



# On the Way to Adulthood: Factors Contributing to the Life Satisfaction of Young Israeli Modern Orthodox Women

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## Abstract

Drawing on ecological theory, the current study examined the associations of religious versus secular environments, relationship with the mother, and personal characteristics (religious coping strategies; self-mastery; sexual self-concept) with the life satisfaction of Israeli Young Modern Orthodox women and a comparison group of secular women. A sample of 362 women aged 18–29 completed quantitative questionnaires. High levels of sexual self-concept and self-mastery, positive religious coping strategies, and supportive relationship with the mother were associated with higher life satisfaction. Supportive relationships with mothers moderated the association between religious coping strategies and life satisfaction. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

**Keywords** Relationship with the mother · Religious coping strategies · Satisfaction with life · Sexual self-concept · Young modern Orthodox women

## Introduction

Traditional view has been based on the assumption that processes of identity formation occur mainly during adolescence. Demographic and social changes that have taken place in Western society have resulted in increased freedom and opportunities for young people. These changes have given social legitimacy to more extended processes of investigating and crystallizing identity (Arnett, 2000). Consequently, scholars have defined a new developmental phase termed "Emerging Adulthood" (Arnett, 2006). During this period, which generally extends from age 18 to 29, young adults form their identities in reference to romantic relations, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2005).

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The current study focuses on a unique group of emerging adults, young Modern Orthodox women in Israel, and explores factors that may contribute to their satisfaction with life. “National-religious” is the term used to refer to around 16% of Israel’s Jewish population (Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This sector comprises a variety of communities that differ from each other in many ways, but share common characteristics. These include being gainfully employed and socially integrated in mainstream Israeli society, and simultaneously adhering to Orthodox Judaism (Ben-Shlomo et al., 2022b). National religious young women engage in processes of self-exploration that, on the one hand, are committed to the Western world and the freedom it provides, and on the other hand, to the more conservative norms of their religious community (Aran, 2003).

The study is based on ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which contends that children’s development results from interactions between five nested ecological environments. The most influential of these is the microsystem, that is, the immediate setting in which people grow up (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We therefore focused on a major feature of this system, examining how a religious versus secular environment shapes young women’s satisfaction with life. Another aspect of the microsystem are relationships between individuals and their closest circles (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), such as the types of available support. In this context, we examined the supportive relationship with the mother.

Other scholars added the ontogenic system (e.g., Belsky, 1981) to the original five environments. These include factors related to the individual, such as personal characteristics. The current study examines the contribution of three such factors to satisfaction with life: religious strategies, self-mastery, and sexual self-concept.

### **The Immediate Environment and Relationship with the Mother**

The identity of the Modern Orthodox sector in Israel is built on three major foundations: religion, nationality, and openness to modernity. Members of the community position themselves between two minority groups, the national Ultra-Orthodox and the liberal Orthodox (Herman et al., 2014). The openness of the community is expressed in their adoption of the practices of a democratic society and lifestyle, including affording career opportunities to women. However, whereas young secular women are allowed a relatively long time for exploration on the road to adulthood, Modern Orthodox women are expected to marry young, to start a family immediately, and to run their homes as dictated by Jewish religious tradition and values. At the same time, they are expected to acquire a higher education and help in providing financially for the family (Schwartz & Baumel-Schwartz, 2012).

Modern Orthodox women in Israel first come into close contact with secular society after graduation from a religious high school (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2009). It is at this point in their lives that they encounter key concepts in Western society, such as autonomy and critical thinking (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2009). As a result, they are routinely faced with conflicting messages as they attempt to cope with their different roles in the religious and modern worlds (Rappoport et al., 1995). Given these circumstances, their developmental process may be more complex and conflictual

than that of young secular women (Herman et al., 2014; Schachter, 2002), thereby affecting their satisfaction with life.

**Satisfaction with life** refers to a person's cognitive assessment of their subjective well-being and reflects how satisfied they are with their life in terms of the criteria they set for themselves (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1985). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

Research conducted both in Israel and elsewhere indicates a higher level of satisfaction with life among the religious than among the secular (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Wilchek-Aviad & Malka, 2016). It has been suggested that these findings stem from the sense of meaning afforded by religious faith, and the positive feeling of stability and certainty provided by faith and religious practices (Koeing, 2001). Creating an environment that supports subjective well-being (WHO, 2018) may increase a woman's satisfaction with her life in the period of emerging adulthood. One of the key resources in this regard is her relationship with her mother.

The importance of a woman's relationship with her parents in general, and with her mother in particular, and its contribution to life satisfaction is well established (e.g., Deb et al., 2020). Most psychological theories posit that perception of the relationship with the mother is a significant factor in the formation of women's identities (Cwikel, 2016; Gilligan, 1993). Psychoanalytic theories maintain that women tend to internalize the values and behaviors of the mother, as well as the meaning the mother attributes them (Boyd, 1989).

The mother–daughter dyad is marked by several periods of transition, and may even be viewed as having a “life cycle” (Fischer, 1981), with the developmental period of young adulthood being one of the milestones in this relationship. Arnett (2000) terms this stage the “in-between age,” as the individual is no longer a teenager but has yet to define their mature identity. Most previous studies that relate to the mother–daughter relationship in religious communities at this time in the daughter's life were conducted in the context of her marriage (e.g., Frydman, 2022). However, this relationship also has other implications for young Modern Orthodox women, where the parents play a central role in religious socialization (Bengtson et al., 2009). The mother is perceived as the main role model for her daughter (Boyd, 1989), and the maternal relationship is considered an important protective factor (Israel-Cohen, 2012).

## Personal Characteristics

**Religious coping strategies** are one of the key characteristics of young women in the Modern Orthodox community in Israel (Ben Shlomo et al., 2022b), and may serve as a protective factor in emerging adulthood (Fatima et al., 2022). Positive religious coping strategies involve a strong connection with God, such as perceiving life events to be part of a larger plan, while negative religious coping strategies

entail a weaker connection with God, such as a reappraisal of divine power (Abu-Raiya & Agbaria, 2018).

A study conducted among Jews in North America and elsewhere around the globe found an association between positive religious coping strategies and better mental health (Rosmarin et al., 2009). Moreover, a recent study assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on 419 American Orthodox Jews found that positive religious coping, intrinsic religiosity, and trust in God strongly correlated with less stress and more positive impact, while negative religious coping strategies and mistrust in God yielded inverse associations with these outcomes (Pirutinsky et al., 2020). Yet another study found religious beliefs and practices to be associated with fewer depressive symptoms among young adults. The authors suggest that the inclusion of religious/spirituality-oriented strategies may be important for mental health interventions in emerging adulthood (Gwin et al., 2020).

**Sexual self-concept** is a developmental product of culture and environment that begins in adolescence and continues into young adulthood, and is related to sexual arousal (Crockett et al., 2006). It consists of three main dimensions: sexual openness, or recognition of sexual pleasure and arousal and the feeling that one has the right to engage in specific sexual behaviors; sexual esteem, that is, a positive evaluation of one's sexuality and ability to appraise sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and sexual anxiety, or tension and discomfort regarding the implications of one's sexuality on one's life (Hensel et al., 2011). Several studies indicate an association between sexual self-concept and satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1995; Donaghue, 2009).

Sexual development during adolescence and young adulthood does not take place in a social vacuum (Smetana et al., 2006). As a result, greater attention is now being paid to social contexts and interpersonal relations in the study of youth sexuality (Van de Bongardt, 2019). In traditional societies, certain taboos typically restrict the development of sexual self-concept (Garcia & Kruger, 2010). Along the same lines, Jewish religious law defines prohibitions and commandments pertaining to sexual behavior (Ribner & Rosenbaum, 2005). Young Modern Orthodox women are often subject to negative messages concerning their sexuality, warnings against the danger posed by the female body, and bans on feelings of passion (Marmon Grumet, 2008). Consequently, the sexual urges of young women in this community may conflict with religious social codes that mandate avoidance of thoughts about sexuality outside of the marital relationship. Suppression of the exploration and development of young Modern Orthodox women's sexual self-concept (Crockett et al., 2006) could potentially reduce their life satisfaction.

**The sense of self-mastery** provided by religious belief and its associated practices may serve as a protective variable in transitional periods (Cheadle et al., 2018). Consequently, it can reduce uncertainties and buffer their negative psychosocial consequence and may therefore be associated with satisfaction with life (Ben-Shlomo et al., 2022a). Self-mastery refers to the degree to which the individual perceives that they can influence circumstances and events in their life (Mausbach et al., 2008; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

In a study of Australian youngsters, a positive association was found between sense of self-mastery and satisfaction with life (Hong & Giannakopoulos, 1994).

The authors suggest that the better adaptability and higher self-esteem typical of people with a high sense of self-mastery serve to increase their satisfaction with life. We were unable to find any previous studies that specifically explored the relationship between self-mastery and life satisfaction among young religious women.

## The Current Study

The current study was conducted in the light of the ecological theory and examined one of the significant transitional periods of young individuals in Western society—The transition to young adulthood. In practice, we examine how the life satisfaction of national religious young women compared to their secular counterparts is related to personality variables and the relationship with the mother. Finally, as the ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) stresses the interactions between nested ecological environments, we also sought to learn whether the relationship with the mother moderates the association between religious coping strategies and satisfaction with life. To the best of our knowledge, this possibility has never previously been examined.

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. A correlation will be found between sexual self-concept and satisfaction with life: the higher the sexual self-concept the higher the satisfaction with life, and the lower the sexual self-concept the lower the satisfaction with life.
2. A correlation will be found between sense of self-mastery and satisfaction with life: the higher the sense of self-mastery the higher the satisfaction with life, and the lower the sense of self-mastery the lower the satisfaction with life.
3. A correlation will be found between religious coping strategies and satisfaction with life: greater use of positive religious strategies will be associated with higher satisfaction with life, and greater use of negative religious strategies will be associated with lower satisfaction with life.
4. A correlation will be found between perceived relationship with the mother and satisfaction with life: higher perception of a supportive relationship will be associated with higher satisfaction with life, and higher perception of a discordant relationship will be associated with lower satisfaction with life.

In addition, considering the lack of literature on which to rely, the following research questions were also explored:

1. Are there differences between young Modern Orthodox women and young secular women in levels of satisfaction with life?
2. What is the unique and combined contribution of the environmental and personal variables to the explained variance in satisfaction with life?

3. Does perceived relationship with the mother moderate the correlation between religious coping strategies and satisfaction with life?

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The study was conducted in 2017, after approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the university's School of Social Work. Participants were recruited by means of convenience sampling. To reach a diverse population of young women, the questionnaire was distributed through community social networks at concentrations of young Modern Orthodox and secular women (Educational frameworks for young women within universities and communities of national religious families and secular families).

The purpose of the study was presented as to examine the satisfaction with life, of young women. Those who agreed to participate in the study signed an informed consent form in which it was stated that she could leave the study at any time without being harmed.

Three hundred and eighty-six women were recruited for the study, 311 of them through community social networks. Twenty-four participants were excluded because they returned incomplete questionnaires and/or were not within the specified age range (18–29). The final sample, therefore, consisted of 362 women, 231 of whom defined themselves as Modern Orthodox and 131 as secular. Mean age of the participants was 24.03 ( $SD=3.90$ ), with the mean age of religious women lower than that of secular women (23.1 and 25.6 for religious and secular, respectively). Mean years of education was 14.27 ( $SD=2.31$ ) for the secular group, and 13.60 ( $SD=2.58$ ) for the religious. The majority of participants were single (54.1%), with 26.0% married, and 19.9% in a committed romantic relationship. In terms of employment, 35.9% of secular women were employed as compared to 26.4% of the religious women. In both groups, the majority worked part time or in temporary work, and only 30% were employed full time. About a third of the participants (35.2%) lived with their parents, and a similar number (36.3%) lived with a partner. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. The minor differences found in age, education, and romantic relationship status between the groups were controlled for in the regression analysis.

### Instruments

**Satisfaction with Life Scale** (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985), consisting of 5 items examining subjective assessment of satisfaction with life (e.g., "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal"). Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agree with the statement in each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale has shown to be a valid and reliable measure of life satisfaction, showing high internal consistency and reliability

**Table 1** Means, standard deviations, and difference-tests for study variables in the two study groups

	Modern Orthodox ( <i>n</i> = 231)		Secular ( <i>n</i> = 131)		<i>t</i> / $\chi^2$
	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>M</i>	SD	
Age	23.1	3.6	25.6	3.7	6.21***
Education	14.2	2.3	13.6	2.5	2.4***
Romantic relationship status	0.40	0.50	0.56	0.50	3.1**
Employment					
Full-time	41(26.3%)		36(32.1%)		1.1
Part-time	49(31.4%)		33(29.5%)		
Temporary	66(42.3%)		43(38.4%)		
Life satisfaction	5.20	1.10	4.69	1.34	3.09***
Sexual self-concept	4.78	1.52	5.35	1.80	0.34
Sense of mastery	3.04	0.54	3.06	0.51	0.34
Positive religious coping strategies	3.33	8.12	1.90	7.67	22.33***
Negative religious coping strategies	2.44	2.64	1.90	2.67	5.53***
Supportive relations with mother	3.28	0.88	3.39	0.93	1.16
Discordant relations with mother	2.17	0.61	2.16	0.67	0.75

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

and suited for use with different age groups and populations (Diener et al., 1985). Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.84$  has been reported for the scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993), and was 0.86 in the current study. A life satisfaction score was calculated for each participant by averaging her responses to all items, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction with life.

**Women's Sexual Self-Schema** (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994), a checklist of 50 adjectives, 26 of which are divided into three categories: passionate-romantic (e.g., *loving*; *stimulating*); open-direct (e.g., *uninhibited*); and embarrassed-conservative (e.g., *cautious*). Nineteen of these adjectives are positive and 7 are negative. The remaining items are fillers. Participants were asked to rate each of the items on a 7-point scale from 1 (*not at all descriptive of me*) to 7 (*very descriptive of me*). The analysis showed good psychometric properties and internal validity for various populations (Nowosielski et al., 2018) Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the current study was 0.79 for passionate-romantic, 0.71 for open-direct, and 0.52 for embarrassed-conservative. Following factor analysis, item 48, "revealing," was removed, raising the internal reliability for embarrassed-conservative to  $\alpha = 0.62$  and resulting in a reliability of  $\alpha = 0.79$  for the scale as a whole. A sexual self-concept score was calculated for each participant by totaling the average scores in the first two categories and subtracting the average score in the third.

**Jewish Religious Coping Scale** (JCOPE; Rosmarin et al., 2009), containing 16 items presenting different ways in which to rely on Judaism to deal with stressful problems. Twelve of the items represent positive strategies (e.g., "*I talk to my rabbi*"), and 4 represent negative strategies (e.g., "*I get mad at God*"). Participants were asked to indicate how often they behave in the manner described in each item



on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The total score for each of the subscales reflects the frequency of its use. concurrent validity for the measure was evaluated by examining correlations with indices of Jewish beliefs and practices (Rosmarin et al., 2009). in the current study, poor internal reliability was found for the negative strategies, and a positive correlation was found between the two subscales. We therefore performed factor analysis, and consequently removed item 10, "I question whether God can really do anything." We then calculated a positive and a negative coping strategy score for each participant by averaging, rather than totaling, her responses to the relevant items. Following these procedures, the internal reliability of the subscales was  $\alpha=0.89$  and  $\alpha=0.64$  for positive and negative, respectively, and Pearson examination revealed a nonsignificant negative correlation between them,  $p > 0.05$ .

**Sense of Mastery Scale** (SMS; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), containing seven items relating to the individual's sense of control over their life (e.g., "*What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me*"). Five items are phrased in reverse direction (e.g., "*I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life*"). Participants were asked to respond to each item on a 4-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Past studies have found that the mastery scale has acceptable psychometric properties (Lim et al., 2022). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the current study was 0.81. A score was calculated for each participant by averaging her responses to all items, after correcting for reverse order, with higher scores reflecting a greater sense of self-mastery.

**Network of Relationships Inventory—Relationship Qualities Version** (NRI-RQV; Buhrmester & Furman, 2008), consisting of 30 items, half of which describe supportive relationships (e.g., "*How often does this person seem really proud of you?*") and the other half discordant relationships (e.g., "*How often does this person criticize you?*"). In the current study, participants were asked to relate to their mother, indicating (Buhrmester & Furman, 2008) their responses on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*never or hardly at all*) to 5 (*always or extremely much*). The tool was validated by the authors and by other researchers in a variety of countries and populations (Buhrmester & Furman, 2008). In the current study Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.95$  was found for supportive relationships, and  $\alpha=0.87$  for discordant relationships. A score was calculated for each participant for each subscale by averaging her responses to the relevant items, with higher scores indicating a higher level of supportive or discordant qualities in the mother–daughter relationship.

A sociodemographic questionnaire was used to obtain data such as age, religiosity, and self-definition of the religious community to which the young woman belongs, years of education, employment, etc.

## Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted in four stages. In the first stage, comparative tests (Chi-square and independent samples t-tests) were performed to identify differences between the groups. In the second stage, Pearson correlations were calculated between the independent and dependent variables. Next, hierarchical regression



analysis was performed, with the background variables entered in Step 1, including a dummy variable representing religious group affiliation, sexual self-concept and sense of mastery entered in Step 2, religious coping strategies in Step 3, and perceived relationship with the mother in Step 4. In Step 5, PROCESS procedure (Hayes, 2013) was used to determine whether the quality of the relationship with the mother moderated the association between the two types of coping strategies and satisfaction with life. The Johnson Neyman technique (Johnson & Fay, 1950) was employed to examine the variance in the interactions as dependent on the precise value of mother's supportive relationship.

## Results

Comparative tests conducted to examine differences in the study variables between young Modern Orthodox women and young secular women, and particularly differences in satisfaction with life (Research Question 1), revealed a higher level of life satisfaction among religious women. Not surprisingly, this group also employed more religious coping strategies (both positive and negative). On the other hand, secular women displayed higher sexual self-concept.

Pearson correlations showed that Hypothesis 1 was fully confirmed: the higher the sexual self-concept the higher the satisfaction with life, and the lower the sexual self-concept the lower the life satisfaction. These results were observed in both groups.

Hypothesis 2 was also fully confirmed: the higher the sense of self-mastery the higher the satisfaction with life, and the lower the sense of self-mastery the lower the life satisfaction. Again, the same results were found in both groups.

Hypothesis 3 was fully confirmed in the Modern Orthodox group and partially in the secular group. Among Modern Orthodox women, the greater the use of positive religious coping strategies the higher the satisfaction with life, and the greater the use of negative strategies the lower the life satisfaction. Among secular women, a significant correlation was found between positive religious coping strategies and higher satisfaction with life, but no correlation emerged between negative strategies and life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4 was fully confirmed in both groups. For all participants, the more supportive the perceived relationship with the mother the higher the satisfaction with life, and the more discordant the maternal relationship the lower the life satisfaction (Table 2).

## Contribution of the Study Variables to Satisfaction with Life

Results of the regression analysis showed that the independent variables explained 45% of the variance in satisfaction with life. The sociodemographic variables entered in Step 1 accounted for 10.5% of the explained variance. Significant associations were found between romantic relationship status and religious group on the one hand, and satisfaction with life on the other, so that higher life satisfaction

**Table 2** Pearson Correlations between Independent Variables and Life Satisfaction in the entire sample ( $n = 362$ )

	Life satisfaction
Age	
Modern Orthodox	−0.08
Secular	0.04
Romantic relationship status	
Modern Orthodox	0.12
Secular	0.35**
Employment	
Modern Orthodox	−0.15*
Secular	0.03
Sexual self-concept	
Modern Orthodox	0.23***
Secular	0.38***
Sense of mastery	
Modern Orthodox	0.50***
Secular	0.51***
Positive religious coping strategies	
Modern Orthodox	0.24***
Secular	0.22**
Negative religious coping strategies	
Modern Orthodox	−0.34***
Secular	−0.09
Supportive relations with mother	
Modern Orthodox	0.26***
Secular	0.32***
Discordant relations with mother	
Modern Orthodox	−0.22***
Secular	−.21*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ 

was reported by women who were married or in a committed romantic relationship, as well as by Modern Orthodox women compared to their secular counterparts (Table 3).

In Step 2, sexual self-concept and sense of self-mastery contributed a further 22% to the explained variance, with significant positive associations found between both variables and satisfaction with life. Religious coping strategies, entered in Step 3, added another 7% to the explained variance, showing that the greater the use of positive strategies the higher the satisfaction with life, and the greater the use of negative strategies the lower the life satisfaction. In Step 4, perceived relationship with the mother contributed a further 2% to the explained variance, with a significant positive association between a supportive relationship and satisfaction with life.

Step 5, examining whether perceived maternal relationship moderated the association between religious coping strategies and satisfaction with life, contributed

**Table 3** Hierarchical Regression Coefficients (Beta Weights) of Life Satisfaction in the entire sample ( $n = 362$ )

	$\beta$	$t$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>			0.10	0.105***
Age	0.10	1.43		
Romantic relationship status	0.27	4.80***		
Employment	-0.08	1.32		
Religious Group <sup>#</sup>	0.21	3.92***	0.33	0.22***
<b>Step 2</b>				
Sexual self-concept	0.12	2.6**		
Sense of mastery	0.43	8.98***	0.39	0.07***
<b>Step 3</b>				
Positive religious coping strategies				
Negative religious coping strategies	0.19-	4.97***	0.33	
<b>Step 4</b>			0.41	0.02*
Supportive relations with mother	0.15	3.31***		
Discordant relations with mother	0.03	0.66		
<b>Step 5</b>			0.45	0.04*
Positive coping strategies	-0.26			
x supportive relations with mother	3.62**			
Negative coping strategies	0.06	1.4	0.45**	
x discordant relations with mother				
	$R^2$	11.3***		
	$F$			

$p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

<sup>#</sup> 0—secular, 1—Modern Orthodox

another 4% to the explained variance. Of the possible interactions entered, only the interaction between positive religious strategies and supportive relationship with the mother was found to be significant. The Johnson Neyman technique, used to examine the variance in this interaction as dependent on the precise value of the relationship with the mother, showed that when the value of the supportive relationship was lower than 3.91, there was a strong association between positive religious strategies and satisfaction with life ( $b=0.87$ ,  $t=4.56$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). However, when the value of the supportive relationship was higher, that is, 3.91 or over, no association emerged between religious strategies and satisfaction ( $b=0.23$ ,  $t=1.23$ ,  $p=0.22$ ).

## Discussion

The results of the current study demonstrate the importance of a variety of ecological environments for the satisfaction with life of young Modern Orthodox women in Israel. Moreover, they indicate differences between Modern Orthodox and Secular women.

One of the key components of the ecological model is the microsystem, that is, the immediate environment in which the individual grows up. We compared religious and secular environments, and found that young Modern Orthodox women reported higher satisfaction with life than their secular peers. This finding is in line with the results of previous empirical studies conducted both in Israel (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015) and elsewhere (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Mochon et al., 2011). As noted above, it is generally explained in terms of the meaning in life provided by religion (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005), and the positive sense of stability and security afforded by religious practice (Koeing, 2001).

Another plausible explanation is that the inherent faith and religious practices of young Modern Orthodox women, as well as the clear set of expectations from them (Herman et al., 2014), aid them in coping with emerging adulthood and protect them from aspects of this period that may reduce satisfaction with life. In a study of young Israelis, including Modern Orthodox and secular individuals of both genders, Rich and Seri (2009) found a positive association between religiosity and stability in general, and in respect to housing, education, and employment in particular. Indeed, secular youngsters are allowed a longer moratorium period for exploration before they must assume adult responsibilities. This, along with the values of Western society, including critical thinking (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2009) and self-actualization (Engelberg & Deutsch, 2010), may lead to a greater sense of confusion, thereby explaining why the young secular women in this study reported lower life satisfaction.

Furthermore, lower sexual self-concept and greater use of religious coping strategies were found among Modern Orthodox women. This is consistent with the two background variables found to contribute most to the explained variance in satisfaction with life: religious group and romantic relationship status. The finding that married women and those in a committed romantic relationship reported higher life satisfaction is in line with the literature showing that a romantic relationship is positively associated with satisfaction with life (Facio & Resett, 2014) and psychological

well-being (Johnson et al., 2012). The experience of a romantic relationship in emerging adulthood not only promotes the developmental process, but has also been linked to greater happiness and higher self-esteem (Johnson et al., 2012), both of which are significant factors in satisfaction with life. However, no correlation was found here between romantic relationship status and satisfaction with life among the Modern Orthodox women, perhaps indicating the need to consider this variable in the context of the woman's overall way of life.

Interestingly, Modern Orthodox women whose primary occupation was their job reported a lower level of satisfaction with life. No such association was found in the secular group. The explanation may lie in the fact that focusing mainly on a job or career does not meet the social expectations from young women in the Modern Orthodox community, where they are allowed less time for exploration before they are expected to start a family.

Another significant finding of this study is that higher satisfaction with life was found among young Modern Orthodox women who perceived their relationship with their mother to be more supportive. Moreover, although a direct correlation was found between discordant relations with the mother and lower life satisfaction, discordant relations was not found to predict satisfaction with life in the regression analysis. This is consistent with theoretical and empirical literature indicating that the period of emerging adulthood is accompanied by increased identification with the parents (Arnett, 2006). The relationship with the mother is considered especially significant in the identity formation of women in general (Boyd, 1989; Cwikel, 2016), and religious women in particular, since the mother plays a major moderating role in the transition between adolescence and adulthood in religious society.

In respect to the personal characteristics of the participants, it was found that sexual self-concept was positively associated with satisfaction with life in both groups. This finding suggests the importance of encouraging the development and consolidation of a sexual self-concept among young Modern Orthodox women, despite religious restrictions (Douaghue, 2009).

Sense of self-mastery was also found to contribute to satisfaction with life. This, too, is in line with previous studies of the general population (Hong & Giannakopoulos, 1994; Pearlin, 1999). However, to the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to examine this association among young religious women. The explanation for this may be related to the fact that these women transition between modern western life and traditional life, and consequently the uncertainty they encounter is particularly challenging. Considering this background, the resource of self-mastery increases their satisfaction with life.

The results also reveal that the greater the use of positive religious strategies the higher the satisfaction with life, and the greater the use of negative religious strategies the lower the life satisfaction. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing a positive association between religious faith and practice and satisfaction with life (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005).

Finally, one of the innovations of the current study is the finding that a low level of perceived support from the mother moderated the association between positive religious coping strategies and satisfaction with life. This can be explained in terms of the interactions between nested environments posited by ecological theory.

Moreover, following Hobfoll's and Walfisch (1984) theory of Conservation of Resources, it may be assumed that when mother's support is low, and therefore the relationship with the mother cannot be relied on to help cope with life events and stressful situations, young Modern Orthodox women turn to another resource, their strong connection with God. This becomes a meaningful factor in their lives that arouses positive feelings (Koeing, 2001; Rosmarin et al., 2009), and is consequently associated with greater satisfaction with life on their way to adulthood.

## Study Limitations

Certain limitations of the study should be noted. First, it relies on self-reports, which may be subject to bias because of the natural desire to present oneself in a positive light or to conform to social norms. Furthermore, certain questions, particularly those dealing with sexual self-concept, may have touched on sensitive or embarrassing issues and thus led to inaccurate responses.

Secondly, the sample was relatively homogeneous, with the majority of participants being single college students. The reason for the absence of greater heterogeneity probably lies in the sampling method. Future studies should make an effort to obtain a more diverse sample of young women.

Another limitation is related to the fact that secular women had to answer a religious strategies questionnaire, a topic that was probably less relevant to them, but was essential so that we could compare them to the religious women.

Finally, the study design was cross-sectional and thus did not allow for the examination of changes in the variables and the associations between them over time. Future studies might adopt a longitudinal design that would enable investigation of such changes over the course of the women's development.

## Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. On the theoretical level, it focuses on factors influencing the satisfaction with life of emerging adults in a population never previously investigated, revealing associations and interactions that demonstrate the validity of the ecological theory in this group as well.

In practical terms, one of the major contributions of the study is the link found between sexual self-concept and life satisfaction, with lower levels of sexual self-concept reported by Modern Orthodox than by secular women. These findings suggest the need to expand the discussion of female sexuality in this community in a manner that respects their religious convictions but does not detract from the importance of the subject. In view of the findings, it would also be of value to strengthen the sense of self-mastery of young Modern Orthodox women during the period when they are forming their identity, as distinct from, and separately from, considerations of sexual self-concept.

The results also indicate that positive religious coping strategies are a particularly significant resource for young Modern Orthodox women. Examining their

perceptions of their relationship with God could help psychologists and social workers who meet with young religious women to determine the extent to which belief in God constitutes a permanent and stable basis of attachment, and may therefore provide a sense of strength and comfort. Indeed, our study highlights the importance of religious/spirituality-oriented strategies in promoting satisfaction with life among young women (Gwin et al., 2020).

This is particularly meaningful considering the findings on the interaction between religious coping strategies and the relationship with the mother. The results indicate the benefit of designing interventions aimed at strengthening the dyadic bond between young women and their mothers, and suggest an alternative for young religious women who do not enjoy a supportive relationship with their mother: promoting the use of positive religious coping strategies. In other words, strengthening the protective role of the personal resource of religious coping strategy may help compensate for low levels of the environmental resource of maternal support. Further research, including qualitative investigations based on in-depth interviews, is needed to confirm this suggestion, and shed additional light on the issues pertaining to the satisfaction of life of young Modern Orthodox women.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** No conflict of interest

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