. Compared to my informants, these young adults might engage in less exploration and probably reach "adulthood" (depending on their criteria) sooner than my informants. If I had incorporated Jewish communities who were more recent migrants, more ethnically diverse, and less assimilated (such as Syrians, Israelis, and so on), it would produce useful information about the strategies used by people who do not have the luxury of "blending in" as they see fit in terms of physical appearance, language barriers, and experience integrating into their environment.

Access Constraints. Another major limitation was that the empirical data that I presented came largely from interview data. The purpose of ethnography and data triangulation is to observe the inconsistencies within the data and show the difference between what people say and what they do (Denzin, 2012). I had insider access, but it was impossible to observe ethnographically some of the topics that were central to this project. For example, it is difficult to study dating ethnographically because my presence would change the meaning of the encounter,

make things awkward, and cross ethical boundaries. My fieldwork often did not allow for direct observation but functioned as a set of ethnographic relationships in which I was able to carry a series of conversations with participants about their lives in real time.

As I discuss in Appendix A, I had extensive observational data on LGBTQ participants, as opposed to the heterosexual men and women I had trouble recruiting prior to the interviews. Therefore, I had a range of access to certain data, which depended on the person and the topic. Participants could show me their dating profiles, but I could not see their ongoing conversations and observe the changes that took place over time. Sometimes I interviewed informants and then followed them on social media, but I felt like I did not have the relationship depth and other contextual information to make comprehensive conclusions about their identity development.

The use of interview data made it a challenge to accept the validity of participants' self-descriptions and self-presentations (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Walford, 2007). This could lead to the assumption that emerging adults are rational actors who think logically about each decision before interacting. People make choices at random and behave in ways that are unpredictable, emotional, and situational. When informants walked me through their dating decisions, for instance, it was possible that they were recalling those decisions in a much more justified and rational way, rather than how the situations unfolded. Further, participants could have experienced response bias in the form of social desirability (Furr, 2013). Namely, participants could have responded to my interview questions in a manner they felt were more socially appealing.

There are several ways in which I tried to overcome the issues above. First, I spent time in the field to learn the cultural norms within this population to help me ask questions that participants would understand. Over the course of my fieldwork I developed relationships with

different members of participants' networks. Furthermore, given my insider position as a young Jewish adult, I already had established relationships with some people in my participants' networks. Not only did this help create a sense of trust and rapport, but also it provided me with an alternative way to triangulate information. I probed during interviews so that participants could clearly and truthfully explain their experience. I also followed up during the interview process to verify my own interpretations of interview responses in order to ensure that my interpretations were accurate.

It is also difficult to use observational data in order to formulate conclusions about others' sense of self. Interviews provided a self-reported, in-depth account of a participant's perceptions of their lived experience (Katz, 2001; Kvale, 1996). Combining interviews with observations helped me assess the extent with which my informants carried on with their behavior or made slight adjustments. Throughout the process I reflected on my relationship to each participant in terms of whether I had collected enough data to make an informed conclusion. During my analysis I also made judgments about multiple plausible interpretations or conclusions.

Given the range of access, however, I was unsure as to whether I could make judgments for certain inconsistencies. As an example of this dilemma, I casually hung out with a potential participant for one evening that spanned across settings, starting at a bar in the Lower East side and ending at a gay bar in the West Village. I observed that he took his yarmulke off when we went to the gay bar, which I thought was noteworthy. I briefly ran into him one or two times in religious settings where he wore his yarmulke and interviewed him several months later. During the interview he talked about his journey to self-acceptance wherein he left his yarmulke on across situations, which I did not observe during that first meeting. I felt that given the amount of

time that had passed and my lack of observational access, I was not at liberty to make a judgment about that type of contradiction. If I had access to ongoing observational data, I could more clearly point out the connection between his presentation of his narrative and my observation. Like my participants, I conducted my own self-assessments and reflected on my connection to the data during the analysis.

Future Research Directions

This dissertation research sets the foundation for future work concerned with uncertainty management and identity development in emerging adulthood. Below I outline specific areas of inquiry for future research. Specifically, I suggest that studies include different populations of emerging adults and additional methodological approaches for studying this phenomenon throughout the life course.

The current study supported the idea that exploring as a young adult offers a sense of freedom and exploration for those who are privileged in American society (Alper, Katz, & Clark, 2016; Henrich et al., 2010; Silva, 2012). Participants navigated New York City, many had extra financial backing, and they interacted with other members of their in-group to help establish their identities. Future research on groups with access to fewer social and financial resources could help parse out differences among coping strategies. For example, Mary Gray (2009) debunked the narrative of rural to urban migration for LGBTQ Americans by focusing on young people in rural areas who used media to engage in identity politics. Examining how Jewish Americans navigate situations in which they are more of a religious and sexual minority can provide an interesting point of comparison. In less diverse locations emerging adults may feel more constricted in their gender and sexual exploration and the extent to which they are able to explore new forms of Judaism during emerging adulthood. For instance, in-depth participant

observations of young Jewish adults who interact in more tight-knit, religiously-oriented communities would yield additional insights into the extent that emerging adults use similar coping strategies.

A longitudinal study could map out how people use their strong tie relationships to cope with uncertainty well beyond the transition to adulthood. For instance, research suggests that people slowly drop out of their support networks as they age (Sammarco, 2001). Engaging in interviews with the same group every five years would yield insight into the extent with which they maintained certain connections that were important during their emerging adulthood years. This would also help to compare the degree with which uncertainty is caused by new points of conflict and tension, whether or not adults learn to cope in new ways, and how their sense of security fluctuates over time.

Comparative research on other life stage transitions beyond emerging adulthood (such as retiring or becoming new parents) would parse out the role of support networks for coping in those cases as well. For example, new mothers must manage the information they receive from different members of their networks, from family members, acquaintances, and close friends in an effort to cope with uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities. Ethnographies should consider these transitions, the uncertainty they elicit, and the pathways to cope in different phases of life.

Additionally, my empirical model can extend to the experiences of other minority groups and their transition to adulthood in the United States. For example, immigrant groups often work to maintain a sense of cultural cohesiveness in response to discrimination (Mahalingam, 2006). As shown in this study, coming of age and being part of a minority group lends itself to tensions between wanting to maintain tradition and wanting to be "American." For instance,

there are different Hindu groups in the United States that reinterpret the religion for the American context (Kurian, 1998). Indian Americans growing up often struggle to come to terms with being part of a religion that outsiders do not understand and to appreciate their ethnic identity (Khandelwal, 2002). For these groups, appreciating one's ethnic/religious identity and merging it with one's American identity might be similar to context collusion.

My study can inform scholars who are researching how religious minorities struggle to balance a sense of tradition and modernity. As an example, O'Brien's (2017) research on Muslim teenagers outlined different ways in which they incorporate their sense of religion with their identities as urban teens. In one strategy called "low key Islam" they presented themselves by downplaying Islam as a central part of their identities, while emphasizing their abilities as urban American teens. On the other hand, other teens from the study presented themselves by foregrounding their Islamic identity and discussing discrimination in the United States. Context collusion can offer an alternative approach for these kinds of groups to integrate their identities with more balance, such as recognizing the threat of Islamophobia as they participate in urban social life (Tyler et al., 2010). My study also offers a helpful model for religious minorities that are struggling with their sexual identities. As an example, in most Muslim countries, homosexuality is illegal and in some countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, it is punishable by death—which may cause Muslim Americans to feel compelled to choose between their religion and sexuality, conforming to either peer pressures or family expectations. In summary, the study can provide scholars with a better approach for understanding the angst that comes with one's desire to both participate in mainstream activities and maintain a sense of continuity, as well as the strategies for overcoming those challenges.

Lastly, my findings illustrate how religion, gender, and sexual identity intersect at a personal and organizational level, which has implications for policy research (Buroway, 2004; Castro, 2016). My study explained how engaging in context collusion helped my informants merge once previously disparate social identities into an integrated sense of self. My findings on context collusion can help organizations for Jewish Queer adults (such as Keshet Ga'avah, or JQInternational.org) by providing more detailed strategies for supporting those intersectional identities. Further, my findings can help organizations that do not target intersectional identities reframe their programming to emphasize intersectional needs.

Conclusion

This study outlined different pathways that these financially privileged, young Jewish adults went through to develop a sense of security. My informants entered unfamiliar contexts, which invoked different questions about their identities, and responded to those questions by self-assessing. They then brought their friends and family into these contexts to help them manage uncertainty about their identities. They gained a rough understanding of situational norms and started exploring how to collapse them. Coping with uncertainty cannot be thought of as an individual process; it is intertwined with close relationships and reflects a cross-contextual process.

This research provides a new way to think about how a subset of emerging adults resolves identity tensions. These informants use the process of context collusion to intentionally combine their social identities into a coherent sense of self, or an integrated sense of self. After combining contexts, my informants felt more grounded in themselves, in their environment, and in the direction of their future. I expect these informants to build on their sense of self throughout the life course and respond to crises by moving through the stages of the model again.

Usually research on uncertainty management deals with how people manage uncertainty about information, rather than viewing it as a form of identity work. I selected young Jewish adults as my population of study because they had the freedom to explore their identities within the diversity of New York City, but were responding to pressures from their parents to maintain their religious upbringings. They entered a context, self-assessed, and received support from close friends and family members from different parts of their lives, which helped them develop the capacity to merge their social identities moving forward. As a result of this process, they shifted from a sense of contexts collapsing on them and an anxious defensive posture to becoming more purposeful, confident actors who intentionally combined contexts by linking their once disparate social identities. By taking such an approach, future studies should consider how minorities use their social resources within and across contexts to help with their transition into normative adulthood.

Appendices

Appendix A: Methodological Notes

To make sense of an ethnographic work, it is important to understand how the researcher approached the area of inquiry. In the following section I describe how I conducted the project, which includes how I overcame difficulties that arose. I also share how my own identity shaped what I came to learn and how those on the inside made sense of my presence in their friend groups and social outings. Lastly, I explain how I managed my relationships among those networks and how I managed my own context collusions.

Access Constraints

As I mentioned in chapter one, the fieldwork began by gaining access to a group of young, LGBTQ Jewish adults. I received IRB approval for the study in January 2017 to begin conducting the initial interviews and observation. In June 2017 I added an amendment to continue shadowing my informants for an extended period of time. I told my informants that I was doing a study on the dating strategies of young adults and how they changed over time. I explained to participants that I would be asking them some questions about their dating strategies and experience being young singles in the city. I also made it clear that with their permission I would be following up with them after our initial meeting to find out how their strategies/experience had changed over time. I asked informants for permission to accompany them to different social events to assess how they talked about dating with friends. I intend to follow up with participants and send them a summary of the dissertation.

Initially, gaining access to the tight, niche LGBTQ network made it easier for me to break into the group because there were limited people and options to connect with someone new. My gender and physical appearance made me memorable to others because I initially stood

out as the only woman at a Jewish men's mixer at a club. Numerous people would approach me at different events and ask, "Weren't you the only girl at the 'high homo-days' mixer?" Going to a gay club in Hell's Kitchen to find romantic and social connections with other Jewish men and befriending a straight Jewish female researcher is a novel and memorable context collusion, which helped me to develop close relationships with that cohort. The more events I attended, the more I blended into various crowds because I was expected to be there as an insider. I developed new, alternate, and overlapping networks for this project, and consistently attended those face-to-face events to maintain those ties.

I was privy to more observational information of LGBTQ participants, which allowed me to understand their relationships more clearly. I recruited heterosexual participants halfway into my fieldwork, in which I attended several, regular young professional events to develop relationships. My interactions with heterosexual participants were more limited (they took place at specific events, or during several one-on-one interactions) and did not move across contexts as fluidly and as often as the LGBTQ group. I was invited to some dinners with straight women and their female/male friends, but was never invited to dinners with straight men and their close friends. This is probably due to my position as a straight woman and my inability to develop relationships where I had access to those intimate settings. Furthermore, the lack of openness to outsiders like me also has to do with the established relationships those participants already had without the desire to seek out new relationships.

I ended up compensating for the lack of access by having more one-on-one interactions and interviews to gather more information. I ultimately used the snowball sampling technique in which informants referred me to people they knew to round out the characteristics of my informants (e.g., to find more heterosexual men and more variation in terms of level of

religiousness). This also generated unique cases to build on my understanding of uncertainty management. The snowball sampling method also contributed to the limitations in terms of variation of social characteristics because those participants came from my own homogenous network and my own position is privileged, as I discuss in my reflection.

Insider Bias

My position as an Ashkenazi Jewish American 28-year old woman from the suburbs of New York meant that I could more easily blend in with participants. Like my informants, I have similar expectations and ideas of what reaching "normative adulthood" looks like (Lipsitz, 2008). Reyes (2020) suggests that researchers have "an ethnographic toolkit" which consists of their social capital, backgrounds, and other characteristics that shape "field access, field dynamics, and data analysis" (p. 3). For example, my Jewish background helped me have something in common with the LGBTQ informants in my initial point of entry because we had a shared history that we could connect on. As I discuss below, when I struggled in recruiting certain demographics I resolved those issues by turning to my Jewish social network from high school or college to refer me to people they knew—using my age, religion, and class background to my advantage.

I was able to find commonalities as points of entry, which included shared interests of spirituality, civic engagement, and community service. Unlike other ethnographers, who work in field sites that they would never inhabit otherwise (such as a high school), it was not out of the ordinary for me to be attending the events in my fieldwork, which provided a sense of insider privilege. I grew up in a neighborhood that was predominantly Jewish and had experience with structured religious settings, including synagogue, sleep-away camp, Israel trips and Hebrew school. Most of my family settled in the U.S three generations ago and I was accustomed to

blending into secular society (English is my primary language, I do not dress modestly, and so on). However, similar to how informants strategically displayed their religious identities in Chapter 5, I knew how to reveal and conceal different parts of my identity to achieve certain goals. Even if I was not LGBTQ or came from a more secular understanding of religious identity, I was able to draw on similarities to help create a bond.

Kanuha (2000) notes that in insider research, "Questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied" (p. 444). Being part of a minority community that has provided me with social support, including access to social groups for my dissertation research meant that I could also be ostracized if people did not like how I portrayed the group. I tried to overcome those dilemmas by a) diversifying my sample of participants, b) running my findings and analysis by friends and other outsiders, and c) ensuring that the data analysis was theoretically sound.

Insiders tend to enter the field with certain assumptions, and I had natural biases about the experiences of Jewish emerging adults that I had to actively work to abandon. Beginning the study with the LGBTQ Jewish group opened my eyes to different types of young Jewish experiences, such as leaving one's community behind, being pressured to go to conversion therapy, desiring alternative family structures (such as co-parenting and polyamorous relationships), and the unique intersection of religion and sexual identity that was less common in my social world. I found that the more diverse my participants were (in terms of age, gender, sexuality, religious affiliation) the more I could circumvent some of the issues of insider bias because I was constantly asking questions about nuances (such as lingo, rituals) that were unfamiliar.

My presence as a researcher also framed the meaning participants brought to the encounters (Gergen & Davis, 1997; Goffman, 1959; Mishler, 1986; Warren, 2002). Like my informants, I also dealt with the challenge of whether to open or close contextual boundaries. My insider position meant that participants often viewed me as a friend, which was a challenging boundary to navigate. In Jordan's (2006) research in family settings, she found that participants created meaning based on "questions asked back" (Oakley, 1981). Similarly, participants made sense of my identity by asking questions about my past ("Have you ever been ghosted?") and about my (now) husband ("What is Michael doing tonight? Is he okay with you missing every Shabbat?"), and marriage ("How's married life ?"). I tended to answer those questions and briefly entertain the conversation to ease their curiosities before moving it to a different topic.

I also developed boundaries between my research and personal life, which I did on a case-by-case basis. For instance, when a participant asked if he could crash at my apartment for the night, I politely told him that it was not a good time. I lived in a one-bedroom apartment with my husband and I felt that it would be collapsing social contexts in a much too intimate way.

Sometimes I engaged in context collusion because my informants were referred to me through snowball sampling. More specifically, some informants were weak ties whom I knew through connections from my hometown. For instance, I knew some of Brian's family members, who referred me to him for this project, and that background information helped to define the situation (Goffman, 1959). During our conversation, Brian took great efforts to explain his pride in being self-sufficient financially. Brian also described his frustration with peers, whose parents clearly paid their rent. Throughout our conversation I asked Brian three times if he or his friends received any financial help from their parents, to which he responded no. I actually knew that Brian received financial support prior to the conversation because I had heard that information

from his family members. At the end of the conversation Brian disclosed, "I lied. My mom does help me out with rent 'cause I wouldn't be able to survive unless I did get a little monetary support." As Brian's audience, I navigated the interaction to ensure that there were no bumps or awkward moments by simply nodding, agreeing that New York prices were high, and refraining from asking Brian why he initially lied in the first place so that he could save face (Duguay, 2014, p. 8).

In sum, my social similarities and relationships provided unique access, but also pointed to challenges for managing my own networks, relationships, and boundaries. Looking back, however, I am glad that I also engaged in context collusion because it helped me with the developmental task of finding participants for my study.

Appendix B: Participant Demographics

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Descent						Total
Ashkenazi	Sephardic					
33	1					34

Gender/Sexual Orientation						
Heterosexual Women	Bisexual Women	Gay /Lesbian Women	Transgender Women	Heterosexual Men	Gay Men	
14	2	3	1	10	4	34

Religious Identification						
Non-Denomination al	Culturally Jewish/ Atheist	Modern Orthodo x	Reform	Conservative		
6	8	5	8	7		34

Location of Origin						
Northeast	Other					
31	3					34

Location in New York City						
Midtown	Uptown	Brookly n	Queens	Hoboken	Down town	
15	6	5	6	1	1	34

Appendix C: Sample Codes

Table 2: Sample Codes, Chapter 4

Strategy	Description	Example	Connection to Theory
Validation pathway: Prioritizing friends over family	Looking to friends to validate current goals	Justifying being single because friends are single	-Social comparison and mutual disclosures provide a sense of comfort about identity
Coping skill development pathway: Self-advocating to family	Self advocating for new views	Expressing political opinion online	-Justifying new beliefs; develops self-advocacy skills; reduces uncertainty
Information avoidance pathway: Avoiding topics among family	Mutually avoiding a topic to prevent conflict	Mutually avoiding one's sexual identity to avoid mother-daughter conflict	-Maintaining uncertainty to avoid conflict; maintains uncertainty
Perspective shift pathway: Accepting lack of control over family	Accepting that family will not change	Recognizing that family will never share political views	-Viewing lack of control as a form of acceptance; tolerates uncertainty
Coping skill development pathway: Negotiating with friends and family	Finding a joint goal among friends/family	Responding to pressure to date by trying to date; self advocating if they do not like the experience	-Practices problem-solving (negotiating) skills; considers needs of both parties; trust is established; reduces uncertainty
Perspective shift pathway: Crisis support	Turning to family to help manage a crisis	Viewing a crisis in a different light	-Shifts perspective about a crisis; tolerates uncertainty

Appendix D: Interview Guide

1. Provide a background of your experience as a young Jewish adult in NYC.

2. What religious category would you identify as? How does that compare with how you were raised?

3. Walk me through your dating profile and social media. What type of impression do you try to convey? If you are on multiple apps, please compare your profiles and explain why you made the choices you did.

4. Describe the characteristics that an ideal partner would have. What type of background would they have in terms of religion? What type of background would they have in terms of the family they came from/place they grew up?

5. Did you always want a partner with those characteristics? If not, at what point in time did you change your mind?

6. Is there a certain professional category you would want your ideal partner to be part of? If so, please explain what category that might be and why it is important. If not, explain why this is not important to you.

7. Do you see certain jobs (that potential partners have) on the apps that make you want to swipe left, or right? Why do they make you want to swipe left?

8. Do you ever feel pressure to get married by a certain point? How do you manage that pressure?

9. What things turn you off when you are on a date? Describe a time where you experienced a deal breaker.

10. Can you describe a time when you were with a potential partner who seemed like they weren't at the same economic level as you? What made you believe that?

10. How do your expectations of a potential partner compare to the expectations of your single girlfriends? Explain.

11. What kind of impression do you think you give to prospective partners face to face? Do you give a different impression to people who you are not dating (such as friends and family)? Why or why not?

12. Describe your social media use. How often do you post, and what types of topics do you post about?

13. Pull up one of your social media profiles (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat). If an outsider was looking at your profile, how might they describe you? Provide examples.

14. Why did you pick _____ organization as a regular place to hang out? Why do you prefer it over other organizations?

15.What else do you do for fun with your friends? Have your interests changed at all since you graduated college? Why do you think they have changed?

16. Which Jewish organizations/events do you dislike? Why? What is the organization like, and what kinds of people does it attract?

17. Are there times when you act more or less Jewish? How do you present your degree of religiousness on the apps?

18. Which of your friend groups do you feel the closest to? Why do you feel closest to those friends?

19. In what ways would you say your experience dating might be different than someone of another gender or sexuality? What pressures do (female/male) (heterosexual/LGBT) Jews face that other Jews might not face? Explain.

20. Describe the personal lives of your close friends and peers. Would you want to be in a similar position as your friends/peers? Why or why not?

21. Do you talk about dating at all with your friends? If so, what types of topics do you discuss? You are welcome to show text message conversations if you feel comfortable.

22. Have your friendships or friend groups changed at all since you moved to the city? If they have changed, why do you think they have changed?

23. Describe your current living situation. How many roommates do you have, where is the apartment, and what is your set up like? How long do you plan to live in your current apartment? If you have plans to move, how will you go about it?

24. Describe your current work situation. How do you feel about your current job, and what future plans do you have?

25. Compare your current experience to the experience of your parents when they were our age. In what ways were their lives different? Would you like to achieve the same goals that they achieved at your age? Why or why not?

26. Do you experience any pressure from family members to achieve certain goals (in terms of dating, career, finances)? Which family members pressure you, and what topics do they pressure you about?

27. Do you want to get married and have children? If so, when would be the ideal time? Was there a time when this seemed difficult to achieve?

28. Suppose you were planning on having children. Would you want your children to have a similar upbringing to the one you had? Why or why not?

29. Suppose you were not Jewish. How might your experience being a young adult in New York City be different? What pressures do you face (if any) that are uniquely Jewish?

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