

## Mandatory Automatic Enrollment

S. Derrin Watson

#### Agenda

- **▶** Introduction
- ► EACAs Generally
- ► Mandatory Automatic Enrollment (MAE) Details
- ► Notice 2024-02
- ▶ Proposed Regs
  - ▶ Dates
  - ► Covered employees
  - ▶ Deferral percentages
  - ► Exemptions
  - ► Other requirements



#### SECURE 2.0 MANDATE



#### SECURE 2.0 Section 101



- ► Effective for plan years beginning in 2025
- ► Requires 401(k) and 403(b) plans with elective deferrals to have an EACA meeting exacting specifications
  - ► Mandatory automatic enrollment (MAE)
  - ► New Code §414A
- ► Default deferrals in statutory range
- ▶ Permissible withdrawals
- ► Default deferrals invested under QDIA regulations unless participant elects otherwise

#### Applies to Plans Unless There is an Exemption

- ► ADP tested plans
- ► Classic safe harbor plans
- ▶QACAs
  - ► May need to:
    - ► Adjust deferral percentages
    - ► Add permissible withdrawals
    - ▶ Direct default deferrals to QDIAs if no participant investment election
- ► Starter 401(k) plans
- ▶ Deferral-only 403(b) plans exempt from ERISA



### Concern About Deferral-Only 403(b) Plans



- ▶ DOL Reg. §2510.3-2(f) says that deferral-only 403(b) plans of tax-exempt organizations are exempt from ERISA if they satisfy several requirements limiting employer's control
  - ► These establish that a plan is not "established or maintained" by employer
- ► Requirement #1: Participation is completely voluntary for employees
- ► Elsewhere DOL has said that automatic enrollment, in effect forcing employee to opt out, is not "completely voluntary"
- ► Concern: 403(b) plan subject to MAE may not qualify for ERISA exemption
  - ► Required Form 5500 filing
  - ► Fiduciary issues, including DOL deposit requirements

#### Several Exemptions From MAE

Real Property of the Property

- ► Governmental plans
- ► Church plans
- ► SIMPLE plans
- ► Grandfathered plans
- ► Plans of small employers
- ► Plans of new employers
- ► We will discuss all of these



#### Introduction



- ► Today we will discuss the MAE rules and all subsidiary rules
  - ► Starting with a review of the EACA rules
  - ► MAE obligations and covered plans
    - ▶ Statute
    - ► Notice 2024-04 interim guidance
    - ▶ New proposed regulations
  - ▶ Permissible Withdrawal
  - **▶ QDIA**







# ELIGIBLE AUTOMATIC CONTRIBUTION ARRANGEMENTS (EACAS)



#### **EACA**

- ► Existed since 2008: Code §414(w)
- ▶ Requirements
  - ► Applicable plan (including 401(k) and 403(b))
  - ► Elective deferrals under salary reduction agreement
  - ► Uniform default elective deferrals unless participant opts out
  - ► Annual notice to covered employees



## Uniform Default Deferral Percentage



- ▶Same rules must apply to everyone covered by EACA
- No minimum or maximum default deferral
  - ▶ 2% is perfectly acceptable
- ► Automatic escalation allowed but not required



#### **EACA Benefits**



- ▶ Permissible withdrawals
  - ► Allows participant up to 90 days after automatic deferrals first withheld to request distribution, including earnings
    - ► Taxable in year of distribution; Form 1099-R
    - ▶ Forfeit associated match
    - ► Not counted in §402(g)/ADP/ §415
- ▶6 months after plan year end to fix ADP/ACP failures without penalty
  - ► Now also applies to certain Roth catch-up failures
- ►\$500/year tax credit for 3 years for small (<101 employees) employers

#### Covered Employee – General EACA Rules

- ► Plan can define who are covered employees
  - **▶** Division A
  - ► New employees
  - ► Employees who haven't made deferral election
- ▶ Doesn't have to include everyone eligible to defer
  - ▶ If not in EACA don't have to receive notice
  - ► If not in EACA no permissible withdrawals
- ▶If plan wants 6 months to correct ADP/ACP, <u>all</u> employees (HCE and NHCE) eligible to defer must be covered employees

#### **EACA Notice Content**



- ► Everything in classic safe harbor notice (other than safe harbor contributions)
- ► Level of default deferrals
- ▶ Right to elect different percentage or 0%
- ► How contributions made under the arrangement will be invested if EE doesn't specify
- ▶ Permissible withdrawal rights and procedures
- ► Accurate, comprehensive, understandable



#### **GUIDANCE**

- NOTICE 2024-2
- PROPOSED REGULATIONS



#### Notice 2024-2: SECURE 2.0 Grab Bag

► Answered a few of the many questions about MAE

- ► Primarily relating to grandfathered plans
  - ► Called "pre-enactment plan" in Notice
- ► To be grandfathered:
  - ▶ 401(k) plan must be signed before December 29, 2022
    - ► Signed plan must provide for elective deferrals
    - ► Even if effective date is later (e.g., January 1, 2023)
  - ▶ 403(b) plan must be signed before December 29, 2022
    - ► Whether or not it provided for elective deferrals



#### Proposed Regulations



- ► Clarifications to §414(w) regulations
- ► New regulation §1.414A-1
- ► Released January 9, 2025
  - ► After effective date for calendar year plans
    - No delay in effective date
  - Proposed applicability date for regulations: plan years beginning more than 6 months after final regulations issued
    - ▶ Suppose a minor miracle happens and Treasury issues final regulation in September 2025
    - ► Effective for 2027 calendar year plans

#### **Effective Date**



- ► What do you do before final regulations in effect?
  - ► Follow reasonable, good faith interpretation of statute
  - ► While reliance isn't promised, a plan complying with the regulations will almost surely be seen as following a good faith interpretation
- ▶In this program we will:
  - ► Explain the proposed regulations
  - ► Highlight some of the issues that are still open

#### Covered Employees For MAE

- ► The employees who must be covered by the EACA are all employees in the plan who are eligible to defer
- ► That's everyone
  - ► HCE/NHCE
  - **▶** Union/nonunion
  - ► LTPT (specifically mentioned)
  - Seasonal and part-time employees
- ► Exception: Default deferrals don't have to apply to participant who, when MAE first effective, had an <u>affirmative election</u> in place to defer or not to defer

## Can't We Limit it to New Employees?



- ▶ Preamble allows some leeway before final regulations:
  - ▶ If a plan existed before 2025, but wasn't grandfathered, and otherwise complies with MAE for employees who become eligible to defer after MAE becomes effective for the plan (generally the first day of the 2025 plan year), then employees who were eligible to defer before MAE was effective don't have to be covered under MAE until final regulations apply
- ► At that point, unless the pre-'25 employees have a deferral election in effect, they would need to be automatically enrolled, either at the initial percentage, or where they would have been on the deferral schedule if they had been subject to automatic deferrals all along

## Example

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- ► Chris was eligible to defer in 2024
- ► Never filed affirmative election
- ► Calendar year 401(k) plan implements MAE in 2025 but temporarily limits it to new participants
- ▶ Regulations finalized in 3<sup>rd</sup> Q 2026
  - ► Apply to calendar year plans in 2028
- ► Chris must be automatically enrolled 1/1/28
  - ► At either 3% or 5%

Year	Auto Defer %
1 (2025)	3%
2 (2026)	3%
3 (2027)	4%
4 (2028)	5%
And so	Up to 10%
on	

## Deferral Percentages: Initial Period

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- ► Very similar to QACA rules, with a few twists
- ► Initial period starts at later of:
  - ► Date participant becomes eligible to defer
  - ► MAE applies to plan/participant
- Initial period ends last day of following plan year
- ► Examples (calendar year plan):
  - ► Anne entered plan in 2020: Initial period is 2025 and 2026
  - ► Bill enters plan 7/1/2026: Initial period is 7/1/26 12/31/27



### Default Deferrals: Percentages and Escalation



- ► Initial period auto deferrals must be at least 3% and no more than 10%
- ► Increase exactly 1% each year thereafter until you hit 10% 15%
- ▶ If you want "set it and forget it" go with 10%
- ► Example:
  - ► Calendar year QACA set up in 2023 has flat 6% automatic deferral
  - ► Employer decides to leave 6% floor in place
  - ▶ Initial period for existing participants is 2025 and 2026
  - ► Auto escalation starts in 2027: 1%/year up (i.e., 2027 rate is 7%) to 10% 15%

#### **Uniform Default Deferrals**



- ► Same rules apply to everyone
- ► Exceptions to uniformity permitted under QACA rules:
  - Different rates based on different years of participation or partial periods
  - ► Participant has an election in place to defer at a rate greater than the automatic rate
  - ► Rate is limited based on §402(g)/§415/§401(a)(17)/§401(k)(16)
  - No deferrals while employee is suspended from deferring for taking HEART deemed severance distribution

#### Partial Periods



▶ Uniformity still exists even though: "The percentage used for the default election varies based on the number of years (or portions of years) since the beginning of the initial period for an employee"

- ► In original EACA/QACA regulations
  - ► Allows annual increase other than on first day of plan year
  - ▶ But plan must escalate at least as rapidly as regulations



## Examples



- ► Calendar year plan decides to apply escalation on May 1 after performance reviews/raises
  - ► Applies to everyone
  - ► Cindy enters plan 7/1/26; regulatory initial period ends 12/31/27
    - ▶ Default deferral percentage increases 1% on May 1, 2027: OK
    - ► Could not delay it to May 1, 2028
- ► Allows plan to set shorter initial period
  - ► Could escalate beginning 1<sup>st</sup> day of 1<sup>st</sup> plan year after entering plan

## Don't Have to Reduce Existing Deferrals



► Uniformity still exists even though "the rate of [deferrals] that is in effect for an employee immediately prior to the date that [MAE] first applies to the employee is not reduced"

#### ► Example:

- ▶ Plan starts at 3%
  - ► Plan provides that, if you are deferring less than 3%, you are now by default automatically enrolled at 3%
  - ► Plan provides that, if you are deferring 3% or more, your existing election will remain in force

## What About Rehired Employees?



- ▶If auto enrollment doesn't apply for a full plan year and then employee is again subject to auto enrollment:
  - ► Example: Employee terminates and is rehired
  - ► Example: Employee temporarily moves to excluded class (e.g., union)
- ► When they start over, you can either:
  - ► Resume auto deferrals where they would have been if they hadn't left
  - ► Give them a new initial period (start them at the bottom of the schedule)

## Example

- ► Taylor enters 1/1/26
- ► Auto enrolled at 3%
- ► Quits 10/15/27 (year 2)
- ▶ Rehired 3/1/30 (year 5)
  - ► Plan can start Taylor at 3% or 6%
- ▶ Rehired 9/1/28
  - ► Taylor is at 4% (year 3)
  - ► Not eligible for 3% because not absent full plan year

Year	Auto defer %
1 (2026)	3%
2 (2027)	3%
3 (2028)	4%
4 (2029)	5%
5 (2030)	6%
6 (2031)	7%
7 (2032)	8%
8 (2033)	9%
9+ (2034+)	10%

#### What About if an Affirmative Election is Cancelled?



- ▶ If participant's affirmative election (including an election not to defer) is in place for a full plan year, plan can provide that initial period is redetermined
  - ► Applies if participant or plan cancels affirmative election
- ► Preamble explanation:
  - ▶ Plan can provide that, as of a certain date, everyone deferring less than the minimum default deferral are now subject to AE unless the participant files a new affirmative election
  - ► Facilitates "sweep"



## PLANS EXEMPT FROM MAE



## Several Exemptions from MAE



Governmental plans

Church plans

SIMPLE plans

Grandfathered plans

Plans of small employers

Plans of new employers

## Grandfathered Plan Exception: Base Definitions



- Proposed regulations do not have a term for grandfathered plan
- ► We will call them grandfathered/GF
- ► To be grandfathered:
  - ▶ 401(k) plan must be signed before December 29, 2022
    - Signed plan must provide for elective deferrals
    - ► Example: December 15, 2022, company signs amendment to existing PS plan to add 401(k) feature effective January 1, 2023
      - ▶ Plan is grandfathered
    - ► Example: Company doesn't sign amendment to add 401(k) feature until 2024
      - ▶ Plan is NOT grandfathered

## Grandfathered 403(b) Plans



- ▶ Rules are slightly different for 403(b) plans
  - ▶ 403(b) plan must be signed before December 29, 2022
    - Whether or not it provided for elective deferrals

#### ► Example:

- Charity adopted 403(b) plan in 2020 that provided only for employer nonelective contributions
- ► Employer amends plan in 2026 to add elective deferral feature
- ► Plan is nonetheless grandfathered

## Grandfathered Plans in Mergers and Spinoffs



- ► A spinoff of a grandfathered plan is a grandfathered plan
- ► A merger of two grandfathered plans is a grandfathered plan
- ► Single employer plans:
  - ► If a grandfathered plan merges with a non-grandfathered plan, it isn't grandfathered
  - ► Exception:
    - ▶ Plan merger follows a company merger/acquisition
    - ► Coverage transition rule period is still in effect when plan merger occurs
    - Grandfathered plan is the surviving plan

#### Example

- ► New Horizons has grandfathered 401(k) plan
- ► Future Tech has Non-GF plan
- ► Both plans are calendar year
- ▶ New Horizons buys stock of Future Tech on March 1, 2025
  - ► Coverage transition period applies until December 31, 2026
- ▶ Future Tech plan is merged into New Horizons plan on January 1, 2026
- ▶ New Horizons plan remains grandfathered for all participants
- ► But:
  - ▶ If Future Tech is the surviving plan, it is NOT GF
  - ▶ If plan merger takes place in 2027 (after transition period), it is NOT GF



### Multiple Employer Plans (MEPs/PEPs)

- ► Status of each employer in a MEP is determined separately under normal GF rules, regardless of date MEP was established
- ► Example:
  - ► A adopted MEP as a new plan in 2021: Grandfathered
  - ▶ B adopted MEP as a new plan in 2023: Not grandfathered
- ► Mergers into MEPs
  - ► Merger of grandfathered plan into MEP stays grandfathered
    - ► Even if MEP adopted after 12/28/2022
- ► Merger of two MEPs doesn't impact status of underlying plans
- ► Spinoff of plan from MEP is grandfathered if that portion of the MEP was grandfathered within the MEP

# MEP Example 1



- ► Reliable Tools (RT) adopted the RT 401(k) Plan on January 1, 2024
- ▶On December 31, 2024, Reliable Tools merges the RT Plan into a MEP, which was effective in 2021
- ► Because the RT Plan wasn't a GF plan before the merger, the RT portion of the plan within the MEP is not GF
- ▶ Other adopting employers of the MEP are not affected

# MEP Example 2



- ▶ Reliable Tools (RT) adopted the RT 401(k) Plan on January 1, 2022
- ▶On December 31, 2024, Reliable Tools merges the RT Plan into a MEP that was effective in 2023
- ► Because the RT Plan was a GF plan before the merger, the RT portion of the plan within the MEP is still GF
- ▶ Other adopting employers of the MEP are not affected
- ▶If RT later spins out its portion of the MEP
  - ► The spun off plan is still GF

# MEP Example 3

- ▶ Big Corp merges GF plan into MEP
  - ▶ Still GF
- ▶Big Corp buys Little Corp
  - ► Little Corp has non-GF plan
- ▶Big Corp merges Little Corp's plan into its portion of MEP during coverage transition period
- ► Entire Big Corp portion of plan is GF



## **Controlled Group Rules**



► Plan amendments to expand coverage to other employees of the employer or related employers do not cause plan to lose grandfathered status

#### ► Example:

- ► A, B, and C are in controlled group
- ► A has grandfathered plan that just covers A employees
- ► A amends plan to cover B and C employees, as well, effective in 2027
- ► Plan retains grandfathered status

## **New Employer Exemption**

- ►MAE doesn't apply for a plan year if, as of the first day of the plan year, the employer maintaining the plan (aggregated with any predecessor employer) has been in existence for less than 3 years
  - ► MAE applies as of the first plan year following the year containing the company's 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary

#### ► Example:

- ► ABC is formed on 9/1/2025
- ► Sets up calendar year 401(k) plan on 10/15/2025
- ► MAE does not apply until 1/1/2029

#### Beware of Predecessor Employers



- ► No definition of predecessor employer in regulations
  - Preamble asks if they need one
  - ► Treas. Reg. §1.415(f)-1(c)(2): Does new business continue substance of prior business?
- ► Predecessor employer example (if the §415 rules apply)
  - ► ABC is formed on 9/1/2025
  - ▶ Buys out XYZ (formed in 2019) in asset deal and continues XYZ business (XYZ constitutes predecessor)
  - ► ABC sets up calendar year 401(k) plan on 10/15/2025
  - ▶ Plan is immediately subject to MAE because predecessor is > 3 years old

# Open issue: Related Employers



- ► Tech Giant formed in 2018
- ► Tech Giant forms new subsidiary in <u>new</u> field: Baby Tech, in 2024
  - ▶ Is Tech Giant a predecessor employer?

► Is Baby Tech a new business regardless of whether Tech Giant is a predecessor employer?

## **Small Employer Exemption**



- ►MAE doesn't apply before the first plan year that begins at least 12 months after the close of the first taxable year of the employer with respect to which that employer normally employed more than 10 employees
- ► What does "normally employ" mean? Glad you asked!
  - ▶ Based on COBRA regulations: Treas. Reg. §54.4980B-2, Q&A 5
- Notice we look at the employer's <u>tax year</u> to determine if exemption applies
  - ► Exemption applies/ceases to apply the next following plan year

# Who Counts Towards "Normally Employed"?



- ► All common law employees of the plan sponsor
  - ► Whether or not they participate or will ever be eligible to participate
  - ▶ Union and nonunion
  - ► Full-time and part-time
- ► Who doesn't count:
  - ► Sole proprietors
  - ► Partners in entity taxed as partnership
  - ► Independent contractors and directors (as such)

# What Does it Mean to "Normally Employ"?



- ► An employer is considered to have normally employed no more than 10 employees during a particular fiscal year if, and only if, it had no more than 10 employees on at least 50% of its typical business days during that year
- ▶ Can calculate it on a daily basis or based on payroll periods, but must do so consistently throughout the fiscal year

## Part-Time Employees

- ► Count as partial employees
- ► Example:
  - ► Full-time employees work 8 hours per day
  - ► Allen works 10 hours: counts as 1 employee
  - ▶ Betty works 6 hours: counts as ¾ employee
  - ► Charlie works 2 hours: Counts as ¼ employee
  - ► Total = 2 employees
- ► Cannot treat full-time employee as having more than 8 hours/day or 40 hours/week



# Small Employer Example 1



- ► Growing Pains Clinic (GPC), a partnership with a calendar tax year, sponsors a 401(k) plan with a plan year ending March 31
- ► For the 2024 tax year, GPC employs 2 doctors (the partners) and 9 additional staff
- ► The doctors are self-employed, so they <u>do not count</u> as employees under these rules
  - ► GPC has fewer than 10 employees and is exempt from MAE for the plan years beginning on April 1, 2025 and April 1, 2026

# Small Employer Example 2



- ►GPC brings in a physician's assistant and another staff member on September 1, 2025
- ► For 8 months of the tax year, they have 9 employees, and for the remaining 4 months, their headcount rises to 11
- Since they stayed under 10 employees for the majority of the year, GPC holds onto its exemption for the plan year starting on April 1, 2027

# Small Employer Example 3



- ►GPC lays off two full-time employees on February 1, 2026, but hires two part-time staff members on March 1, 2026
  - ► Each part-timer works 25 hours per week, while full-timers work 40 hours per week
  - ▶ This means the two part-timers collectively count as 1.25 employees
  - ► January: 11 employees
  - ► February: 9 employees
  - ► March through December: 10.25 employees
- ► Since GPC had more than 10 employees for over half of the 2026 tax year, it loses its exemption and must implement MAE for the plan year beginning on April 1, 2028

# Related Employers Again



- ► A and B are in a controlled group
- ► A sponsors a non-GF 401(k) plan
- ▶A has 6 employees during 2024; B has 7
- ► Suppose the plan is limited to A employees
  - ▶ Is it an exempt small employer plan?
- ▶ Suppose the plan covers employees of both A and B?
  - ▶ Is it an exempt small employer plan?

# What if You Go Back to 10 Employees or Fewer?



- ► Regulations don't explicitly address
  - ► They just say MAE applies in plan year following tax year you go over 10
- ▶I think it is unlikely you will be able to ditch MAE







# OTHER ISSUES

#### **QDIA**



- ► Investments of default deferrals must comply with QDIA regulations if participant does not make deferral election
  - ► What does that mean in a trustee-directed plan?
  - ► Maybe need to allow participant direction on default deferrals
  - ► Maybe can talk IRS into allowing trustee to invest default deferrals in QDIA, but that doesn't comply with the QDIA regulation
    - ► Must have participant choice between broad range of funds
    - ► Must have QDIA notice (can be combined with EACA notice)
    - ► How can they comply with 404a-5 notice requirement (needed for QDIA)
- ► No QDIA mandate for participants with affirmative election

#### Permissible Withdrawals



- ► Must allow permissible withdrawals
- ► Optional provision
- ► Any employee in EACA can withdraw default deferrals
- ► Plan distributes all default deferrals to effective date of request plus/minus earnings/losses
- ► Can charge same fees as other distributions
  - ► Or less
- ► No spousal consent needed for withdrawal

#### More on Permissible Withdrawals



- Withdrawal election deadline: 90 days after first paycheck with default deferral
  - ► Plan can set shorter period, at least 30 days
  - Crucial if 6-month rule doesn't apply
- ► Latest effective date of election is earlier of:
  - ▶ Payday for the 2<sup>nd</sup> payroll period that begins after the election date; or
  - ► 1<sup>st</sup> payday that is at least 30 days after election date
- ► Can treat EE with no automatic deferrals for a full plan year as having new 90-day period if automatic enrollment later begins
- ► Otherwise distribute under plan's normal distribution timing

#### **Taxation of Permissible Withdrawals**

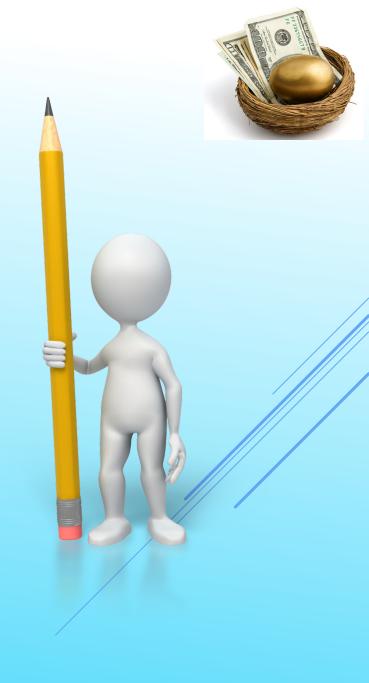


- ► Tax rules
  - ► Report on Form 1099-R
  - ► Pay tax in year of distribution (except Roth)
  - ► No 10% penalty
- ▶ Plan forfeits match
- Withdrawal is permitted notwithstanding plan distribution restrictions
- ▶ Don't take into account for purposes of
  - ► §402(g) limit
  - ► ADP/ACP test



#### New Rules on EACA Notice

- ▶ Can combine with:
  - ► QDIA notice
  - ▶ PLESA notice
  - ► ACA notice
  - ► Safe harbor notice
  - ► QACA notice



#### **Unenrolled Participant Notice and Rules**



- ► No need to provide to "unenrolled participants"
  - ► Must provide one annual reminder notice
- ▶ Reminder notice:
  - ► Furnished in connection with the annual open season election period with respect to the plan or, if none, within a reasonable period prior to the beginning of each plan year;
  - ► Understandably notifies the unenrolled participant of—
    - ▶ The unenrolled participant's eligibility to participate in the plan; and
    - ► The key benefits and rights under the plan, with a focus on employer contributions and vesting provisions

# **Unenrolled Participant**



- ▶ "Unenrolled" defined in IRC §414(bb)(2)
  - ► Eligible to participate
  - ► Has been furnished with SPD, other required notices re eligibility under ERISA §104(b)
  - ► Not participating in the plan
  - ► Satisfies "other criteria" as determined by DOT and DOL
- ► Waiting for DOL guidance regarding "other criteria"



## Thank you!



- ► S. Derrin Watson
- ► Attorney at law
- ▶ 5631 Kent Place
- ► Goleta, CA 93117
- ► sderrin@gmail.com

- Derrin's books are available at ERISApedia.com
  - ► Plan Distribution eSource
  - ➤ Who's the Employer (8<sup>th</sup> ed)
  - ► 403(b) Plan eSource
  - ▶ 457 Plan eSource
  - ▶ Plan Correction eSource (with Ilene Ferenczy and Alison Cohen)