Emerging adulthood is a new developmental construct to account for recent demographic and sociological changes which have redefined the transition to adulthood. Since there has been no previous direct exploration of this phenomenon in the Modern Orthodox Jewish community, this essay attempts to begin a critical conversation for our community by surveying relevant research in the field and proposing several features that are highly relevant for the Modern Orthodox cohort. The following topics are addressed:

1. What is emerging adulthood generally? The typical sociological features, subjective experiences, and conceptions of this period of life as well as the factors that account for the diversity of this phenomenon are explored.
2. How is religiosity experienced during this developmental period? Patterns of religious and spiritual development for this cohort are presented.

3. How is emerging adulthood particularly relevant for the Modern Orthodox cohort? The features of the typical experiences and conceptions of Modern Orthodox emerging adults will be hypothesized.

4. What are the important implications of these findings? Several theories regarding the opportunities and challenges that uniquely confront the Modern Orthodox cohort will be offered.

WHAT IS EMERGING ADULTHOOD?

A New Developmental Phase

The contemporary transition to adulthood has recently been captured by several terms, including arrested development, contestable adulthood, and young adulthood. Perhaps the most influential and captivating construct in psychology and sociology literature is “emerging adulthood,” which encompasses the demographic and subjective experiences of many young men and women, ages eighteen through twenty-five or thirty. Historically, adolescents transitioned immediately from dependent children to independent young adults. Yet, recent demographic trends have introduced a period in between adolescence and adulthood. Specifically, a rise of the median age of first marriage, an increase of participation in higher education, and a higher frequency of residential change have changed the typical experiences of people between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Thus, unlike their cohort in previous generations, contemporary eighteen- to thirty-year-olds tend to be mobile and freely explore options in life, love, work, and ideology before they make enduring adult commitments. They tend to enjoy the privileges and freedoms of adulthood without the responsibilities of such roles as marriage partner and parent. The phenomenon of emerging adulthood is described from three different perspectives: the typical experiences of this life stage, identification with adult status, and conceptions of criteria for adulthood achievement.

Extensive research has highlighted five main experiences that typically characterize this life stage:
1. Emerging adults tend to explore their identity as they consider different options about enduring life decisions related to work, marriage, religion, and ideology.

2. Emerging adults tend to experience this period as one of instability that entails numerous residential changes in response to love, work, education, and pursuit of adventure.

3. Emerging adulthood generally entails a focus on the self, since emerging adults have few social obligations and responsibilities toward others, whereas they have high autonomy in running their own lives and spend considerable amounts of time alone.

4. Emerging adulthood tends to be a time of feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood.

5. Emerging adults experience an age of possibilities, characterized by the first opportunity to leave difficult home and family conditions and a broad range of choices regarding the future.

In sum, emerging adulthood is experienced as a period of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and multiple possibilities.8

Besides being delayed, the achievement of adulthood status has also been redefined regarding when individuals perceive they have achieved adult status.9 For example, when asked whether they have reached adulthood, 60 percent of people between eighteen and twenty-five respond “in some ways yes, in some ways no,” whereas 5 percent respond “no,” and 35 percent respond “yes.”10 These responses indicate ambivalence about adulthood status during this period of life.11 Furthermore, the achievement of adulthood status is no longer perceived as finite or abrupt as it was previously.

Studies reveal that this cohort also has different conceptions of the criteria required for adulthood status than were held by those of previous generations. Adulthood was traditionally determined by role transitions, such as marriage, independent residence, school completion, full-time employment, and parenthood.12 Prioritization of these role transitions contributed to the traditional onset of adulthood as sudden and definite, in contrast to the current experience of a gradual and lengthy process.13 Traditional societies have also
determined adulthood status according to family capacities, such as being capable of protecting and caring for a family.\textsuperscript{14}

However, in recent surveys, American adolescents, emerging adults, and adults consistently endorsed characteristics of independence, such as forming relationships with parents as peers rather than authority figures, accepting responsibility for one’s actions, deciding personal beliefs independently, and financial independence, as the most salient markers of adulthood.\textsuperscript{15} Of secondary importance are criteria related to consideration for others and avoidance of behavior that is harmful to others.\textsuperscript{16} While high importance was ascribed to family capacities—the ability to provide a caring, financially stable, and secure home environment—role transitions such as marriage and parenthood were not considered major markers of adulthood. For example, when asked to select the necessary markers of becoming an adult, emerging adults ranked role transitions lowest.\textsuperscript{17} This phenomenon has been explained, in part, by the focus on individualism as a value for white middle-class Americans.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Cultural Diversity}

Findings have demonstrated that emerging adulthood is the most heterogeneous developmental stage, in part because of the flexible norms that guide appropriate living arrangements, educational enrollment, and social relationships during this time period.\textsuperscript{19} For example, while the average marital age has risen in industrialized countries, so has the variance of the range of marital ages.\textsuperscript{20} These variations manifest in diverse experiences, degrees of adulthood identification, and conceptions of adulthood criteria. To date, no studies have explored the phenomenon of emerging adulthood in the Modern Orthodox Jewish community. In order to shed light on this obscure area, relevant findings from studies of other cultures and subcultures as well as findings regarding individual differences will be presented.

The divergent patterns of this life stage have been explored in different countries as well as in different ethnic and subcultures within the United States. Studies in China, Israel, and Argentina reveal variations in the degree to which this cohort relates to the typical
experiences of emerging adulthood. In other countries, emerging adults were less likely than their American cohort to experience this life phase as an in-between stage\textsuperscript{21} or as a period of instability,\textsuperscript{22} whereas they were more likely to experience this stage as other-focused. Furthermore, their responses indicated both similar and discrepant conceptions of adulthood. For example, Israeli respondents generally endorsed similar criteria for adulthood as their American counterparts,\textsuperscript{23} which included independence criteria such as accepting responsibility for one’s actions and independently deciding one’s beliefs. Yet, the Israeli respondents also granted greater importance to criteria related to responsible norm-abiding behavior, which entails the avoidance of risk-taking behaviors, such as substance abuse as well as criteria related to role transitions such as marriage.

Several explanatory factors have been proposed to account for the variations in the experiences and conceptions of emerging adults in different cultures. These factors include a culture’s demography and values. Demographic variables include a younger achievement of milestones, such as marriage and family formation. For example, Chinese emerging adults tend to marry younger than their American counterparts; the Chinese average marital age is twenty-three versus twenty-six in the United States. Similarly, Chinese emerging adults tend to complete their education and assume the responsibility of providing for a family at a younger age.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, the culture’s conventional morals or values, such as individualism versus collectivism or emphasis on the family unit versus individual accomplishments, may also affect emerging adulthood in a given society. For example, Israeli eighteen-year-old emerging adults are influenced to value the welfare of the collective through their mandatory conscription in the army during this age period.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Subculture Synthesis}

The variation of emerging adulthood experiences and conceptions between subcultures within the United States is perhaps more nuanced. In a review of studies exploring diverse experiences of emerging adulthood, the authors reflected that “there may be cultural differences within countries that are . . . greater than differences
between similar groups across countries. Thus, emerging adults in subcultures often experience a clash between the majority culture’s values and their subculture’s ideals, resulting in an integration of the demographic variables and values of the dominant culture with the unique characteristics of their subculture.

In a study of ethnic subcultures in the United States, the responses of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos who have been exposed to both the majority culture in America and their own heritage subculture reflected certain patterns of the majority culture but also differed in significant ways. For example, the emerging adult respondents tended to endorse criteria for adulthood that reflected independence (e.g., accepting responsibility for one’s actions) as frequently as whites. Yet, members of the ethnic minority groups tended to endorse criteria for adulthood that related to family capacities (e.g., supporting a family financially), norm-compliance (e.g., driving safely), and role transitions (e.g., marriage) more frequently than their white peers. These variations were attributed to the synthesis of values from the majority culture that emphasized independence and individuality with values of the minority subculture, such as obligations to one’s family and consideration for others.

**Individual Differences**

Research has indicated two possible explanatory factors that may account for individual differences in the experiences and conceptions of emerging adults which may be particularly relevant for the Modern Orthodox cohort. These factors include an individual’s religious acculturation and marital horizon. Religious acculturation refers to the degree of identification with the values, social relationships, and traditions of a minority subculture while confronting the influence of a majority culture. This variable may account for different experiences and conceptions of emerging adulthood between individuals in a given subculture.

In a study of aboriginal college students in Canada, the degree of acculturation to the aboriginal subculture (versus the dominant Canadian majority culture) predicted variance in experiences during
this stage, perceptions of adult status, and criteria for adulthood. The highly acculturated students were less likely to experience this period of life as an in-between stage, a period of instability, or a time of self-focus. They were also more likely to report that they had already achieved certain markers of adulthood. In specific, the highly acculturated female students were more likely to report achievement of roles, such as marriage and parenthood, and the highly acculturated male students were more likely to report achievement of norm-compliance behaviors, such as avoiding substance abuse. Lastly, the highly acculturated students were more likely to endorse adulthood criteria related to family capacities, including the capability of supporting parents financially, as well as criteria related to interdependence, such as becoming less self-oriented.

A second factor in influencing emerging adulthood is strongly intertwined with the average marital age promoted by a given culture. For example, Mormon emerging adults tend to engage in few risk-taking behaviors and to generally experience a shorter and more structured emerging adulthood, which is attributed to the religion’s emphasis on early marital timing. The influence of marriage on emerging adulthood may refer both to those who are already married and to those who have strongly prioritized marriage as a goal for the near future. Marital horizon theory refers to the bidirectional relationship between emerging adults’ approach to the upcoming life stage of marriage in relation to their current experiences and values.

Two aspects of one’s perspective toward future marriage may influence one’s current emerging adulthood experiences and conceptions. The degree of prioritization of marriage as a goal and the proximity of desired marital timing may guide one’s current behaviors and values. In a recent survey, emerging adults endorsed high levels of agreement that marriage was an important part of their life goals and varied in their responses regarding the priority of marriage and the desired timing of marriage. The emerging adults who endorsed a more proximal marital age (in their early twenties) were more likely to behave as if they were married in their current behavior and values than those who expected to marry later (mid- to late twenties).
Thus, the proximity of emerging adults’ desired marital age affected their current behaviors and values related to substance use, sexual permissiveness, and family formation.

**Potentially Negative Consequences of This New Life Stage**

Researchers and social commentators debate whether emerging adulthood is a positive phenomenon for the individual or for society. Criticisms of this prolonged journey to adulthood include the danger “that these young people would not develop adult skills and might experience ‘happy’ developmental stagnation through overprotection.” Critics allege that this overprotection underprepares the emerging adult for independence and self-sufficiency and does not provide the tools needed to focus, make decisions, and assume adult responsibilities. Research indicates that emerging adults who identify themselves as an adult earlier than their peers are less depressed and anxious, and engage in fewer risk-taking behaviors in comparison to those who identified as in between childhood and adulthood, because they have already committed to important decisions. Negative consequences of a prolonged transition to adulthood also abound for the general society, including the economic burden of supporting the emerging adult in an extended path to financial independence, the current increase in divorce and decrease in fertility rates, and reduced future earning power.

**RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD**

The commitment to traditional, formal, and observable expressions of religion remarkably declines during this life stage. In fact, a higher proportion of people between eighteen and twenty-nine does not identify with any religious group (22 percent) in comparison to the proportion of the total U.S. adult population (15 percent). This decline in levels of religious commitment and participation in institutionalized religion persists regardless of religious upbringing. In a study of 140 emerging adults, no correlation was found between the degree of childhood socialization and current religious beliefs or practices. It is unclear whether this trend reflects a generational shift
toward decreased religiosity or a cross-sectional pattern of temporary reduction in religiosity which will rebound with the advent of the next developmental stage of family formation.

While tending to reject formal and institutional religion, emerging adults may increase their exploration of different expressions of spirituality, and they tend to endorse forms of religiosity that represent highly individualized combinations of different beliefs and practices from a variety of religious influences. In the executive summary of an ambitious study titled “OMG: How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era,” the author concludes:

Generation Y does seek community and meaningful involvements, though often in informal and non-traditional ways. Religious faith and commitment is one route by which young people find meaning, value, and community, though their religious pluralism complicates what this looks like in practice.

Emerging adults tend to be oblivious or skeptical toward traditional religious institutions either because of negative experiences in the past or because of a perceived compromise on individuality. So, while Jewish emerging adults express high levels of pride and self-confidence about their Jewish identity, they feel alienated from existing Jewish institutions and communities.

Additionally, this cohort enjoys a high degree of choice, where they can decide where and when they work, marry, and socialize. They are exposed to unprecedented racial, ethnic, sexual, and religious diversity. Consequently, this cohort tends to have more liberal and progressive views on such social issues as gay marriage and immigration in comparison to older generations.

However, a significant minority of emerging adults (27 percent) reported having a strong religious commitment. These emerging adults reported that they were more likely to attend worship services regularly (71 percent), have friends who practice the same religion (56 percent), and firmly integrate all aspects of formal and informal religious attachment into their lives than their less religiously committed peers.
It was this group of respondents who strongly endorsed religious values that have been associated with unique experiences of emerging adulthood. These religiously committed participants tended to endorse traditional views on sexuality and marriage and to express stronger connections to family and community.

Research on the impact of traditional religious commitment on emerging adulthood conceptions and experiences has largely focused on the Mormon community. The Mormon Church strongly endorses early marriage and family formation. For example, there is a significantly lower average marital age in Utah, where 60 percent of the population is Mormon, than other states (23 years old for men, and 21 years old for women) and a higher likelihood that students at a Mormon university will marry while in college (60 percent of men, and 45 percent of women). Religiously committed Mormons were less likely to experience this period as a time of identity exploration and multiple possibilities. For example, responses concerning their religious identity, selecting a marriage partner, and certainty about religious beliefs suggested that Mormons had already decided several important decisions that the majority of U.S. emerging adults were still exploring. They also were less likely to experience this period as a time of instability and self-focus, and tended to avoid risk-taking behaviors. Lastly, they were less likely to experience this phase as an in-between period and reported that they already achieved several of the criteria traditionally associated with adulthood, such as marriage. They also tended to endorse other-oriented criteria more frequently than their peers.

AN EMERGING PICTURE OF MODERN ORTHODOX EMERGING ADULTS

The Jewish community comprises 1.6 percent of the total U.S. population; 10 percent of it is Orthodox. The Orthodox denomination is disproportionately younger than other Jewish denominations. For example, 34 percent of those who affiliate with synagogues at all between ages eighteen and thirty-four affiliate with an Orthodox synagogue. While it is difficult to determine what percentage of Orthodox eighteen- to thirty-year-olds identifies as Modern Orthodox,
it appears that the construct of emerging adulthood is particularly salient for this subgroup.

The Modern Orthodox cohort appears to share several features of the aforementioned typical emerging adulthood experiences and conceptions, such as an extended and increasingly ambiguous pathway toward adulthood. Yet, it is likely that the Modern Orthodox emerging adulthood trajectory significantly diverges as well. This cohort appears to experience a truncated emerging adulthood, marked by fewer experiences over a shorter period of time. Modern Orthodox emerging adults tend to have fewer experiences of identity exploration, feeling in-between,\textsuperscript{60} instability, or self-focus than their American cohort.\textsuperscript{61} Furthermore, they are more likely to experience this stage as other-focused and to grant greater importance to other-oriented criteria as requisite for adulthood achievement. These deviations may be attributed to Orthodox Judaism’s promotion of other-oriented values and early achievement of developmental milestones, such as family formation.

As a subculture within the United States, Modern Orthodox Jews are influenced both by the values of Jewish tradition and by the values of the pervasive majority culture, hopefully in that order. Therefore, Modern Orthodox experiences and conceptions of emerging adulthood will likely reflect a conflict between and synthesis of competing trends and values. Individual differences in these experiences and conceptions may be explained by the degree to which an individual acculturates to the Orthodox community, commits to a traditional lifestyle, and prioritizes marriage as a proximal life goal.

Modern Orthodox emerging adults may be at a crossroads in their religious and spiritual development. Some tend to intensify their commitment to formal or traditional religion. They may be emboldened by their desire to rebel against a society they perceive as increasingly secular, without values, and unbridled. They tend to seek a counterculture existence by adhering to passionate religious guides with strong commitments to prescriptive tradition, such as Haredi models of Judaism.\textsuperscript{62} This is often supported and encouraged by education provided by yeshivot and seminaries. Others may stagnate. Their close connections to their community and family of origin
both propel and limit their present religiosity. For example, they may zealously initiate and loyally participate in a minyan that is devoid of devotional prayer and kavanah, but authentically reproduces their own Young Israel at home.

Others may be influenced by the generational trend to decrease formal religious involvement, either temporarily or permanently. They may seek highly individualized expressions of spirituality that will satisfy their pursuit of personal meaning and address their skepticism toward formal institutions and communities. Modern Orthodox emerging adults may also be challenged by their first confrontations with progressive and liberal perspectives and an unprecedentedly religiously, ethnically, and culturally diverse cohort.

**IMPLICATIONS: KEY THEMES**

Strong evidence corroborated by personal experience indicates four trends which warrant further exploration: a condensed experience of the typical emerging adulthood trajectory, conflicting criteria regarding adulthood achievement, engagement with diversity, and the prevalence of communal and individual entitlement. These trends present both challenges and opportunities that should be further addressed and explored.

**Forced Identity Foreclosure**

The Modern Orthodox community likely deviates from the common features of emerging adulthood and experiences a condensed and lighter emerging adulthood, if one at all. There may be several benefits to this trajectory, as mentioned above. Yet, Modern Orthodox emerging adults may experience identity diffusion, or the inability to commit to important life decisions because they are struggling to integrate competing values and expectations from their religious community and secular society. Alternatively, Modern Orthodox emerging adults who engage in a society that promotes (or necessitates) an extended period of identity exploration, while feeling pressure to commit earlier than their peers, may experience identity foreclosure, a premature commitment to an identity without sufficient exploration. These
challenges of navigating competing goals and expectations and committing to critical life decisions in an unsupportive context may lead to regret and disappointment, particularly in areas of family formation and religious identity.

This may be one of several factors that contribute to the rising marital age and increased number of singles in Modern Orthodox communities. Modern Orthodox emerging adults’ expectations for romantic relationships and eventual marriage partners may entail conflicting and unrealistic expectations. For example, they are increasingly informed by media, pop culture, and peers’ portrayals of multiple relationships over an extended period of time versus religious messages of fidelity, commitment, and modesty. They may have difficulty committing to a partner without the former experiences.

Modern Orthodox emerging adults may also be prematurely forced into religious trajectories, either by themselves or by others. The foreclosure on religious identity may alienate the emerging adult by minimizing his genuine journey, which is conversely validated by secular society. For example, a nineteen-year-old who has “flipped out in Israel” may be genuinely exploring one of many possible identities rather than merely being “brainwashed.” He may try one path and then decide on another. Alternatively, an emerging adult may have serious religious questions or overwhelming curiosity which drives him to explore a secular or alternative lifestyle. If religious mentors respect (even if they do not condone) this exploration and continue to foster a relationship, the door is opened for a return to commitment of faith. Alternatively, by judging, evaluating, or distancing, the religious mentor may crystallize a temporary exploration into a permanent lifestyle or foreclose an important, and perhaps legitimate, quest.

**Competing Criteria for Adulthood**

Modern Orthodox emerging adults are likely facing competing criteria for adulthood, similar to members of other religious subcultures. Community emphasis on role transitions such as marriage and parenting compete with the societal emphasis on advanced degrees, longer education, and impressive achievements in the workforce. The
Modern Orthodox cohort is likely affected by emerging adults’ high expectations for future roles, including careers that are both lucrative and fulfilling and spouses who are both partners and soul-mates. Similar to other emerging adults, they are thrust into an increasingly complex and competitive economy that demands more schooling. Yet, as they pursue these lofty (and sometimes unattainable) goals, they are also struggling to transition to the roles of spouse and parent.

These competing criteria may be particularly challenging for women, who often must balance (the blessed burden of) taking care of young families while finishing school and launching a career. They often compete for grades and job opportunities against peers who are singularly devoted to academic and professional achievement. They are often faced with difficult decisions regarding childcare, due to the expense and unavailability of quality childcare options. In short, these young couples struggle to balance the financial, emotional, and logistical aspects of starting a family while pursuing academic and professional achievements. Often, the grandparents are expected to contribute to this otherwise impossible juggling act.

Furthermore, women who are single may experience a heightened sensitivity to their marginalization in the Modern Orthodox community. These women may have achieved adult status in the workforce through their achievement of criteria related to financial and emotional independence, yet they may still be perceived as immature by those in the Modern Orthodox community who define adulthood achievement by role transitions, such as marriage. While they are welcomed, applauded, and respected in the professional domain, they feel judged, pigeon-holed, and excluded from the family-centered Modern Orthodox community, which only recognizes them as “eligible” rather than as “accomplished.”

**Engagement with Diversity**

As 70 percent of the Modern Orthodox cohort attends secular universities and increasingly engages in a generation that is the most racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse, they are often confronted with the “other” up close for the first time. They also tend to engage
in academic and social discourse that is remarkably politically and socially liberal. This access to diversity and progressive ideology may challenge their commitment to tradition, but it also may embolden them. They may be religiously inspired and engaged by the interaction with the other, whether a peer who is passionately committed to a different faith or one who is completely secular and inspired by their own religious lifestyle. Many emerging adults are curious and want to engage in meaningful conversations that transcend boundaries. At NYU, the most impactful Jewish experiences for some Jewish day school graduates have been interfaith programs with religiously committed peers. Ironically, these encounters have often inspired a rededication to traditional observance.

This engagement is often inevitable and unavoidable, so the Modern Orthodox community must carefully consider how to convey messages and engage in conversations related to cultural superiority or the notion of chosenness, denominational differences, gender disparities, and sexual diversity. Modern Orthodox emerging adults are alienated by religious teachers whom they perceive as racist, biased, or homophobic, and there is clearly a generational divide regarding sensitivity to these issues. For example, one NYU student left his yeshiva in Israel at the beginning of the year because a rabbi had made a racially insensitive comment about the poster of an African American basketball player hanging on his wall. As a community, we must frame these forums sensitively and appreciate that these conversations are opportunities for education and growth. If we are not convening these conversations, we risk appearing irrelevant or insecure.

Furthermore, we must provide more outlets for multiple forms of spirituality within the Modern Orthodox community. Some of our most religiously committed students seek to engage with what they perceive as controversial, edgy, and new, such as Machon Hadar. Are we creating enough of these opportunities within the Modern Orthodox community? We should capitalize on our rich tradition of engaging with the secular and provide our own models of multiple forms of religious expression.
Individual and Communal Entitlement

The tendency of emerging adults to be self-focused also influences the Modern Orthodox cohort. While Judaism provides a healthy antidote to this tendency through its strong emphasis on ḥesed and tikkun olam, and while it appears that religious emerging adults are more inclined to be other-focused than their peers, they are inevitably afflicted by this contagious sense of entitlement. They feel entitled to a community of convenience. While many take initiative and contribute tirelessly for the benefit of others and the promotion of Jewish life, others need to be constantly invited, on their terms, at their time. They expect to be pursued, to be fed, to be entertained, and then to be congratulated. And some will still check out.

Their college Jewish life is framed by a Birthright mentality, in which they are entitled to fellowships, stipends, and free trips to enrich their Judaism. This mindset may affect even the most giving and other-focused students. For example, a selfless leader in our community presented the need of providing students with a funded trip to South Africa to do goodwill. She did not stop to think why others should fund such an excursion or what possible good they could bring. Participants on a heavily subsidized service-learning trip to Israel routinely asked for more stipends and funding—as did their parents. Some of the same students spend Passover in five-star hotels and routinely take three exotic vacations a year.

The flip side of this sense of entitlement and self-focus is, perhaps, a pervasive sense of loneliness and dispensability. Modern Orthodox emerging adults are exploring how they are unique and what they can uniquely contribute to their community and to the broader society. Invitations to lead, rather than to participate, often prove transformative in their trajectory. Many have “big questions and worthy dreams”71 that will only be acknowledged through personal and respectful attention.

Arguably, the Modern Orthodox feel entitled as a community. We have relegated the religious nurturance of young Modern Orthodox emerging adults to other organizations and to secular benefactors. As a community, we are not adequately investing in providing resources for the navigation of this defining period in which major life decisions
are made. It seems that many Modern Orthodox parents feel that they have already invested adequately in emerging adults’ Jewish education heretofore, and if their children need more, it is time for someone else to foot the bill. Many Orthodox organizations focus on Jewish education through twelfth grade, yet refuse funding to this important cohort. Aside from institutions like Yeshiva University and Touro College, which accept tuition, the Orthodox Union, through its Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus (JLIC) program, is arguably the only Orthodox organization that has prioritized serving the needs of this cohort. Furthermore, we have not addressed the opportunity to engage the 47 percent of emerging adults who are religiously “undecided.” What, if any, is our responsibility toward them?

TO CONCLUDE . . . (OR TO BEGIN)

This essay has aimed to integrate relevant sociological, demographic, and developmental research with personal experience and anecdotal evidence to ask several questions and begin this critical conversation. Regarding future communal policy, the most confident assertion of this essay is that more research is desperately needed to examine this critical life stage in the Modern Orthodox cohort. Attention and resources have been generously dedicated to this pursuit in the secular domain, in other religious domains, and in the secular Jewish cohort, but little attention has focused on the rigorous study of the Modern Orthodox emerging adult cohort. How does the Modern Orthodox community experience and understand emerging adulthood? What are the strengths, challenges, and opportunities of meeting the needs of this cohort?

This life period is one in which major life decisions are determined which set a trajectory for the future. Emerging adults are remarkably vulnerable and yet tremendously capable. Will we invest in their unlimited potential and ensure that their promising journey brings them toward realizing their individual and our collective potential?
NOTES

1. Several articles cited in this essay address related topics, but none specifically addresses the construct of emerging adulthood within the Modern Orthodox community. Personal conversations with major researchers in this field, including Jason Carroll, an expert on Mormon emerging adults, and J. J. Arnett, the father of the field, have confirmed this gap.


3. Different articles identify this period of life as ending at ages twenty-five, twenty-eight, or thirty. Most of the articles cited in the paper were conducted with the eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old cohort, although the broadest range is generally used for consistency.


social and cultural factors.” Child Development Perspectives 1, 86–91.
33. See the debate between Hendry & Kloep (2007), “Conceptualizing emerging adulthood: Inspecting the emperor’s new clothes,” and Arnett, J.J. “Emerging adulthood: What is it, and what is it good for?” in Child Development Perspectives 1(2).
42. This was conducted with a largely Christian sample.
44. This is also identified in the literature on informal and intrinsic forms of religion.
52. For example, 91 percent endorsed that young people should postpone sex until they are married.
64. Lewis (2003) discusses this in reference to minority ethnicities that value deference to authority and interdependence.
72. For example, the AVI CHAI Foundation and the Board of Jewish Education.
73. See, for example, project READY, conducted by the Mormon community at Brigham Young University, and the Jewish Emerging Adulthood Conference convened by Hillel through a Covenant grant.