

# Examining Average Age at First Marriage within Orthodox Judaism: A Large Community-Based Study

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*Marriage trends across global communities are influenced by demographic and cultural factors. The marriage age of secular Americans, and multiple religious groups are affected by gender and religious affiliation, but this has not been examined in Orthodox Jewish subcultures. This study explored how gender, cultural affiliation, and shifting cultural affiliation affect the age at first marriage within Orthodox Jewish subcultures differing in openness to Western culture: Yeshiva Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy. Respondents (n = 3865) provided information about themselves and members of their family but respondents' information was excluded to increase sample representativeness, focusing instead on the 8856 family members. Gender, subcultural affiliation, and individual cultural shifting were all found to affect the age of the first marriage. We interpreted these results in the context of varying cultural beliefs, education, and a perceived surplus of available women. Further examination of related factors may aid community efforts to support individuals in their pursuit of finding marriage partners.*

**Keywords:** Orthodox Judaism, marriage, gender, cultural affiliation, cultural shift.

## INTRODUCTION

There are currently over 580,000 Orthodox Jewish adults in the United States (Pew Research Center 2021), who adhere to specific subcultural standards, traditions, and expectations. As in all cultures, complexities of the environment bear influence on social norms and trends, as is clear when evaluating cultural differences in dating and in age at first marriage. Gender and religious-cultural affiliation have been found to predict age at first marriage among Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, and other religious and nonreligious groups (Lehrer 2004; Xu et al. 2005). While

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cultural ramifications on age at first marriage have been researched extensively in many cultures in the United States, little data on this exist about subcultures of Orthodox Jews.

In the 2013 Pew survey, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," 10% of the estimated 5.3 million Jewish adults were found to be Orthodox. Of those 530,000 Orthodox Jewish adults, 62% were Ultra-Orthodox and 31% were Modern Orthodox (as per the latest available data on religious affiliation; Lipka 2013). In their more recent study, "Jewish Americans in 2020" (2021), the Pew Research Center reported a similar number of Orthodox Jews, finding that approximately 9% of an estimated 5.8 million Jewish adults aged 18 and older in the United States are Orthodox; however, subculture data have not yet been published.

In the United States today, there appear to be multiple subcultures of Orthodoxy, including Hasidic, Yeshiva Orthodox (YO), and Modern Orthodox (MO) communities (Cohen, et al. 2012; Schechter 2011; Schechter 2016; Schnall 2006). There are other smaller groups as well, such as Chabad and Sefardic Orthodox Jews (for review, see Ferziger 2015). These subcultures, in line with Dean M. Kelley's strictness theory, are broadly categorized by their level of adherence to Jewish law and compatibility with secular society, and accordingly, within each of the subgroups, there are variances in observance and tradition (Kelley 1977).

According to strictness theory, the success of religious groups is dependent on social norms and rules that regulate member behavior and separate the group from similar cultures (Finke and Stark 1992; Hoge 1979; Iannaccone 1994; Kelley 1977; Tamney et al. 2003). In groups with more regulations, especially those concerning separation from society (e.g., dress codes and routine in-group social events), adherence to social norms and rules becomes central to personal identity development. Within Judaism, Conservative denominations are considered more strict than Reform denominations, and Orthodox denominations are more strict than Conservative. Expanding on this theory, within Orthodoxy, Hasidic and YO communities are more strict than MO communities.

Two of these subgroups, the Hasidic and YO communities, are widely bracketed as "Ultra-Orthodox." Typical values of the Hasidic community include minimal engagement with secular culture and "purposeful insularity" (Schechter 2016). The YO community, while valuing insularity, has a greater degree of integration with Western culture that includes increased participation in secular education and a mode of dress that resembles Western norms more than the Hasidic community (for more information on this distinction, see Ferziger 2015). Within Modern Orthodoxy, there is generally an even greater interaction and acceptance of Western culture. Overall, the current MO ideology encompasses adherence to Jewish law and encouragement of Torah study in congruence with more robust engagement in secular education and culture than that of the Hasidic and Yeshiva Orthodox subgroups (Schechter 2016). In a study measuring the religious observance of Orthodox Jews, Ultra-Orthodox, including Hasidic and YO subgroups, reported higher levels of religious observance than MO individuals (Sokol 2012).

As with other practices that vary within these Orthodox subgroups, variation in religious practices is apparent in courtship practices and marriage ages (Rockman 1994). Concerning marriage age, the 2013 Pew survey found that 69% of all Orthodox Jews over 18 years of age in the United States are married (the latest available data). They reported a marriage rate of 79% among the Ultra-Orthodox (i.e., Hasidic and Yeshiva Orthodox) and 52% among the Modern Orthodox. Additionally, 68% of all of the Orthodox Jews they surveyed reported having been married before the age of 24, but due to the small sample size of the Orthodox group ( $N = 517$ ), this statistic was not specified for Ultra-Orthodox and Modern Orthodox communities. Additionally, the average age at first marriage is not reported.

Regarding courtship and marriage processes, Orthodox Jewish practices are dictated by the view that dating is a mechanism employed exclusively for marriage. Schechter (2016) identified several components of the dating experience unique to Orthodox Jews which may impact age at first marriage, including gender socialization, courtship, and marriage processes. Concerning

gender socialization, each subgroup has communal standards of gender segregation, with Ultra-Orthodox groups as the most restrictive. In these communities, knowledge about, and interaction with, the opposite gender is limited, outside of close relatives and family friends. For example, classroom education in these communities is gender-segregated beginning in preschool. Comparatively, MO communities generally permit more gender interaction and offer both gender-separated and coeducational classroom education (Brand 2012; Glasser 2018).

Many communities have their own particular matchmaking system, which is referred to by members of the Orthodox Jewish community as “*shidduchim*” or the “*shidduch* system.” In this system, a third party acts as a matchmaker, known as a “*shadchan*,” who plays a role in introducing individuals to each other. This particular individual can be a professional matchmaker, friend, or family member (Salamon 2008). In line with strictness theory, the level of a matchmaker’s involvement at each stage of the relationship development depends on the couple’s level of connection to their subcultural affiliation, as those within more strict communities will often engage the services of a *shadchan* more thoroughly and those within less strict communities will often experience more autonomy in the dating process (Kutylo 2017). Milevsky et al. (2011) observed among those more oriented toward Western culture, such as Modern Orthodoxy, an appreciation for the “American way” of dating. Individuals who are more oriented toward Western culture may limit the involvement of the matchmaker, date for extended periods of time before engagement and marriage, and emphasize establishing financial independence before marriage (Schechter 2016).

While experiences vary by Orthodox Jewish subgroup, the *shadchan* will often introduce two individuals, act as an intermediary to coordinate and schedule the dates, and guide the individuals in their dating and decision-making process. Individuals are introduced based on family backgrounds, religious observance, and a myriad of individual and familial characteristics (Salamon 2008). Typically, family and/or close friends will conduct extensive research to investigate the potential for compatibility regarding religious observance, cultural affiliation, personality, character, values, and life goals (Block 2013; Salamon 2008). Upon agreement from both parties to proceed, they are introduced, begin their courtship, and ultimately decide whether to proceed with marriage or end their courtship (Schechter 2016).

Since marriage suitability factors include cultural and individual decisions made in the years leading up to one’s time within the *shidduch* system, choices of schools, summer camps, and social circles are often considered in terms of how such associations may influence one’s dating prospects (Schechter 2016). Factors that may influence one’s dating prospects may include but are not limited to intellectual ability, lineage, physical and mental health history, family financial background, external appearances, and genetic compatibility (Block 2013). Similarly, shifts in cultural affiliation of an individual or family member(s) may strain one’s experience in the *shidduch* system. This cultural shift refers to a switch from one Orthodox subculture to another, or removal from Orthodox subcultures altogether, and may be perceived by prospective *shidduchim* as a sign of “guilt by association” in highly insular communities (Schechter 2016). One’s success in the *shidduch* process is of great importance on an individual, familial, and even communal level, as it is a realization of a religious edict, cultural ideal, and assurance of Jewish continuity. To that end, the *shidduch* system has been said to serve as a “central organizing principle” in Orthodox communities (Schechter 2016, p. 239).

Another essential component in the realm of *shidduchim* is gender roles, as they impact both the dating experience and age gaps within couples (Milevsky, et al. 2011). This can be observed in many countries and cultures, as in the U.N. report on global marriage patterns, in which the mean age at first marriage was higher for men in all 114 countries studied (United Nations 2011). However, this is not a uniform cross-cultural effect; Carmichael (2011) found that the degree to which men marry later depends on the specific community culture. He also found that smaller gender gaps and later female age at first marriage are both associated with the average level of

female education and the community's degree of urbanization (Carmichael 2011). From an experiential perspective, although gender roles vary in different communities, they lean conservative and arise from religious and moral values (Ringel and Bina 2007). Therefore, we would expect communities with varying levels of traditional values to have different gender roles and different ages at first marriage for each gender. This study aims to examine gender role patterns and how they differ between Orthodox Jewish communities regarding age at first marriage.

Since Orthodox Judaism, like many religious cultures, emphasizes the importance of marriage, age at first marriage has significant social ramifications for Orthodox Jewish adults. In a multitude of qualitative studies, single Orthodox adults discuss feelings, such as a sense of inability to get married despite a strong desire, a “shidduch crisis” (lack of available male partners to marry), shame, lack of identity, and inferiority (Rosenbach et al. 2022; Milevsky et al. 2011). Additionally, participants discussed significant social consequences like lack of social integration, community overinvolvement in their dating habits, and being publicly pitied (Rosenbach et al. 2022; Milevsky et al. 2011). These social consequences also likely affect those in YO communities to a higher degree, as the culture is more rigid and the percentage of single adults is lower. Similarly, adults who have undergone a cultural shift within Orthodox Judaism may experience higher levels of isolation and shame. As such, it is important to explore age at first marriage trends and factors that affect those trends to develop a deeper understanding of Orthodox Jewish culture and the experiences of Orthodox Jewish adults.

## The Present Study

Concerning the general cultural influences of Orthodox Jewish culture on marriage, it is essential to differentiate between the varying Orthodox affiliations and their nuanced differences. Further, singlehood is perceived as undesirable and deficient in Orthodox Judaism, and is, therefore, an area of great communal concern. Regarding singlehood, age at first marriage has many significant consequences, including social participation, communal life, religious identity, social participation, public policy, and career trajectories. Single individuals may experience a lack of integration into the community structure in an insular community. The research conducted in this study primarily focused on two subcultures, Yeshiva Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy, as these communities exhibit increased concern about the perceived rates of dating and marriage difficulties in their communities compared with the Hasidic community (Milevsky et al. 2011). Another reason for this focus was the practicality of obtaining a robust and statistically powered sample through technological dissemination choices, a mode of communication not widely used among the Hasidic community.

## Study Aims and Hypotheses

The present study sought to evaluate the varying effects of culture on age at first marriage, considering Orthodox Jewish values of marriage and the unique aspects of the marriage process within Orthodox Jewry. While general information exists about the age at first marriage in the Orthodox Jewish community (see aforementioned 2013 and 2021 Pew reports), the sample size of Orthodox Jews in that report ( $n = 517$ ) did not allow for the specification of differences between YO and MO communities. This study sought to obtain a large sample of Orthodox Jews to explore marriage differences between MO and YO communities. In line with strictness theory, for our first hypothesis, we expected MO individuals to have a later age at first marriage than YO individuals due to their more open orientation to the prevailing secular values of marriage in American society. In addition, in line with U.N. data (2011, 2016) on worldwide marriage practices and Pew Research Center (2019) data on marriage age gaps across religions, our second hypothesis was that a higher mean age at first marriage for men across communities and that age at first marriage differences would vary by community. For our third hypothesis, regarding the

cultural affiliation and cultural shifting, we expected to find that current cultural affiliation, an affiliation of upbringing, and personal and familial cultural shifting would individually predict age at first marriage across Orthodox Jewry.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Study Design

There is no standard and available method of random sampling in the Orthodox Jewish community in North America, nor a relevant database from which to conduct random sampling. Therefore, this study utilized a nonrandomized method of sampling: a crowdsourcing/convenience sampling technique. However, due to the limitation of this method, throughout this study, from survey development, dissemination, data cleaning, and the determination of the final sample selected for analyses, we selected techniques to decrease the bias associated with the sampling method. In particular, one major limitation of nonrandomized sampling is the increase in respondent bias. Therefore, we used multiple methods to decrease respondent bias.

### Limiting Self-Selection Bias

One component of respondent bias that occurs with nonrandomized sampling is self-selection bias, wherein particular individuals may choose to participate in the study over others. We expected that a biased sample of individuals, such as women and/or currently unmarried individuals, might be more likely to complete the survey due to a greater vested interest in the topic of marriage rates in the Orthodox Jewish community. To address this anticipated self-selection bias, most questions in the survey focused on obtaining information from respondents about others in the population: their family members. Since the family members were expected to be more representative of the population than the respondents themselves, only the family member data were used for statistical analyses in this study, to the exclusion of the data about the respondents themselves.

### Demographic Information

Respondents were asked to report a variety of demographic information, including their age, gender, subethnic Jewish subgroup (e.g., Ashkenazi and Sephardi), current religious affiliation (e.g., Yeshiva Orthodox and Modern Orthodox), and current marriage status (e.g., never married, currently married—no previous marriages, currently widowed, widowed and remarried, currently divorced, divorced and remarried), among other demographic information.

### Family Members

Based on the respondents' ages, respondents were prompted with demographic questions regarding a specific unit within their family; respondents who were 50 years of age or older were asked to report about their children, if relevant, and respondents below the age of 50 were asked to report about their siblings, if relevant.

More specifically, respondents who were 50 years of age or older were asked to report the religious affiliation, zip code, and last two digits of their home phone number when their children lived at home. Respondents below 50 were asked to report these data points for the home in which they and their siblings were raised. We used this information to identify and remove duplicate information obtained from multiple survey respondents from the same family unit.

Respondents who were 50 years of age or older were asked to report the number of their children between the ages of 18–55, and respondents below the age of 50 were asked to report the number of their siblings within that same age range. Using the number of family members provided, respondents were prompted to answer five straightforward, objective follow-up questions about each family member sequentially from youngest to oldest. The information requested included: (1) age, (2) gender, (3) current religious affiliation, (4) current marriage status, and (5) age at first marriage, if relevant. These questions were selected since they consist of information that people generally know about their family members, which is essential for increasing the likelihood of reliability and accuracy of the information provided, thereby decreasing the likelihood of error or inaccurate information.

### **Preventing Duplicates**

To ensure that the final sample did not contain duplicate information about any of the individuals in the sample, the survey asked respondents for a variety of deidentified information that would be used to identify and remove duplicates from the final sample. Examples of deidentified information included geographic information (zip code) and the last two digits of the sibling unit's home phone number of upbringing, as described above. This information was integrated with the information regarding the number of siblings, and the ages and genders of each sibling within a family unit to determine whether more than one person per family had filled out the survey. These data were reviewed and imputed into the "Identify Duplicate Cases" function in SPSS to identify and remove individuals represented multiple times in the sample.

### **Power Analysis**

Based on the 2013 Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews (latest data available with this breakdown; Lipka 2013), there are approximately 530,000 Orthodox Adult Jews in the United States of which 328,600 are Ultra-Orthodox and 164,300 are Modern Orthodox Jews. Specifying a 5% margin of error, the minimum sample size required for a 99% confidence level for the overall population is 665, 664 for Ultra-Orthodox and 663 for Modern Orthodox. The populations we anticipated reaching included the Ashkenazi Yeshiva Orthodox and Modern Orthodox communities in North America (including the United States and Canada) as they represent large groups within the Orthodox Jewish community and they employ widespread usage of the digital platforms through which the survey was disseminated. For these reasons, individuals affiliated with other Orthodox groups (such as Hasidic, Chabad, or Sephardi), as well as those from outside North America (based on their zip codes), were not included in the analyses.

### **Dissemination**

Following the creation of the survey and approval from the Western Institutional Review Board, a multimodal approach was utilized to disseminate the survey. The survey was distributed and publicized online through paid email advertisements, social media forums, texting platforms, word of mouth, web-based community news forums, and emails from Orthodox Jewish clergy leadership organizations (e.g., Rabbinical Council of America) to their members and affiliated Orthodox Jewish communities. The utility of this multimodal approach was to increase the reach of the study and the survey to as many communities within the Orthodox Jewish population in North America as possible, with an emphasis on the Yeshiva Orthodox and Modern Orthodox communities. This approach was taken to increase the diversity and representativeness of the sample and protect against oversampling specific portions of the population. The survey was live for 112 days between February 6, 2019, and May 29, 2019.

## Age at First Marriage

Age at first marriage for each participant was reported by respondents. Participants for whom it was indicated that they had never married were excluded from analyses that included this variable.

## Family Cultural Consistency versus Shifting

A family cultural consistency versus shifting variable was created to examine the association of cultural change within a family on dating and marriage. First, each participant and respondent was numerically coded comparing their reported current cultural affiliation and affiliation of upbringing: if both of these affiliations were consistent with each other, they were designated as “culturally consistent” and assigned a “1,” and if not, they were designated as having “cultural shift” and assigned a “0.” Then, a family-unit cultural consistency percentage score was established to assess the degree to which the family unit as a whole remained consistent in its cultural affiliation. This was achieved by adding the scores for all the individuals in a sibling unit between the ages of 18–55 years, including the respondents, and dividing by the total number of individuals in the sibling unit.

## Data Analytic Strategy

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 26.0 (SPSS inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Values were expressed as means, SDs, or as percentages. Multiple imputation was not performed for this dataset since there were no missing research data in the sample following the Qualtrics Survey Software process of preventing incomplete data from being submitted. Correlations between individuals who were currently and/or previously married, increasing age, YO and MO cultures/subcultures, and gender were computed through Pearson’s correlation analysis. Correlations between variables were categorized as low (between 0.10 and 0.29), moderate (between 0.30 and 0.49), and high ( $>0.50$ ) according to their values. To further identify the independent variables (religious affiliation, gender, and age) that contribute to age at first marriage, group differences were assessed. To analyze group differences between individuals raised/currently affiliated with YO and individuals raised/currently affiliated with MO, analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed. Follow-up independent sample *t*-tests were utilized to assess cultural differences of age at first marriage for each gender and the effects of age at first marriage by gender within both YO and MO cultures. Further analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were used to determine the difference of age at first married for individuals raised YO compared to raised MO and the difference of age at first married for individuals currently YO compared to currently MO, controlling for gender and affiliation of upbringing. Additional analyses of covariance were employed to assess the effect of shifting between YO and MO on age at first marriage. All tests were considered statistically significant if  $p < .05$ .

## RESULTS

A total of 3865 respondents completed the survey, providing information about themselves and their 10,883 family members, totaling 14,748 individuals. In preparation for analysis, we removed from the dataset the information regarding the respondents ( $n = 3865$ ), duplicates ( $n = 402$ ), participants with incomplete survey responses ( $n = 56$ ), and participants who were not geographically and/or culturally within the focus of this study ( $n = 1992$ ). Analyses were run on the original respondents (parallel to the analyses on the final sample) and are available in the Supplementary Material, see Appendix S1. The final sample size used for analyses included 8856

Table 1: Demographic information of final sample ( $N = 8856$ ) and respondents ( $N = 3302$ )

| Characteristic                                    | Mean (SD) [Range] or % ( $N$ ) |                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                                   | Final sample <sup>a</sup>      | Survey respondents <sup>b</sup> |
| Age <sup>***</sup>                                | 30.3 (8.3) [18–55]             | 33.1 (12.5) [15–83]             |
| Gender (% male) <sup>***</sup>                    | 51.9% (4595)                   | 32.0% (1058)                    |
| Current marital status <sup>***</sup>             |                                |                                 |
| Never married                                     | 32.3% (2862)                   | 34.1% (1126)                    |
| Never married (currently engaged)                 | 1.3% (116)                     | 1.5% (48)                       |
| Currently divorced                                | 2.2% (192)                     | 3.8% (127)                      |
| Currently widowed                                 | 0.1% (9)                       | 0.6% (21)                       |
| Currently separated                               | 0.2% (22)                      | 0.5% (15)                       |
| Currently married (no previous marriages)         | 61.8% (5477)                   | 57.0% (1881)                    |
| Currently married (previously divorced)           | 1.9% (168)                     | 2.3% (76)                       |
| Currently married (previously widowed)            | 0.1% (10)                      | 0.2% (8)                        |
| Ever married (% yes) <sup>*</sup>                 | 66.4% (5878)                   | 64.4% (2128)                    |
| Age at first marriage <sup>**</sup>               | 22.9 (3.2) [16–44]             | 23.2 (3.9) [17–52]              |
| Currently available <sup>***</sup>                | 34.6% (3063)                   | 38.6% (1274)                    |
| Cultural affiliation of upbringing <sup>***</sup> |                                |                                 |
| Yeshiva Orthodox                                  | 56.6% (5013)                   | 42.9% (1418)                    |
| Modern Orthodox                                   | 24.8% (2194)                   | 27.3% (902)                     |
| Jewish—not Orthodox                               | 3.8% (339)                     | 7.2% (239)                      |
| Chassidish                                        | 7.5% (668)                     | 5.3% (176)                      |
| Chabad/Lubavitch                                  | 7.2% (635)                     | 4.8% (159)                      |
| Current cultural affiliation <sup>***</sup>       |                                |                                 |
| Yeshiva Orthodox                                  | 54.1% (4790)                   | 53.3% (1759)                    |
| Modern Orthodox                                   | 23.8% (2109)                   | 33.0% (1089)                    |
| Jewish—not Orthodox                               | 7.9% (698)                     | 1.5% (51)                       |
| Chassidish                                        | 7.4% (656)                     | 5.8% (193)                      |
| Chabad/Lubavitch                                  | 6.8% (603)                     | 6.4% (210)                      |

<sup>a</sup> The inclusion criteria for the final sample consisted of: individuals between the ages of 18–55, identification with Ashkenazi Jewish subculture, and geographically located in North America.

<sup>b</sup> The inclusion criteria for the survey respondents included in this table consisted of: identification with Ashkenazi Jewish subculture and geographically located in North America.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

participants. Of note, some participants were removed for multiple of the aforementioned reasons. As many of the following series of analyses examined the age at first marriage, a subset of the final sample was used for those analyses that included individuals who were currently and/or previously married ( $n = 5878$ ). Table 1 provides demographic information about the characteristics of the respondents and the final sample used for analyses. Figure 1 displays the percent of individuals married by increasing age for YO and MO subcultures and Figure 2 displays the ages at first marriage of individuals in our sample. Of note, approximately 92% of YO men and women, and approximately 81% of MO men and women, had been married by age 30.

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the effects of subculture and gender on age at first marriage. Main effects analysis demonstrated that individuals raised/currently affiliated with Yeshiva Orthodox culture (YO-RC) contained a younger age at first marriage than those raised/currently affiliated with Modern Orthodox culture (MO-RC; YO-RC:  $M = 22.51$ ,  $SD = 2.60$ , MO-RC:  $M = 24.05$ ,  $SD = 3.45$ ,  $t(1076.60) = -11.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Table 2). Additionally, a main effect was found in which overall YO-RC and MO-RC Jewish men were older at their

Figure 1  
Percent currently (or previously) married by age, cultural affiliation, and gender. Note: Cultural affiliation reflects those with a current affiliation that is consistent with an affiliation of upbringing. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

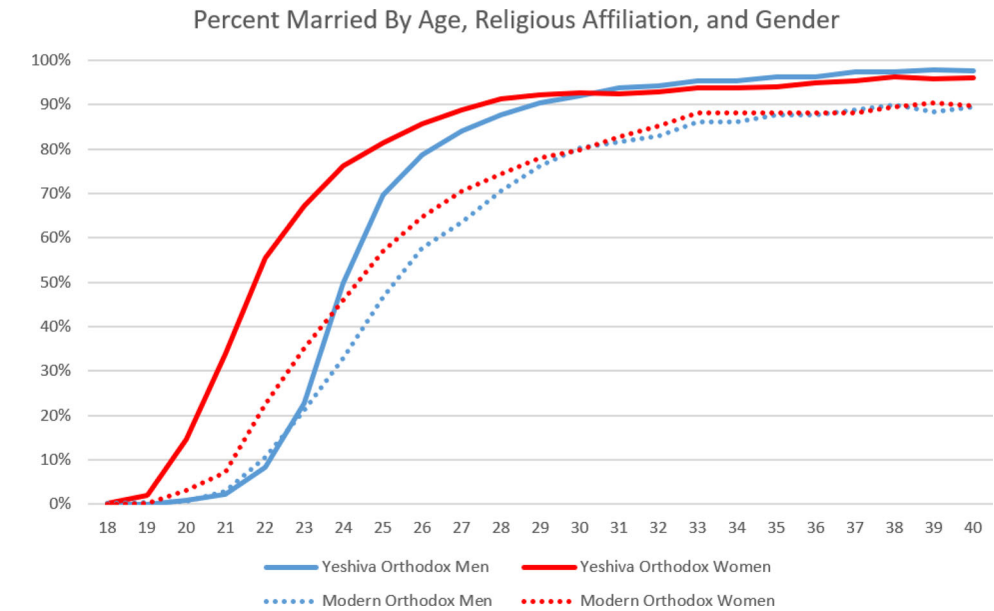


Figure 2  
Histogram of ages at first marriage of final sample [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

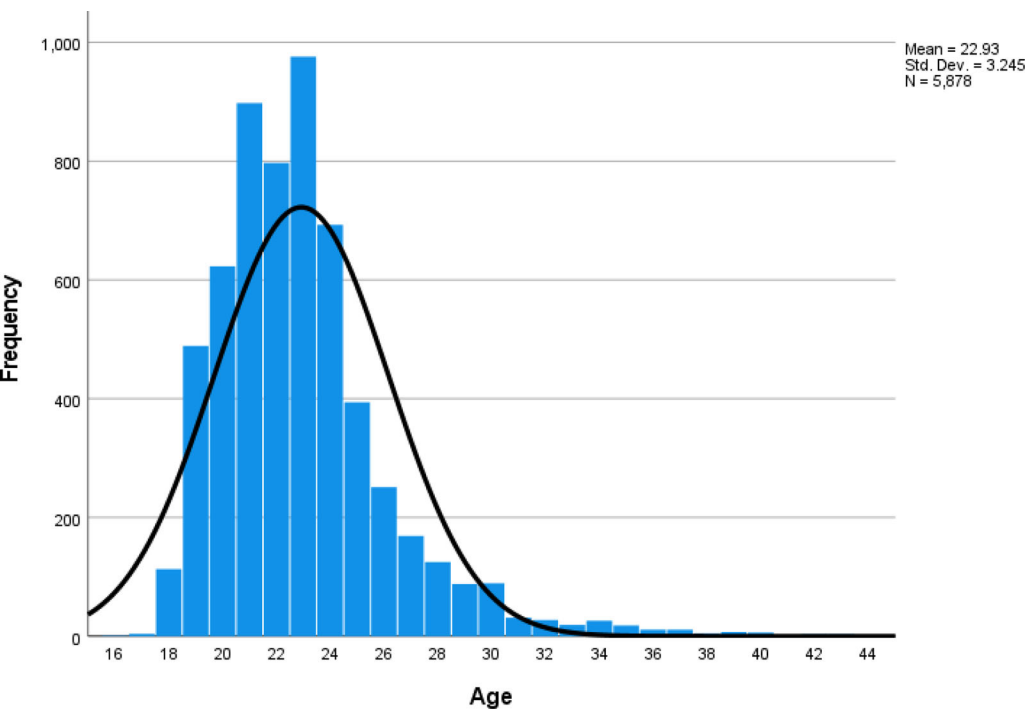


Table 2: Age at first marriage of Orthodox Jewish subgroups

| Group                          | Level                       | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | % ( <i>n</i> ) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Orthodox Jews*                 | YO-RC                       | 22.51    | 2.60      | 78 (2906)      |
|                                | MO-RC                       | 24.05    | 3.45      | 22 (809)       |
| YO-RC & MO-RC*                 | Men                         | 23.81    | 3.02      | 50 (2922)      |
|                                | Women                       | 22.06    | 3.23      | 50 (2956)      |
| YO-RC*                         | Men                         | 23.57    | 2.10      | 48 (1397)      |
|                                | Women                       | 21.52    | 2.63      | 52 (1509)      |
| MO-RC*                         | Men                         | 24.55    | 3.44      | 51 (409)       |
|                                | Women                       | 23.53    | 3.39      | 49 (400)       |
| Cultural upbringing*           | YO-R                        | 22.65    | 2.83      | 72 (3398)      |
|                                | MO-R                        | 22.89    | 3.43      | 28 (1348)      |
| Current cultural affiliation*  | YO-C                        | 22.57    | 2.62      | 73 (3417)      |
|                                | MO-C                        | 23.89    | 3.62      | 27 (1248)      |
| Overall Orthodox Jewish**      | Cultural shifting           | 23.55    | 3.69      | 21 (1228)      |
|                                | No cultural shifting        | 22.76    | 3.09      | 79 (4646)      |
| YO-R cultural shifting*        | Cultural shifting           | 23.49    | 3.81      | 14 (492)       |
|                                | No cultural shifting        | 22.51    | 2.60      | 86 (2906)      |
| MO-R cultural shifting*        | Cultural shifting           | 23.65    | 3.39      | 40 (539)       |
|                                | No cultural shifting        | 24.05    | 3.45      | 60 (809)       |
| YO-RC family cultural shifting | Family cultural shifting    | 22.50    | 2.56      | 42 (1207)      |
|                                | No family cultural shifting | 22.51    | 2.63      | 58 (1699)      |
| MO-RC family cultural shifting | Family cultural shifting    | 23.88    | 3.48      | 49 (393)       |
|                                | No family cultural shifting | 24.21    | 3.42      | 51 (416)       |

Abbreviations: MO-C, currently Modern Orthodox; MO-RC, raised and currently Modern Orthodox; MO-R, raised as Modern Orthodox; YO-C, currently Yeshiva Orthodox; YO-RC, raised and currently Yeshiva Orthodox; YO-R, raised as Yeshiva Orthodox.

\*Group differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

first marriage than overall YO-RC and MO-RC Jewish women (men:  $M = 23.81$ ,  $SD = 3.02$ , women:  $M = 22.06$ ,  $SD = 3.23$ ,  $t(5856.60) = 21.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There was a statistically significant interaction between the effects of subculture and gender on age at first marriage, where there was a greater directional difference between men and women on age at first marriage in the YO-RC culture than in the MO-RC culture,  $F(1, 3711) = 24.10$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ .

To further examine the interaction effect of age at first marriage by gender within both YO-RC and MO-RC cultures, two simple effect follow-up independent sample  $t$ -tests were conducted (using a Scheffe corrected alpha of .025 for significance). In each subculture, men were associated with an older age at first marriage than women (YO-RC men:  $M = 23.57$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ , women:  $M = 21.52$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ ,  $t(2842.35) = 23.323$ ,  $p < .001$ ; MO-RC men:  $M = 24.55$ ,  $SD = 3.44$ , women:  $M = 23.53$ ,  $SD = 3.39$ ,  $t(807) = 4.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

To examine the cultural differences of age at first marriage for each gender, two simple effect follow-up independent sample  $t$ -tests were conducted (using a Scheffe corrected alpha of .025 for significance). YO-RC women were associated with a younger average age at first marriage than MO-RC women, and YO-RC men were associated with a younger average age at first marriage than MO-RC men (YO-RC women:  $M = 21.52$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ , MO-RC women:  $M = 23.53$ ,  $SD = 3.39$ ,  $t(533.12) = -11.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ; YO-RC men:  $M = 23.57$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ , MO-RC men:  $M = 24.55$ ,  $SD = 3.44$ ,  $t(500.26) = -5.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

To further examine the subculture main effect, a set of two follow-up one-way ANCOVA analyses were conducted (using a Scheffe corrected alpha of .025 for significance) to examine

the distinct effects of cultural affiliation of upbringing and current cultural affiliation on age at first marriage. The first one-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference of age at first marriage for individuals *raised* with a Yeshiva Orthodox cultural affiliation (YO-R) as compared with those *raised* with a Modern Orthodox cultural affiliation (MO-R), controlling for gender and *current* cultural affiliation. The second one-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference of age at first marriage for individuals *currently* affiliated with Yeshiva Orthodox culture (YO-C) than those *currently* affiliated with a Modern Orthodox culture (MO-C), controlling for gender and cultural affiliation of *upbringing*. Both ANCOVAs were significant with YO-R associated with a younger age at first marriage than MO-R (YO-R:  $M = 22.65$ ,  $SD = 2.83$ , MO-R:  $M = 22.89$ ,  $SD = 3.43$ ,  $F(1,4742) = 77.33$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and YO-C associated with a younger age at first marriage than MO-C (YO-C:  $M = 22.57$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ , MO-C:  $M = 23.89$ ,  $SD = 3.62$ ,  $F(1,4661) = 136.43$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These findings indicate that both upbringing and current affiliation each uniquely associates with age at first marriage.

After examining the individual effects of upbringing and current cultural affiliation, an analysis was conducted to examine individuals who are affiliated with a different subculture than the one with which they were raised, that is, cultural shifting. A one-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine whether individuals with cultural shifting in the Orthodox Jewish community were associated with a different age at first marriage than those who were culturally consistent. As we were interested in the effect of cultural shifting rather than their gender, or their original/current cultural affiliation, we ran the analyses controlling for gender, a cultural affiliation of upbringing, and current cultural affiliation. This analysis found that those with cultural shifting (having affiliated with a different subculture than their upbringing) were associated with an older age at first marriage than those who were culturally consistent (cultural shifting:  $M = 23.55$ ,  $SD = 3.69$ , culturally consistent:  $M = 22.76$ ,  $SD = 3.09$ ,  $F(1,5869) = 53.29$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Two follow-up one-way ANCOVAs were conducted to determine the effect of cultural shifting within YO and MO cultures, examining whether cultural shifting within YO-R and MO-R was associated with a later age at first marriage than those who were culturally consistent, controlling for gender and whether cultural shifting was present in a family. Among YO-R, YO-RC individuals were associated with a younger age at first marriage than those with cultural shifting (YO-RC:  $M = 22.51$ ,  $SD = 2.60$ , YO-R cultural shifting:  $M = 23.49$ ,  $SD = 3.81$ ,  $F(1,3395) = 44.45$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Among MO-R, MO-RC individuals were associated with an older age at first marriage than those who with cultural shifting (MO-RC:  $M = 24.05$ ,  $SD = 3.45$ , MO-R cultural shifting:  $M = 23.65$ ,  $SD = 3.39$ ,  $F(1,1345) = 5.11$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ ,  $p = .02$ ).

As cultural shifting was significantly associated with age at first marriage, an analysis was conducted to determine whether the presence of cultural shifting in a family unit also impacts the age at first marriage of culturally consistent members of the family. Two one-way ANCOVAs, one for YO-RC and one for MO-RC, were conducted to assess whether individuals in these subcultures, who had at least one sibling with cultural shift, were associated with a different age at first marriage than those whose family units were culturally consistent, controlling for gender. No significant difference of age at first marriage was found for either subculture (YO-RC with family cultural shifting:  $M = 22.50$ ,  $SD = 2.56$ , YO-RC with family cultural consistency:  $M = 22.51$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ ,  $F(1,2903) = .04$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ ,  $p = .835$ ; MO-RC with family cultural shifting:  $M = 23.88$ ,  $SD = 3.48$ , MO-RC with family cultural consistency:  $M = 24.21$ ,  $SD = 3.42$ ,  $F(1,806) = 1.24$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ ,  $p = .265$ ).

After finding YO-MO intracultural shifting differences in age at first marriage, we were interested in exploring the association between age at first marriage and intercultural shifting. An exploratory one-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine whether there is a significantly different age at first marriage for Baalei Teshuva who were raised “Jewish—Not Orthodox” and are currently YO or MO, compared to those who were culturally consistent (YO-RC or MO-RC),

controlling for gender and *current* religious affiliation. We found that Baalei Teshuva in the sample married at an older age at first marriage than YO-RC/MO-RC (Baalei Teshuva:  $M = 24.79$ ,  $SD = 4.37$ , YO-RC/MO-RC:  $M = 22.84$ ,  $SD = 2.88$ ,  $F(1,3765) = 24.97$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study assessed the effects of gender and Orthodox Jewish subculture on age at first marriage. Regarding Orthodox Jewish subcultures, in line with our first hypothesis, former, current, and consistent affiliation with Yeshiva Orthodoxy, are all associated with earlier ages at first marriage. Overall, our findings found that Orthodox Jews married at a younger age than the median age at first marriage in the United States, in line with our second hypothesis (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). This may be due to the defining role of family marriage trends as North American Orthodox Jewish communities varied by gender and subculture. Men marry at older ages than women, with larger age differences between genders for Yeshiva Orthodoxy (YO) than Modern Orthodoxy (MO; see Figure 1). Regarding cultural shifting, in the overall sample, individuals with a cultural shift married at an older average age than those with cultural consistency, whereas familial cultural shifting had no significant association with age at first marriage, in line with our third hypothesis.

### Gender

Across MO and YO subcultures, men married at an older average age (23.8) than women (21.9). This finding is in line with U.S. Census Data (2020) and findings across cultures, where the median age at first marriage is older for men than women (Ausubel 2020). Within Orthodoxy, cultural factors may also contribute to this gap. Orthodox men are encouraged to delay dating until after a 2–4 years post-high-school religious education (Helmreich 2000), while Orthodox women have only a 1- to 2-year period of religious education prior to dating (Bacon et al. 1994; Baum et al. 2014; Finkelman 2011; Fuchs 2013). As such, men enter the *shidduch* system older than their female counterparts. Additionally, women may be influenced by a “*shidduch* crisis,” in which communities perceive a surplus of eligible single women compared to men (Rosenbach et al 2022, Salamon 2008; Waxman 2017). Further exploration of this can be found in a study that has recently been published which explores the “*shidduch* crisis” phenomenon (Rosenbach et al 2022). The findings of that study point to the “perceived surplus of women” in the dating system as one of the stressors in the dating process. This perception, combined with the difficulty for women in finding a spouse, may push young women to marry at an earlier age to avoid remaining single.

### Orthodox Jewish Subcultures

YO affiliation was associated with a younger age at first marriage as compared with MO. We studied the associations of age at first marriage and these Orthodox Jewish subgroups in a variety of ways, which all point to this robust finding. First, we examined individuals who were consistent members of these communities (RC: Raised and Current) and found YO-RC married at a younger age. We narrowed our evaluation of these communities by gender and found that YO-RC men married at younger ages than MO-RC men, and YO-RC women younger than MO-RC women. Following separate analyses of the subculture of upbringing and current subculture, we found that YO-R individuals married at a younger age than MO-R, and YO-C younger than MO-C. In fact, when examining cultural shifts, although the overall cultural shift was associated with an older age at first marriage (as was the case with those who were YO-R/MO-C), those who were MO-R/YO-C married at a younger age than those MO-RC, emphasizing the association of

Yeshiva Orthodoxy with a younger age at first marriage (see subsection below for an in-depth discussion about cultural shifts in this study).

As noted, within Orthodox Jewish subcultures, YO-RC individuals were likely to marry at a younger age than MO-RC individuals. This difference may be the result of differences in cultural values between the subcultures (Schechter 2016). Overall, in line with strictness theory, this may be a result of the group's regulations and the motivation of individuals to adhere to social norms. For example, as MO is more accepting of American culture, MO marriage trends are more likely to resemble US marriage trends with an older average age at first marriage (Milevsky et al. 2011). MO *shidduchim*/marriage methods may also contribute to older first marriage ages as MO individuals date for extended periods of time and minimize the role of a matchmaker. Similarly, within MO communities, a strong emphasis on financial independence before marriage, college and graduate education, and career development for both men and women may lead to a later age at first marriage than in YO communities, which may have a decreased emphasis on these goals.

While we found that YO-RC men married younger than MO-RC men, and YO-RC women married younger than MO-RC women, the difference in age at first marriage between subcultures was much larger for women, with YO-RC women ( $M = 21.56$ ,  $SD = 2.69$ ) marrying 2 years younger, on average, than MO-RC women ( $M = 23.60$ ,  $SD = 3.73$ ). This specific trend may be due to varying gender roles and experiences of women within these subcultures, such as the role of secular education, career aspirations, the impact of a perceived *shidduch* crisis (Waxman 2017), and added social pressure for women to date. MO communities that are more oriented toward Western culture may also encourage more post-high school religious and secular education for women before marriage in comparison to YO communities (Baum et al. 2014; Fuchs 2013). Simultaneously, YO communities may perceive themselves as having a greater *shidduch* crisis than MO communities, contributing to increased pressure for YO-affiliated women to marry at an earlier age (Milevsky, et al. 2011; Ungar-Sargon 2015).

Lazar-Feigenbaum (2014) evaluated the effects of “social control,” or social pressure informed by cultural values, interpersonal comments, and behaviors, regarding *shidduchim* on Ultra-Orthodox and Modern Orthodox Jewish female high school students. She found that social control frequency regarding pressure to date and marry correlated with age, indicating that as women in the Orthodox Jewish community get older, there is increased cultural pressure to date and marry. Further, Lazar-Feigenbaum (2014) found that Ultra-Orthodox young women experienced more “social control” than MO young women. As such, YO-affiliated women faced increased pressure to begin dating at an earlier age as compared to MO-affiliated women. This pressure may help explain the significantly younger age at first marriage among YO women, as women within more strict subcultures of Orthodox Judaism comply with more regulations and are more likely to adhere to increased social pressure.

Both subculture of upbringing and current subculture each had distinct significant associations with age at first marriage. YO-R individuals married at a younger average age than MO-R individuals, regardless of current affiliation, and YO-C individuals married at a younger average than MO-C individuals, regardless of current affiliation. Orthodox Jewish culture is intricately incorporated into many, if not all, areas of its adherents' lives. Therefore, values, expectations, and lifestyle choices, such as marrying at a younger age, may persist among those raised in a specific Orthodox Jewish subculture, even if that affiliation is no longer maintained. This context can provide insight into our findings that both subcultural upbringing and current subculture each individually associated with age at first marriage.

## Cultural Shift

To understand how intra-Orthodox cultural variations influence age at first marriage, we explored how individuals who moved from one subculture within Orthodoxy to another varied in age at first marriage. Cultural shift among the participants in our sample was associated with older

age at first marriage. This may be due to individuals with a cultural shift postponing dating while focusing on their acculturation process to a new subculture. Another possible explanation is that since Orthodox Jewish communities are highly insular and averse to change (Schechter 2016), cultural shifting may be perceived as a sign of personal or religious instability, leading these individuals to be perceived as less eligible prospects for marriage. The finding of later marriage age among those with a cultural shift persisted when focusing on those shifting from Yeshiva Orthodoxy to Modern Orthodoxy (YO-R/MO-C), but not among those shifting from Modern Orthodoxy to Yeshiva Orthodoxy (MO-R/YO-C), who were found to have a younger age at first marriage than their MO-RC peers. This difference may be due to early absorption of YO values, with a significantly younger age at first marriage norm, or may be due to the individual's desire to integrate socially into a new subculture with more strict regulations, the adherence to some of which can influence social status. This early cultural learning may outweigh an individual's future need for acculturation time.

As cultural shift demonstrated an association with age at first marriage, we examined if a cultural shift in a family impacted the culturally consistent siblings. We found no difference in age at first marriage between individuals with familial cultural shifts and those without. This was surprising, as we expected cultural shifts in a family to affect family members due to stigma. Perhaps, the later first marriage ages of individuals with personal cultural shifts are more due to the need for acculturation, not relevant to their culturally consistent siblings, than stigma. Further, since we found that intra-Orthodox cultural shifts influenced the age at first marriage, we explored whether being a Baal Teshuva (currently Orthodox Jews that were raised in secular or non-Orthodox Jewish communities) was related to the marriage age trend, and found that on average, Baalei Teshuva married later, a trend similar to the general intra-Orthodox cultural shift effects in this study. This fits with our expectations due to the norms of their cultural upbringing for later marriage age and their additional need to adapt to the novel culture.

## Limitations and Future Directions

The present study examined differences in age at first marriage between two subgroups of Orthodox Judaism: Yeshiva Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy. Further exploration into other subgroups (e.g., Hasidism, Sephardim, and Chabad/Lubavitch) is needed as the present data were not sufficient for analysis. Data on individuals who left Orthodox Judaism or joined Orthodox Judaism as adults were not analyzed in our main analyses due to insufficient statistical power. Last, although we used multiple methods to increase representativeness in our sample, random sampling was not obtained. Therefore, we focused on our interpretations of differences between communities rather than point estimates of the average ages of each community. In addition, we found that although most Orthodox Jews are married by 30, there is a substantial minority of individuals who are not married by that age. Therefore, community researchers should explore methods to enhance the current community structure and programming to include those who are not married. This can include additional roles in community structures, such as synagogues and schools. Future research on this topic may want to explore patterns and outcomes in marriage expectations and dating and matchmaking experiences. Regarding future directions for this large community dataset, we intend to continue to conduct analyses to better understand the landscape of the marriage age phenomena that exist in the Orthodox Jewish community. One potential area to explore might be the timing of remarriage in the Orthodox Jewish community, determining if religion has a role in that timing and how that differs among subgroups of the community (Xu and Bartkowski 2017). Future planned analytic strategies will assess for generational cohort effects in the age a first marriage and will also utilize a mixed methods design to present the quantitative and qualitative data points in a publication to allow them to inform each other's findings.

## CONCLUSION

This study presented a novel method for sampling the community utilizing a combination of crowd-sourcing, communal snowballing, and a series of methods designed to decrease response bias. Our findings suggest that cultural variation within Orthodox Jewish subcultures plays a strong role in age at first marriage. Affiliation with Yeshiva Orthodoxy, whether raised and current, only raised or only current, was associated with earlier ages at first marriage than Modern Orthodoxy. Additionally, in general, cultural shifting was associated with a later average age at first marriage. These cultural effects can be understood within the context of each subgroup's culture, including strictness theory, differences in values, dating methods, insularity-based stigma, and the perceived eligibility of individuals. Overall, our findings highlight the importance of considering the effects of culture in specific cultural subgroups, such as the Orthodox Jewish subgroups, on important components of communal life—such as dating and marriage, rather than assuming cultural groups are monolithic.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix S1. Results for Primary Respondents

Appendix Table 1. Age at first marriage of Orthodox Jewish subgroups among primary respondents.