

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

Coping Style in Achieving Conflictual Identity

Choosing a Coping Style in Religion and Sexuality Conflict
among National Religious Adolescents

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Summary

As part of the process of adolescence, the adolescent needs to handle multiple conflicts of identity, defining his identity and perfecting it in preparation to adult life (Kerpelman & Lamke, 1997; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Every adolescent is required to handle with a 'rising hormonal flood' of testosterone (ברזינדיין, 2013), that courses through his veins as part of adolescence (פוטשניק, 2013). This hormone induces an urge for acts of a sexual nature (Reis & Abdo, 2014). On the other hand, the adolescent is subject to self-regulation and social norms that demand of him to reign in these urges and show restraint (פוקו, 1996; זיר, 2008).

Moreover, the religious adolescent that is subject to religious law in addition to the restraints mentioned above. Religion demands of him to totally refrain from any acts of sexual nature, dictating specific scenarios dedicated for such acts (מנוסי, 2004). As such, the adolescent has an additional frontier in his adolescent period – versus God (Exline & Rose, 2005). In the midst of this turmoil, the adolescent is expected to make internal decisions that will determine his relation to religion. For example, will he choose to retain his link to religion **despite** the religious-sexual conflict, or will he abandon his religion due to that conflict.

This study will try to first define several behavioral-methods of dealing with various conflicts, derived from relevant studies that have gathered them, with no particular interest to the classification of those conflicts. These methods were chosen based on the conceptualization of Novis-Deutsch (2011), but were classified according to two other axes: the *purpose* of the method, and its *fashion*. Understanding that every behavior can be described by the desired purpose of the adolescent, and the fashion by which that purpose is pursued. According to this conceptualization every behavior is a chosen one, even if the course of 'action' is actually inaction. The first axis describing the purpose of the method was constructed in light of Schechter's model of identity construction (2000), and was substantiated below. The second axis describing the fashion of the method was constructed in light of the conceptualization of Marcia (1996, 1980) that identity-development is comprised of two dimensions: obligation and crisis, with the adolescent progressing of retreating in the development of identity in a periodic fashion in reaction to life crises (צוריאל, 1990). Thus, a theoretical model was constructed to display 20 possible behavioral-methods of dealing with conflict.

Later, 20 behavioral-methods of dealing with internal conflict (not including external assistance and support) were gathered from relevant studies with accordance to Novis-Deutsch's model (2011). The methods were classified by the two axes in light of

research literature. These methods were 'translated' to statements regarding the religious-sexual conflict, then grouped into a survey. The survey, with a background questionnaire, was distributed via social media (Facebook, Whatsapp, etc.) to focus groups of religious adolescents of the ages 18-30. The age range was limited to 18 in its lower boundary due to realization that the subject is intrusive in nature, and therefore its sexual contents should ethically be limited to consenting adults. The upper boundary was limited to 30 due to the understanding that 'forming adolescence' is generally nearing completion at that age for the Y generation (2013 אלמוג ואלמוג, ;Arnett, 2004).

In the initial study where 296 surveys were sampled, after their initial questionnaires were compliant with the study's demands, factor analysis and SSA analysis pointed out three main behavioral-methods used by adolescents to deal with the conflict: 'Failure to sense any conflict', 'Identity alteration', and 'Identity preservation'. In fact, the adolescent chose to 'dim' one of the terms in the "Sexual-Religious Conflict" dilemma. Blurring the conflict itself, distancing himself from religion, or dimming any sexual pursuit, to reach inner peace.

After finding the differentiating factors in the survey, the study progressed with the main question, asking to sketch out a 'pyramid' of the Sexual-Religious-Conflict conflict. The study strived to discover with each adolescent what his religious commitment level is, his level of sexual urges towards himself or others, and how he decides to deal with the conflict between the two. To that end three surveys were used: 'Subjective importance of religion', 'Sexual urges' (SDI-2) translated to Hebrew, and 'Behavioral methods dealing with the Sexual-Religious conflict' which construction was described earlier.

A fourth factor that was measured was the 'Identity of self' factor, taken from the Eriksonian approach to the conceptualization of the concept of identity (Marcia, 1980). Including this factor in the study was intended to research whether adolescents with high levels of identity deal better with the conflict while staying religious, and those with lower levels of identity have a harder time doing so, leading them to abandon their faith or distance themselves from it. In light of many studies that display the achiever of identity as an adolescent navigating his life with better strategies in face of difficulties and tending to further respect authority and values (Marcia, 1980), in contrast with those with scattered identities that tend to choose less challenging and hedonistic solutions (Berzonsky, 1992; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009). Since the study was intended to additionally research identity factors dominantly influencing decision

making, Tzuriel's survey (Tzuriel, 1992) 'Self-identity scale for adolescents' (AEIS) was chosen, displaying identity as 'self-identity' that contains seven different dimensions: 'Commitment and purpose', 'solidarity and continuity', 'social recognition', 'significance', 'physical identity', 'truth and naturality' and 'self-control'.

The leading assumptions of the study are:

1. Adolescents with high levels of religious identity will have a higher tendency to choose the 'Identity preservation' method, relatively to 'Failure to sense any conflict' and 'Identity alteration'. The opposite results were expected with adolescents with low levels of religious identity.
2. Adolescents with high levels of self-identity would be more prone to choose the 'Identity preservation' method, relatively to 'Failure to sense any conflict' and 'Identity alteration'. The opposite results were expected with adolescents with low levels of self-identity.
3. The 'self-control', 'commitment and purpose' and 'significance' factors would be found to be relatively high within the group of those who chose the 'Identity preservation' method.

After filtering all surveys that matched the study's target audience, 440 suitable surveys remained. Correlation analysis found that the study's first assumption was mostly substantiated, there being a medium positive correlation between religious identity and choice of 'Identity preservation' method, and a medium negative correlation between religious identity and choice of 'Identity alteration' method. Nonetheless, no correlation was found between religious identity and 'Failure to sense any conflict'. Deeper analysis of the data by interaction of sex and marital status did turn out, though, that the assumption was totally substantiated in the single male respondent group, with a negative correlation between religious identity and 'Failure to sense any conflict' and 'Identity alteration'.

Analyzing the second assumption, describing the relationship in the conflict pyramid, together with the identity factor, it surfaces once more that the single male respondent group has a clear-cut positive correlation between sexual urges and choosing the 'Failure to sense any conflict' and 'Identity alteration'. In the married female group as well there was a clear negative correlation between sexual urges and 'Identity preservation' method. In a regressive analysis of all variables of method choice predictions, the study found that the religious identity factor is the most significant predictive factor of the 'Identity preservation' and 'Identity alteration' methods, and the factors of 'married' and 'female' were the most significant predictive factors of the

'Failure to sense any conflict' method. These findings can be used to conclude that the religious identity constitutes the most significant factor in preserving or abandoning the fold, and single men feel the conflict strongest, therefore being forced to make their decision between 'Identity preservation' and 'Identity alteration' based on their level of religious identity.

In the process of analyzing the second assumption, researching the self-identity factor's role in the conflict model, the study found it was partially substantiated, since the self-identity factor was a significant predictive factor only for the 'identity alteration' method. Meaning that adolescents that displayed high levels of identity don't strengthen their religious connection, neither sense the conflict, but rather that adolescents with low levels of identity are more likely to abandon their religious bindings. In a deeper analysis of the self-identity factor the study found that it doesn't serve as a moderating factor (decides **when** 'identity alteration' would appear), but rather as an intermediary (explains **why** 'identity alteration' appears).

Researching the third assumption, of observing the identity factors amongst those who chose 'identity preservation', it was found to be mostly falsified, except the identity factor of 'significance and alienation' that constitutes a predictive factor that has a weak positive correlation with 'identity preservation'. Analysis points out that the identity factor 'social recognition' is the most dominant predictive factor in the regression analysis of 'identity preservation'. On the other hand, checking the identity factor in Pierson's tests shows that all the factors have a clear negative correlation with 'identity alteration', with 'physical identity' and 'significance and alienation' being the most significant. Meaning that not only internal identity factors have significance regarding leaving religion, but also the supporting environment and the recognition and connection with one's body have significance in the process preserving or cutting off ties with religion.

The current study contributes to the understanding of processes developing in the psyche of those in an unsolvable conflict, particularly religious adolescents in the sexual-religious conflict.