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The Effect of Ability Grouping for Talmud on the Academic Self-Concept of Jewish Orthodox Middle School Students

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Abstract

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Yitzchak T. Goldberg

MS, Queens College, 2004

BS, Touro College, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School Psychology

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Abstract

Researchers have examined the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept in math, science, and English, and have found varying results. However, previous studies have not examined the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept for the subject of Talmud. Middle school presents a unique opportunity to examine this relationship because middle school is when both ability grouping for Talmud and the study of Talmud begin. The purpose of this correlational study was to assess the relationship between ability grouping and the academic self-concept for Talmud in middle school students. The predictive relationship among individual academic achievement, school average achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud was also examined. Two-hundred ninety-three 6th and 7th graders from single-gender, traditional Jewish Orthodox boy schools in a suburb of New York City completed a self-report questionnaire measuring academic self-concept for Talmud. The collected data were analyzed using analysis of variance and multiple regression analyses. According to the results of the study, students placed in the lower-ability grouping had a statistically significant lower academic self-concept for Talmud than did those in the middle- and higher-ability grouping. In addition, individual academic achievement was a predictive factor of academic self-concept for Talmud whereas school average achievement was not found to be a predictive factor in this particular study. By understanding the impact of ability grouping, school administrators can develop policies for class placement and can provide additional care to balance the effects of ability grouping for those middle school student negatively affected by placement.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, family, friends, colleagues, and teachers (former and current). Thank you for the knowledge, love and support that have been essential in my life and in accomplishing a PhD in a field that I love. My accomplishment is your accomplishment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The educational practice of ability grouping began in the United States in the mid-19th century (Ireson & Hallam, 2009). At that time, students were divided by ability per teacher recommendation, and the "higher-ability" group was given the opportunity to progress through school faster than lower-ability students. Ability grouping refers to the educational practice, by schools, teachers, or educational authorities of placing students together on the basis of their abilities, as defined by standardized tests and demonstrated past academic achievement (Carroll, 1999; Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003). Throughout the following century, different criteria were used as a basis for grouping (e.g., individual needs, heterogeneous grouping, level of intelligence, competence). Since the early 1920s there has been ongoing research to investigate the academic and social outcomes of ability grouping (Abadzi, 1983). Those who oppose ability grouping are concerned that it will have negative outcomes for students placed in lower- ability groups (e.g., underachievement, lack of academic success, low self-esteem; Cheng, Lam, & Chan, 2008; Oakes, 1985; Powell, 2008; Prince, 2004). Others express concern that more experienced teachers prefer to teach stronger classes, leaving less experienced teachers instructing lower-ability students (Prince, 2004). Teachers also may lower expectations for lower-ability students resulting in those students receiving a lower quality education (Kususanto, Ismail, & Jamil, 2010). Despite the number of studies in this area, the debate regarding the effects of ability grouping still continues after 30 years of research with little additional clarity (e.g., Alpert & Bechar, 2008; Dai & Rinn, 2008; Hallam, &

Ireson, 2009; Lleras & Rengel, 2009; Marsh, Seaton, & Trautwein, 2008; Nomi, 2010; Brull & Prekel, 2008; Brull & Prekel, 2010).

In the context of ability grouping, low self-concept as an outcome measure is of particular importance as it has been found to be correlated with depression, suicide in boys, criminal activity, a lack of coping skills, poor health, low socioeconomic status (SES), and future antisocial behavior (Pakiz & Reinherz, 1997; Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Self-concept is defined as a multidimensional construct that refers to an individual's overall perception of self, including the roles an individual plays and his or her evaluation of performance in those roles. Some domains that make the self-concept are academics, gender roles, sexuality, racial identity, socialization, and intelligence. It includes the constructs of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bandura 1994). For the purpose of this study, self-esteem was defined as a specific feeling based on an individual's evaluation of his or her performance. It is considered one aspect of a broader construct of self-concept and will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 2.

Students who have difficulty learning and experience low academic self-concept tend to attribute their academic successes to external factors and their failures to internal factors (Banks & Woolfson, 2008). Academic self-concept refers to students' self-concept in relation to school, academic skills, and intelligence (Byrne & Shavelson, 1986). There can be subject-specific academic self-concepts like verbal self-concept, math self-concept and Talmud self-concept. This will be explained more in depth later in the paper. Even when students achieve academic success, they do not always correctly

self-evaluate and often fail to attribute their success to their own efforts. This negative self-attribution only perpetuates negative self-image, resulting in low self-concept. Scholars (Ireson & Hallam, 2009; Ireson, Hallam, & Plewis, 2001; Kususanto, Ismail, & Jamil, 2010; Lleras & Rangel, 2009; Nomi, 2010; Norris & Aleixo, 2003) to date have investigated ability grouping for secular subjects. However, there is widespread use of ability grouping for Talmud in Jewish schools (Sigel, 2009). From a traditional Orthodox Jewish perspective, Talmud is the measure for all other study and is given more value than the study of secular subjects (Hayman, 1997). As a result, the study of Talmud may be a greater determinant of academic self-concept for this population than secular subjects. A Talmud scholar has higher social standing and is often given leadership positions in the community (Benor, 2004). Before Orthodox Jewish children learn the alphabet, they are indoctrinated into the belief that one of the most important goals in life is to be a great scholar, particularly in Talmud (Benor, 2004). The goal of this study was to examine the predictive relationship among individual academic achievement, school achievement, and academic self-concept in Talmud in four Jewish Orthodox middle schools that practice ability grouping.

Statement of the Problem

Because of the overriding social and cultural implications of Talmud study, the academic self-concept for Talmud of middle school students in a traditional Jewish Orthodox school may be influenced by ability grouping that begins in the seventh grade. By understanding the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept, educators can provide the most effective learning environment for students while

supporting positive self-concept for all students. Although the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept has been researched before, no researcher has investigated the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept for Talmud and there is no research on the predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school average achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud.

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between ability grouping for the study of Talmud and academic self-concept for Talmud of middle school students. In the first part of the study, I compared the means on an academic self-concept measure for Talmud of middle school students placed in a high level class to those middle school students placed in a low class. In the second part of the study, I correlated the predictive relationship among covariates, individual academic achievement and school average achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud. Middle school students were chosen as the sample population because the educational experience during the middle school years has been found to affect the development of self-concept in the general population (Danielsen, Hetland, Samdal, & Wold, 2009). Furthermore, middle school is when ability grouping for students in the Orthodox Jewish schools begins for the study of Talmud.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. Will students placed in the lower ability group have a lower academic self-concept for the subject of Talmud than students placed in the higher ability grouped class?

$H_0$1: There will be no significant difference between the Academic Self Concept for Talmud as measured by a self-report questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992) when the scores of the high ability class are compared to the low ability class.

$H_1$1: There will be a significant difference between the Academic Self Concept for Talmud as measured by a self-report questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992) when the scores of the high ability class are compared to the low ability class.

Does school academic achievement and Individual academic achievement predict academic self- concept in Talmud?

$H_0$2: There will not be a predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school achievement and academic self-concept for Talmud.

$H_1$2: School academic achievement, as measured by GPA, will have a negative relationship with academic self-concept for Talmud which will be measured by a self-report questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992).

Students from four schools were assessed for academic achievement in Talmud and academic self-concept in Talmud. To test these hypotheses, a multilevel regression analysis was performed to analyze the relationships between individual academic achievement, school academic achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the research questions in greater detail.

Research Objectives

There were two objectives of the performed research. The first objective was to examine the effect of ability grouping on the academic self-concept for Talmud of middle school students. This was done by showing a significant difference in academic self-concept scores between the low and high ability levels. The second objective was to examine the relationship among individual academic achievement, school average academic achievement, the interaction between the two, and academic self-concept for Talmud.

Theoretical Basis for the Study

The Big Fish Little Pond Effect

The theoretical basis of the big fish little pond effect (BFLPE) is founded in the understanding of the development of self-esteem and self-concept while incorporating the idea that every individual has a frame of reference by which to compare his or her performance (Marsh & Hau, 2004). According to the BFPLE, academic self-concept is developed through a student's evaluation of his or her performance or academic standing relative to other students. This concept was originally investigated by Davis (1966), who found that student performance and student career aspirations were adversely affected in highly selective schools. However, Davis did not investigate the effect of the process of comparison to other students. Figure 1 explains the predictive relationship and interaction among individual academic achievement, school/class average achievement and Academic self-concept.

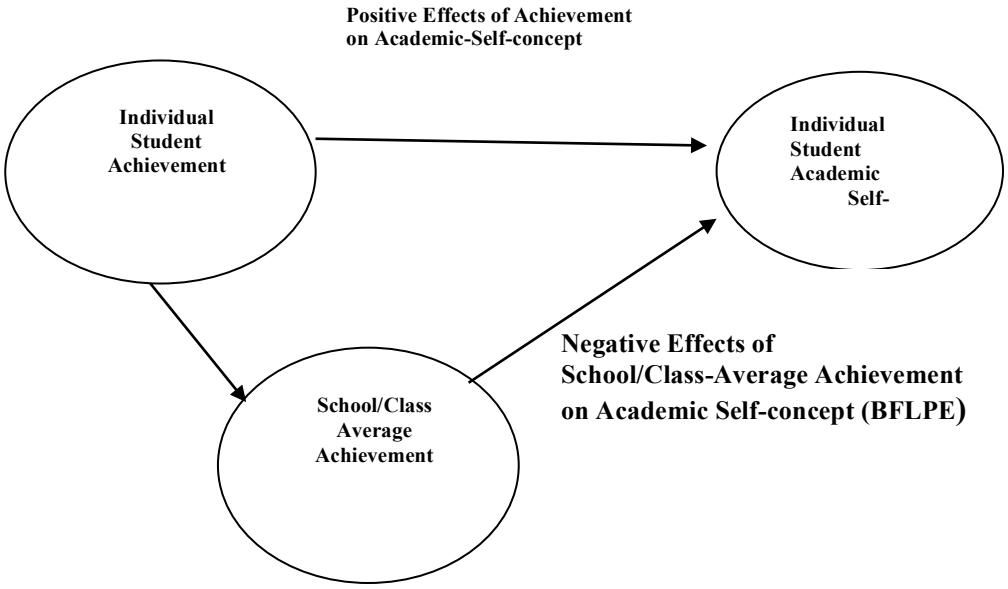

Figure 1. The big fish little pond effect. The predictive relationship between individual achievement, school/class average achievement, and individual academic self-concept (Marsh & Hau, 2009).

Multidimensional self-concept theory. The two theories that provide the theoretical basis for BFLPE are multidimensional self-concept theory and social comparison theory. Multidimensional self-concept theory was first introduced by Shavleson (1976) who proposed that a global self-concept based on academic and nonacademic domains. Marsh (1986) later expanded on Shavelson's original formulation by specifying the academic domain into particular subjects like mathematics, language arts, science, and general school functioning.

Frame of reference hypothesis. Social comparison theorists posit that a person compares his/her ability to the ability of others (Dai & Rinn, 2008). In the

language of BFLPE, social comparison theory is termed frame of reference. According to the frame of reference theory, when surrounded by outstanding achievers a student's self-concept will be lowered; however, when surrounded by students who have a lower achievement level, the student's self-concept will be higher (Trautwein, Marsh, & Seaton (2008).

There are two ways the process of frame of reference occurs: contrast effect and assimilation or reflected glory effect. Marsh and Craven (2002) explained that the contrast effect occurs when an individual of lower ability compares him or herself to individuals with higher ability. Assimilation or reflected glory effect occurs when an individual is part of a group that performs well and takes pride in having membership within the group. The BFLPE results in a stronger contrast effect and a weaker assimilation or reflected glory effect (Trautwein, 2008). According to Marsh and Craven (2006), children become less positive about their self-evaluations as they move through middle school. Marsh and Craven (2006) theorized that there is more social comparison and external feedback (e.g., competition, stricter grading, social standing) in middle school resulting in a more realistic assessment of abilities and social standing.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a quantitative study with a between subject design. I used Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)and multilevel regression analyses to analyze the results. Data were collected from middle school Talmud students from four schools that practiced ability grouping for Talmud. In the first part of the study, the independent variable was the class placement of the students. Students were placed by their schools

prior to the study into a higher, middle, or lower level class. The dependent variable was academic self-concept for Talmud. In the second part of the study, **t**he predictor variables of the study, individual academic achievement and school average academic achievement, were both measured in a quantitative manner through Grade Point Average (GPA). This design is the same design that has been used in previous research on the BFLPE and the effect of ability grouping on academic self-concept (Marsh, Seaton, & Trautwein, 2008; Marsh, Hau, & Craven, 2004).

The predictor variables of individual and school average academic achievement were measured by using archival data of student GPA in Talmud from school records. The outcome variable, academic self-concept for Talmud, was based on the average of responses from a Likert-based questionnaire. Each participant received an academic self-concept score, which was the total of the Likert responses to the questionnaire. The scores were recorded on a self-made record form. The mean academic self-concept scores were analyzed using an ANOVA and the relationship among school average achievement, individual academic achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud were analyzed using a multilevel regression analyses. These tests were used to see whether there was a statistically significant difference between the different ability groups and whether there was a predictive relationship among the variables. The results may provide insight into some of the dynamics of ability grouping and the academic self-concept for the subject of Talmud. The effects of ability grouping for Talmud on academic self-concept has not been researched before.

Definition of Key Terms

Ability grouping: Ability grouping refers to the educational practice, by schools, teachers, or educational authorities of placing students together on the basis of their abilities, as defined by standardized tests and demonstrated past academic achievement (Carroll, 1999; Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003).

Academic self-concept: Academic self-concept refers to students' self-concept in relation to school, academic skills, and intelligence (Byrne & Shavelson, 1986). There can be subject-specific academic self-concepts like verbal self-concept, math self-concept and Talmud self-concept. This includes academic accomplishments, academic competence, expectations of academic success or failure, and academic self-beliefs.

Frame of reference: Every individual has a frame of reference by which to compare his or her performance. This term refers to the idea that students use the other students in their academic environment as a frame of reference in making self-evaluations about their academic performance (Bing, Whanger, Davison, & VanHook, 2004).

Global self-concept: Global self-concept is defined as a multidimensional construct that refers to an individual's overall perception of self including the roles an individual plays and his or her evaluation of performance in those roles (Byrne, 1984). Some domains that make up the global self-concept are academics, gender roles, sexuality, racial identity, socialization, and intelligence.

Global self-esteem: Global self-esteem refers to the students' overall evaluative feeling a person has about themselves and is based on the person's evaluation of his or her

performance and feedback from others in many domains (Harter, 1993). It is one component of self-concept.

Self-concept: Self-concept is a general construct which includes the individual's definition of his or her role and status in the environment. It includes the constructs of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bandura 1994).

Self-efficacy: According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is the foundation of human agency (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy is belief in an individual's capacity to succeed or produce a desired outcome.

Self-esteem: Self-esteem refers to an individual's general positive or negative attitude toward him/herself based on self-evaluation. It is developed as a result of positive and/or negative life experiences (i.e., previous achievements, failures, social comparisons; Bandura, 1977; Harter, 1993).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed middle school Talmud students participating in the study were a representative sample of middle school Talmud students from the NYC area. Although random sampling would have aided in helping make the study population more representative of the overall population in New York City (NYC), this was not considered realistic to get enough participants. However, having a lottery between 10 possible schools and picking four helped provide some level of randomization in the sampling of participants.

The quality of instruction in the higher level classes might be better and, therefore, confound the results. Prince (2004) suggested that the higher-level class

usually gets the more skilled teacher, possibly influencing the outcome of the study. The quality of Talmud instruction received by high, middle, and low ability groups was believed to be of similar quality because all the potential schools involved have access and participate in similar professional development programs. The only difference in instruction should be the pace.

In terms of the variables, there was an assumption that constructing the questionnaire for Talmud self-concept similar to the Self Description Questionnaire-2nd Edition (SDQ-2) created by Marsh (1992) was a valid measure of this construct. Ideally, there would be a standardized tool to measure academic self-concept for Talmud. However, no tool existed to measure self-concept for Talmud. There was also an assumption that GPA was an objective measure of academic achievement. Ideally, there would be an achievement test for Talmud. Yet, no standardized achievement test existed for Talmud.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I investigated the relationship between class placement, achievement, and Talmud self-concept. The theoretical foundation was the frame of reference theory and multidimensional self-concept theory. This research may offer insight into the potential correlation between ability grouping and Talmud self-concept. The BFLPE has been shown in many studies and in many countries but never for the subject of Talmud. I did not look at the general self-concept or any other one of the self-concept scales. Given the multidimensionality of self-concept, it was appropriate to study Talmud self-concept only. The study was limited to a male population because females generally do not have

Talmud as part of their usual curriculum. Although females were not included, there were four schools that participated in the study and that should have helped generalizability among males. Students above seventh grade were excluded as they may have been in classes of different ability at an earlier point which would confound the results. The focus of the study was on the population of middle school students because middle school is the time that Talmud study begins and, therefore, the formation of academic self-concept for Talmud begins at that time as well. Another reason this age was chosen was because this is when students transition from being grouped by neighborhood to being grouped by ability.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the research. One limitation was the narrow scope of the population. The participants were all from Jewish Orthodox private school in the New York City area. A second limitation was the inclusion of only male subjects. Although Talmud is taught to females in some schools, the schools from which this sample was drawn were male-only schools. Therefore, findings from this study cannot be generalized to females.

One possible confounding variable was that the culture of the school influences the values of the students. A school culture of acceptance of individual differences and needs may have different results than one intolerant of individual differences or which creates an intense level of competition.

Although the results may not be generalized to all Talmud students in the United States or even in New York State, the results may provide helpful insight into an

investigation with no prior research. A literature search of the BFLPE and Talmud did not yield any research articles.

Another limitation was that ideally the variable of Talmud Academic Self-Concept would be measured with a standardized tool. Other tools measuring self-concept have been standardized on populations numbering in the thousands. However, it was not uncommon for Likert scales to be used in the early stages of this type of research. Hopefully, better tools will be developed for evaluating Talmud self-concept. In most BFLPE research a standardized measure of academic achievement is preferred over GPA. A standardized assessment of Talmud achievement did not exist, therefore limiting the study to the use of GPA even though it is not ideal.

Many BFLPE studies measured academic self-concept in longitudinal studies and gathered the data a few times. This methodology was beyond the scope of a dissertation but would have aided in providing a more valid measure of each participant's academic self-concept.

Significance of the Study

Children's experiences at school shape the way they view themselves and what they can accomplish. This study may facilitate social change by providing educators with empirically-based research clarifying the relationship between a child's academic self-concept and ability grouping. This information may provide educators with evidence for making research-based policies that will facilitate a positive school environment in which children can thrive.

The results of this study may also help fill the gap in existing research by providing insight into whether ability grouping for Talmud affects academic self-concept in the study population. Many parents are faced with the question of whether it is better for their child to be at the bottom of the higher-tracked class or better to be at the top of the middle or lower class (Alpert & Bechar, 2008). This research may facilitate communication and open discussions between parents and administrators about this topic and identify factors that may balance parents' concerns about their child being placed in a lower ability group.

Summary

In this study, I examined the effect of ability grouping on students' academic self-concept for the study of Talmud in an Orthodox Jewish middle school. Participants in this study completed a measure of academic self-concept. Unlike previous studies on the effects of ability grouping on self-concept for secular subjects, this study was unique because I focused on the effects of ability grouping for the study of Talmud. The study was also unique in that I examined the BFLPE for the subject of Talmud which has also not been examined before.

The findings of this study may result in a better understanding of how ability grouping affects the academic self-concept of students who study Talmud, as well as practical implications for practitioners who work with middle school students. A review of the literature on ability grouping and academic self-concept and an overview of the research methodology are found in Chapter 2. A detailed explanation of the research design and methodology follows in Chapter 3. This work continues with the findings of

the study in Chapter 4 and an overview and discussion of the study in Chapter 5, which will include the study's theoretical and practical implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Ability grouping in schools has been a controversial issue in U.S. educational policy since the early 1900s (Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003). Those who argue against tracking or ability grouping claim that students placed in the lower tracks will suffer from low self-esteem, low self-concept, and the students will develop negative attitudes toward school and academic achievement (Ireson, Hallam, & Plewis, 2001). Due to the controversial nature of ability grouping, researchers have attempted to identify its positive and negative effects on students' self-esteem and academic attainment. However, much of the research remains inconclusive and equivocal (Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003). Additionally, researchers studying ability grouping have focused mainly on grouping students in subjects such as math and reading. In this study, I addressed the lack of empirical research on the effects of ability grouping on academic self-concept in middle school students studying the Talmud.

Given the cultural and personal implications of the study of Talmud for middle school students, it is critical that educators be aware of the potential effects of ability grouping on students' self-concept, personality development, and academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to provide empirical data to help educators develop better policies regarding ability grouping Talmud. If ability grouping affects the development of self-concept in Talmud students, it is something that would be worthy of addressing in the formation of the classes.

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of academic self-concept, self-esteem, the practice of ability grouping; its definition and history in the United States, as well as a thorough explanation of the BFLPE. The chapter also includes a review of the existing literature on the positive and negative effects of ability grouping on students' self-concept and academic achievement. The chapter concludes with the purpose of the present study, the gap in the literature it intends to fill, research questions, and the possible social change implications of the study.

Literature Search Strategy

Electronic databases searched for relevant literature included Academic Search Premier, PsycBOOKS, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, eBooks, ERIC, Academic Research Complete, Education Research Complete, and Dissertation Abstracts International. Key words used for online searches included *ability grouping, tracking, self-esteem, academic self-esteem, BFLPE, self-concept,* and *self-efficacy*. Social work, nursing, and sociological databases were searched yielding many peer-reviewed academic journals from the last 10 years. Some articles were found by cross-referencing from the reference sections of articles already retrieved. Specific titles and authors were searched and key word searches were combined to narrow results. In addition to obtaining an in-depth review of the literature, the literature search also helped to identify gaps in the current literature and directions for further study.

Theoretical Foundation

Big Fish Little Pond Effect

According to the BFLPE, a student's academic self-concept can be predicted by the comparing his or her academic performance to the average academic ability level of peers attending the same school (Marsh et al., 2008). BFLPE is rooted in the frame of reference effects derived from social comparison theory (Marsh, 2007). In an academic context, a particular student will compare his or her academic ability to the academic ability of other classmates and use the other classmates as the basis for social comparison. If the student perceives his or her own ability to be superior relative to classmates, a positive contrast effect will likely occur; if the student perceives him or herself to have inferior abilities compared to classmates, a negative contrast will likely occur resulting in lower academic self-concept.

BFLPE has been substantiated in numerous studies and across cultures (Dai, 2004; Kulik & Kulik, 1991; Marsh, 2005; Marsh & Craven, 2002). For example, in their study of 4,000 15-year-olds from 26 countries (i.e., Brazil, Mexico, Korea, Portugal, Russia), March and Hall (2003) found, regardless of culture or economic level, BFLPE was present. Similar findings were reported in a more recent study of over 200,000 participants from 41 individualistic and collectivist countries (Marsh, Craven, & Seaton, 2009). The researchers of these findings suggested that the BFLPE is a universal concept that exists cross-culturally and in different parts of the world. This would support the idea that the BFLPE would exist for the subject of Talmud as well.

Researchers have suggested that the dynamics of the BFLPE are more likely to result in a stronger negative contrast effect than a positive reflected glory effect. That means that when the contrast effect occurs it happens at a greater intensity than in a situation in which the reflected glory effect occurs. The resulting measures of academic self-concept will be more negatively impacted than positive results of reflected glory. No explanation for this phenomenon was given. Marsh (1991) found that students in high-ability schools have lower educational and occupational aspirations, are less likely to have high aspirations in english or math, and have lower grade point averages. In a longitudinal study, Marsh (2007) found the negative effect on math self-concept to still be present 4four years after graduation of high school. In a well-known study by Trautwein (2008) found that students took pride in attending high-achieving high schools (reflected glory), but a school's higher average achievement led to lower academic self-concept (negative contrast effect). These studies support the idea that although students might take pride in being part of a high achieving class or school, the impact of a negative contrasting effect is more severe and has a long-term impact.

Internal/External Frame of Reference

Self-concept is believed to be developed via two means of comparison. The first, an external frame of reference, occurs when a student compares his or her ability and performance in the same subject to that of another student. For example, John could compare his score of 95 to Jim's score of 90 on a recent math test resulting in a more positive feeling about himself. However, if John uses Charles' score of 98 as an external frame of reference, John will have negative feelings about his 90. The second

internal frame of reference occurs when a student compares his or her own performance in two different subject areas. For example, if John compares his score of 95 on his math test to his score of 80 on a recent essay he will walk away with a positive evaluation of himself regarding math and a negative evaluation of his writing abilities. Internal or external frames of reference can result in positive or negative feelings depending on the variables of the comparison. This theory of internal/external frame of reference was originally examined by Bong (1998) who assessed 11th and 12th grade students in English, math, Spanish, American history, and chemistry. In Bong's study, participants compared two internal variables which should result in an inverse relationship just like in the example above with John's comparison of writing and math. Marsh and Yeung (2001) critiqued Bong's findings because the vague language of the items measuring internal comparisons was flawed and there were only two items measuring for the internal comparison. In a study controlling for the problems in Bong's original study, Dickhauser (2005) evaluated the internal/external frame of reference effect for 675 students ranging from seventh to 10th grade in the math and verbal domains. Dickhauser supported the internal/external frame of reference insofar as the results showed positive effects on the external frame of references and negative effects on the internal comparisons. Brunner et al. (2010) also found support for the internal/external frame of reference in his assessment of 4,800 middle school students in Germany. Brunner et al.(2010) found positive correlations within social comparisons in academic subjects and resulting subject-specific self-concepts. Internal comparison between German and French had the predicted negative effects. Students who

performed better in German than French showed inverse relationships among the two languages supporting internal frame of reference theory. The conclusions from the studies about internal and external frame of reference indicate that student perceptions about their own ability are formed by comparisons made to others and comparisons of their own performance in different subjects. This supports the importance of looking at an individual factors like individual academic achievement and external factors like overall school or class achievement.

Key Variables and Concepts

Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept (ASC) refers to students' self-perceptions of their academic accomplishments, academic competence, expectations of academic success or failure, and academic self-beliefs. Researchers have shown that students' beliefs about their abilities to succeed in academic activities affect their academic achievement (Abadzi, 1983; Bandura, 1982; Cheng, Lam, & Chan, 2008; Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003; Harter, 1993; Ireson & Halllam, 2007; Usher & Pajares, 2006; Zeleke, 2004;). Students who are confident in their ability to succeed work harder, engage in more self-regulatory strategies, and evaluate their progress more frequently (Parjares, 2002). These students are able to solve problems more efficiently, show more persistence, and are better able to monitor their work time.

The conceptualization of academic self-concept began with the Shavelson (1976) model. Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) proposed that academic self-concepts are specific to school subjects and are hierarchically organized, with general academic self-

concept at the apex of the model. Shavelson proposed the general self at the apex of the model. At the next level, there is the general academic self and social self, emotional self, and physical self-concept. General academic self-concept is broken down into specific subject domains. Marsh (1990) found support for the academic self-concept aspect of the Shavelson model in three different studies. Marsh, Hau, Artelt, Baumert, and Peschar (2006) found this phenomenon to be present in the 25 countries in which they performed their research. The concept of academic self-concept expanded over time as the research developed. It was Shavelson who first proposed the idea that the general self-concept is shaped by different domains of self concept, one of them being academic self-concept. The multidimensional nature of self-concept is important because it suggests that academic self concept should be studied as its own construct.

A second hierarchal model, the Marsh-Shavelson Model (1985), was developed in which general academic self-concept was at the apex of the model and believed to influence other concepts below it. However, this model has not been supported by research. Lack of empirical support for these two hierarchical models suggests that having general academic self-concept at the apex is suspect.

Marsh and Shavelson (1990) revised their model and incorporated the problematic findings of prior models. Rather than placing general academic self-concept at the apex of the model, both general math self-concept and general verbal self-concept share the apex. As with prior models, however, this model failed to demonstrate expected correlations among domains. For example, subject-specific self-concepts such as English and Spanish and Chinese and English were unrelated (March & Yeung, 2001;

Kong & Hau, 2001). Further, in studies examining only a few academic subjects, the verbal and math domains seem to have a weak correlation; however, when more subjects are incorporated there is a higher correlation suggesting a greater influence of general academic self-concept.

Brunner and colleagues (2010) suggested a fourth model known as the Nested Marsh/Shavelson Model (NMS). This model takes into consideration the subject-specific complications of academic self-concept and the hierarchical organization of self-concepts with general academic self-concept at the apex. The NMS model accounts for the influence of both domains general and subject-specific self-concepts on one another while maintaining the hierarchal structure. The subject-specific academic self-concept operate independently of the General academic self-concept. In a study of 4,800 students, Brunner et.al (2010) found the NMS model to be superior to the previous models proposed in supporting the assumptions about the structure of academic self-concept. This suggests that the construct of self-concept needs to be studied from both a global and subject specific perspective.

Ability Grouping

Ability grouping refers to the educational practice by schools, teachers, or educational authorities of placing students together based on their abilities, standardized test performance, and demonstrated past academic achievement (Carroll, 1999; Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003). The basic assumption underlying this method is that homogeneous classes will enhance students' academic achievement by allowing the higher-ranking students to progress at a faster pace and the lower-ranking students to learn at a slower

pace without holding back the other students. This method has been the subject of much debate, but nevertheless has been used since the 1800s in the United States and in many other countries around the world (Abadzi, 1983). The most extreme form of ability grouping is tracking. Tracking involves grouping students according to their scores on achievement tests or grade point averages. Once grouped, students remain in that "track" for all of their studies without consideration of how they differ in performance between various subject areas. A second form of ability grouping occurs when teachers group students for instruction in various subject areas within the classroom. Thus, an individual child's grouping within the classroom may vary depending on the subject being taught (Powell, 2008).

History of Ability Grouping

Before the mid-1800s schools had one teacher who taught a class of students spanning first through eighth grades. As schools grew in size, it became clear that a more formal system of grade organization was necessary. The Quincy Grammar School of Boston was the first to implement a grade system that separated children by age (Findley & Bryan, 1970). By 1860, most large cities had graded schools; however, it soon became clear that the graded system had failings (Prince, 2004). Educators began to seek individualized approaches so that work could be completed at different rates by different students according to their abilities.

In 1867, W.T. Harris set up the first school that practiced ability grouping in St. Louis, Missouri (Findley & Bryan, 1970) with students divided based on teacher recommendation. Students identified as more advanced were given the opportunity to

progress through school at a more rapid rate than the other students. Similarly, the "Cambridge Plan" was employed in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1891. Under this model, advanced students were identified by teachers as they entered fourth grade. The recommended students finished school in four years while the remaining students completed school in as many as 8 years.

During this time period, a second approach to ability grouping was also being introduced which focused on the goals of instruction rather than the rate at which the students moved through the school system. For example, schools in Indiana divided the students into two groups: the fundamentals and the special subjects (Ireson & Hallam, 2001). The special subjects studied the same content as the fundamentals but were required to do more complex projects and learned the material at a higher level. This model of ability grouping persisted for the next 25 years. The goal was to develop the students placed in the "special subjects" group so they could apply what they learned from the advanced curriculum to real world problems

The process of ability grouping became more formalized following seminal work by Alfred Binet. At the end of the 19th century, Binet and his colleagues Henri and Simon produced methods of evaluating mental functioning and published the Binet-Simon Scale (Sattler, 2001). In contrast to most methods of evaluation at that time, the focus of their evaluation methods was on higher-level thinking rather than basic sensory processing. One of the political goals of this scale was to satisfy the French government's request to identify children who had mental retardation. Binet's ultimate goal, however, was to develop a scale that was consistent with age-based cognitive

development and to determine whether a child was functioning at the average level of their same-age peers. The work of Binet was influential as it provided the basis for using an intelligence quotient in providing educators with a way of evaluating students.

Binet's work was expanded upon and standardized by Terman in 1916, resulting in the Stanford-Binet and the introduction of the term "intelligence quotient" or "IQ". Terman defined IQ as the ability to carry on abstract thinking (Sattler, 2001). During World War I, Terman administered psychological tests to assist the army in determining which recruits would be trained as officers and which would serve in the lower levels of the army. Upon finding it effective for this purpose, the government pushed to expand its use into school placement. Whereas Binet and Simon developed their tool to identify weaker students so that they may receive needed help, Terman proposed the use of IQ tests to place gifted students on an appropriate job track.

The development of group intelligence tests proved to be an advantage to teachers who were trying to effectively educate children with widely differing socioeconomic and language levels. As a result, between 1920 and 1935, ability grouping was based on intelligence test scores. Much of the research conducted at this time failed to show that students grouped by intelligence were able to make greater academic strides than ungrouped students. Therefore, from 1935 to the mid-1950s, ability grouping became less common (Abadzi, 1983).

In the 1950s, ability grouping experienced a resurgence when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. As a reaction to the Soviet success, American schools developed high-level curricula and accelerated programs in math and science. These programs focused

on gifted students with the hope that they would contribute to the field of science and technology and help the United States close the gap with the Soviets.

In the 1980s the controversy over the use of ability grouping became a popular topic because well-known educators and researchers vocalized their concerns that ability grouping was elitist and racist (Oaks, 1981; Slavin, 1986). Ability grouping came to be viewed as perpetuating racial and socioeconomic inequality (Oakes, 1995), as minority students were disproportionately represented in low ability groups (North Carolina Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1991; Slavin, 1995). In 1991, an African-American parent filed a lawsuit, arguing that grouping students by ability was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment providing equal protection. As a result of this lawsuit, the school district changed its policies regarding tracking and grouping students and inclusive classrooms became the norm (Zirkel & Gluckman, 1995).

Inclusive classrooms have not proven to close the achievement gap, however, as after 20 years of inclusion as common practice, there are still a disproportionate number of minority students who are achieving poorly (Gardner, 2007). Educators and policy makers continue to struggle with questions regarding best education practices and how to effectively meet the needs of all students in a manner that is both politically and academically sound.

Ability Grouping and Academic Outcomes

Controversy regarding ability grouping stems from several areas. For example, in many schools utilizing tracking for placement, students are not reevaluated or re-

categorized from year to year. Powell (2008) found that, generally, once a student has been evaluated and placed in a lower-track, the student stays in the lower-track for the duration of his or her school years. The teachers of higher-tracked classes expect more from their students, resulting in their performing at a higher level (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004). A student who has not had these demands placed upon him or her may not learn to perform at a high academic level. Thus, it is very difficult for a lower-tracked student to move to a higher-track as he or she may be intimidated and apprehensive about the high academic demands.

Being placed on a lower track can also create a negative cycle for the student. For example, per self-fulfilling prophecy, the teacher's expectations of the student shape the student's ability to succeed academically. Students placed on a lower track often experience apathy, low aspirations, and poor academic performance (Slavin, 1995). Seeing the student's low performance level, the teacher may conclude that the student is academically challenged and treat the student accordingly (Trautwein, Ludtke, Marsh, Koller, & Baumert, 2006).

In addition to the influence of teacher expectations on student success, poor outcomes for lower-tracked students may be attributable to less engaging classrooms (Gamoran, 1992). One study revealed that teachers modify the difficulty of their language for different ability groups (Abadzi, 1983). In this study, teachers were asked to teach a magazine article to low and high-ability groups. Teachers used longer words and introduced more concepts with high-ability students and used shorter words and easier language with low-ability students. Students placed in lower tracks have also

been found to be exposed to substantially less and lower level content as compared to similarly low-achieving students in mixed ability classes and students in higher tracks. This may significantly impact students' future academic careers, as some believe that lower-tracked students have great difficulty advancing to a higher-track not because of lack of intellect, but because they are denied the opportunity to do so by only being exposed to low-level basic skills (Braddock & Slavin, 1993).

Consistent with these concerns, most of the research to date shows that ability grouping is more favorable for high-performing students and less favorable for low-performing students (Hendricks, 2009). Hallam et al. (2002) found that tracking benefitted gifted students' achievement and attainment in mathematics while low-ability grouped students benefitted more from mixed-ability group settings. Lleras and Rangel (2009) investigated the effect of ability grouping on 22,000 African American and Hispanic elementary school students from grade K through 3rd and found that the students in the higher level group far surpassed the students placed in the lower group insofar as they learned more material. Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, and Karns (1998) found that high achievers produced work of lower quality and collaborated less effectively when they worked with students of lower abilities. Similarly, Hooper and Hannafin (1998) found that the academic achievement of high achievers increased approximately 12% when grouped with other high achievers. High achievers also completed the assigned learning task more effectively when in homogenous groups. Shelby and Lannie (1999) found that students who were grouped according to academic ability responded to questions with longer and more creative answers than students who were

not grouped according to ability. Some researchers have also found that ability grouping prevents low-performing students from interacting in a cooperative setting with students of higher abilities (Moody & Vaughn, 1997). When students with low academic achievement were tracked by ability and placed with other low achievers, they often perceived collective inability to complete the task because of their limited academic capabilities (Cheng, Lam, & Chan, 2008). However, when students were not tracked by ability and low achievers had the opportunity to work with high achievers, they often had higher collective efficacy due to the supportive learning environment generated by higher academic achieving students. In contrast to other studies, however, ability grouping for high achievers was not beneficial in this study. When high achievers were grouped by ability, they interacted less effectively with their high-achieving peers as they assumed everyone in their group understood the curriculum (Cheng et al., 2008).

Making conclusions about ability grouping more difficult, some studies have found benefit to all groups when ability grouping is employed where others have found no advantage for any groups (Ireson, Hallam, & Plewis, 2001). Hopkins (1997) found that ability grouping increased academic achievement because instruction was more focused, allowing teachers to adjust the pace of instruction. This was beneficial for low-ability groups because it allowed for repetition and reinforcement for those students who needed it. In contrast, teachers were able to provide more opportunities for higher-level students to engage in higher-level problem solving, cooperative group discussion, and independent research. In contrast, Abadzi's (1983) review of the scientific research on ability grouping revealed no significant differences between the academic achievement of

grouped students and nongrouped students. This finding has borne out in other studies failing to show higher grades among ability-grouped students (Bui, Imberman & Craig, 2012).

Teacher Perception of Ability Grouping

Just as the research regarding the effects of ability grouping is mixed, so are teacher perceptions of the practice. When queried regarding their preference of classroom type (i.e. ability grouped vs. integrated), many teachers prefer to teach classes with students of the same ability (Prince, 2004). These findings were echoed by Petrello (2000), who found that, among educators of kindergarten to fourth-grade students, 84% preferred to teach homogenously grouped classes. Many reasons for this preference were identified by the educators. Some felt that classes can be better taught when the teacher's attention is not divided between students of varying abilities. Others believed they cannot teach at the pace high achievers require because lower-achieving students require repetition or re-teaching; this then pulls down the academic level for the higher achieving students. Many teachers also felt that grouping allows each child to explore his or her individual interests while the teacher acts as a facilitator (Powell, 2008). These findings are notable, given Ansalone and Biafore's (2004) study of 124 New York State public school teachers. Their findings revealed that approximately 66% of the teachers surveyed remembered being tracked in elementary school. Twenty-one percent remembered being tracked in a low-ability group, and more than half of those reported it had a "less than positive" effect on their educational endeavors later in life. Additionally, 60% of the teachers reported feeling ability grouping has a negative

impact on the self-concept of students who are low-achievers (Ansalone & Biafore, 2004). Despite teachers' personal experiences with tracking, over 70% supported tracking. Teachers reported feeling it would be too difficult to teach large classes that require a tremendous amount of differentiation, and the support needed to teach a class with wide variability in student ability is not present in most schools.

Similar challenges are identified by middle-school teachers, who view tracking as a key way of reducing student variability so that teaching and managing the group becomes an easier task (Prince, 2004). When there are many significant ability differences within one classroom, the teacher is faced with a choice of customizing the lesson plan to meet students' individualized needs or to teach the average combined level of students. The first strategy is difficult and most teachers are not adequately trained in preparing customized lesson plans. The second strategy is ineffective and may be unfair to students who are above or below average.

Another downside of ability grouping is the pairing of less experienced teachers with lower ability students (Prince et al., 2004). Many teachers prefer to teach high-achievers as it is often less strenuous and feels more productive (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004). More experienced teachers are typically more capable and have a greater voice in determining the class to which they are assigned. New and inexperienced teachers are often given classes other teachers do not want to teach, such as low track and behaviorally-challenged classes. Studies have found that teachers of lower tracks were less qualified and had lower expectations for their students than those teaching higher

tracks. This led researchers to conclude that ability grouping does not raise academic achievement, but in fact serves to decrease it (Powell, 2008).

The Effect of Ability Grouping on Self-Concept

As with much of the ability-grouping research, the effects of ability grouping on academic self-concept are mixed. Both a systematic review of 13 controlled studies (Ireson, Hallam, & Plewis, 2001) and a study of secondary students in Hong Kong (Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003) failed to find negative effects of ability grouping on academic self-concept. However, other studies have supported low self-concept in lower-track students (Kulik, 1993; Slavin, 1990) with lower-track students believing themselves less capable and choosing their educational plans accordingly (Oakes, 1985; Prince, 2004). Ireson, Hallam, and Plewis (2001) have found this to be particularly true among teenagers. Some suggest that negative effects are found for high-ability students as well, with ability grouping resulting in these students becoming egotistical (Mills, 1992).

Assigning lower-ability students to classes based on ability may have a stigmatizing effect that results in students lowering their expectations about themselves, their behavior, and academic achievement. Grouping labels students in a public manner, and teachers identify their students using these labels. Students are well aware of which groups teachers value and which receive positive recognition in school. The stigma of this negative labeling damages students' confidence and self-esteem. Once a label has been assigned, a student rarely challenges the label; rather, he or she assumes the

characteristics of the label. As a result, the lower-track student may feel passed over and inferior (Carroll, 1999).

The stigma of being assigned to a lower track is of particular concern given the reactions of other children to lower-track children. A study by Mason (1974) revealed that children in a high-track group viewed lower-track students as "retards" and "just not good enough." Further, attitudes towards self and others create a vicious cycle where students with low self-concepts are grouped with others who also have low self-concepts and thereby reinforce each other's negative self-concepts. Students who possess a low self-concept display depression, may have thoughts of suicide, and are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers (Bhar, Ghahramanlou-Holloway, & Brown, 2008; Robles-Pina, Defrance, & Cox, 2008; Santos, Saraiva, & De Sousa, 2009). Males with low self-concept may have higher levels of unemployment and females with low self-concept may develop eating disorders. Additionally, students with a low self-concept often treat themselves harshly and allow others to treat them harshly (Emler, 2001).

The Talmud

For the last 1,300 years, the Talmud has been the center of Jewish learning. It combines the study of Bible, law, ethics, and philosophy in a network of legal source texts, traditions, and legends. Talmud records oral traditions composed over more than a millennium by hundreds of rabbinic scholars. The study of the Talmud is synonymous with Jewish identity itself (Hayman, 1997). There is little empirical data on the study of Talmud, and to date there is no research investigating the study of Talmud and ability grouping.

Talmud is an essential part of the Jewish studies curriculum in Orthodox Jewish day schools around the world and is learned by boys from 5th grade to adulthood. In Jewish Orthodox communities, boys are encouraged to incorporate the language they learn in Talmud into their own language from a young age (Benor, 2004). The curriculum in fifth and sixth grades focuses on developing reading skills and following laws. As students become more adept at reading and following the discussion in the Talmud, complex commentaries are introduced and more abstract approaches to understanding the concepts are developed. One possible reason for introducing Talmud at an early age is to provide students with experiential opportunities to connect with God and the Jewish community. From a psychosocial perspective (Erikson, 1956), children can develop a basic competence in learning Talmud at around the age of 11, which would facilitate incorporating the study of Talmud into the next stage of development as the students become teenagers and develop their own identity.

During the fifth grade, students are typically expected to become familiar with the Aramaic language and develop vocabulary and a very basic knowledge of the Talmud. In sixth grade, students continue developing their reading and vocabulary skills and begin developing higher-order thinking skills. Students are monitored very carefully to evaluate whether they are processing and displaying their understanding of new concepts and are placed the following year based on their processing speed and depth of understanding of the material (Rabbi D. Frischman, personal communication, January 5, 2012). Upon entering seventh grade, the students are ability-grouped into one of two tracks. The higher grouping assumes that the students have mastered reading,

vocabulary, and methodology and are now prepared for higher-order thinking skills. The higher track also covers more material as compared to the lower track which focuses more on a continuation of basic skills (Rabbi D. Frischman, personal communication, January 5, 2012).

Seventh grade may be an ideal time to investigate the development of academic self-concept in this population. It is the first time the students are grouped by ability for the subject of Talmud. Because learning the Talmud is a highly valued academic endeavor, studying this population presents a good opportunity to gain insight as to whether students use ability grouping as a frame of reference for academic self-concept.

Summary

The following chapter continues with a description of the research design, including the sample and proposed statistical analyses, followed by a discussion of the psychometric properties of the assessment tools. The chapter concludes with a protection of participants' rights including confidentiality. The final chapter discusses findings and limitations of the study. Recommendations for clinical applications and further research are also presented.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of the study was to investigate whether ability grouping affects the academic self-concept of middle school students learning Talmud and whether the BFLPE exists for the subject of Talmud. The participants of the study were sixth and seventh grade middle school Talmud students from the tristate area from four schools that practice ability grouping for Talmud. The research was conducted on selected Sundays at four Sunday school programs. Both parts of the study were quantitative in nature. To determine the effect of ability grouping on Talmud self-concept, I used a between subject design with an ANOVA. The independent variable was divided into high, middle, and low ability grouping placement and the dependent variable was the average on a Likert scale measuring Talmud academic self-concept which was based on the SDQ-II (1992) as no academic concept scale existed for Talmud. The predictor variables were the individual student achievement, school average achievement, and the interaction between school average achievement and individual student achievement. These variables were measured using GPA of three previous report card grades. The dependent variable was the average score on a Likert scale measuring Talmud academic self-concept, which was based on the SDQ-II (Marsh, 1992). The results may provide insight into the dynamic of ability grouping for Talmud and academic self-concept of middle school students and could influence how educators structure the grouping of classes for this important subject.

The main purpose of this chapter is to explain the procedure that was used to collect, analyze, and interpret data for the study. I present the research design and rationale, method of sampling procedures and recruitment, method of data collection and

analysis, the instruments used in the study, how the data were collected and analyzed, ethical procedures to protect integrity of the study, and possible threats to validity. Both primary and secondary methods of data were used for the study. Primary sources were in the form of a questionnaire eliciting responses to measure academic self-concept and secondary in the form of student achievement scores. Chapter 3 will conclude with a summary of the design and methodology used in the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study, I examined the relationship between ability grouping for Talmud and the academic self-concept of sixth and seventh grade Talmud students. I also investigated the predictive relationship among individual academic achievement, school academic achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud. I assessed and analyzed the academic achievement and academic self-concept of sixth and seventh grade preadolescent students attending four Orthodox Jewish junior high schools that were located in the greater New York City area. In the first part of the study, I used a between-subject design and analyzed the effect of ability grouping for Talmud on academic self-concept. Between-subject designs allow the researcher to compare the performances of two groups on a particular measure to see if there is a significant difference in performance (Jaccard & Becker, 2002). In the first part of the study, a comparison of academic self-concept was made between the levels of ability grouping for sixth and seventh grade. In the second part of the study, I used a correlational design. Researchers use correlational designs to look at relationships between variables (Jaccard & Becker,

2002). In the second part of the study, I measured if an increase in school academic achievement was correlated with a decrease in academic self-concept for Talmud.

The results of the study may be used to offer insight to educational administrators as to whether class placement for Talmud affects the academic self-concept. This may impact the future academic, economic, and social standing of individual students. The results may also provide insight into dynamics that exist for the subject of Talmud because of its religious implications that do not exist for the previously researched secular subjects.

Data were collected on four consecutive Sundays at the four selected Sunday schools. Each school had one Sunday designated toward data collection. The 10-item questionnaires were given in a group setting for 10 minutes of the 20-minute recess. The data collection occurred over four Sundays and lasted for around 4 hours in total. Obtaining consent took effort and patience. However, the actual completion of the questionnaire took no longer than a few minutes. Student and school GPA in Talmud was accessed from the Talmud report card grades from the last three report cards. This helped me to determine individual student achievement and school average achievement. The study correlational design was consistent with the previous research performed in ability grouping and for the BFLPE. I used the same theoretical framework as the previous ability grouping and BFLPE research insofar as I used the frame of reference hypothesis as well as a multidimensional view of academic self-concept.

Methodology

Population

The participants were in sixth and seventh grade with an age range of 11 to 13 years of age. The participants were only male and were drawn from four all boys' schools from New York City. Orthodox Jewish schools in New York City do not generally teach Talmud to girls and, if they do, it is not done as rigorously as the boy schools do. If females would attend these schools, they would have been included as well. The population of the study was male Orthodox Jewish middle schools in the New York City area.

Sampling and Sample Procedures

It was expected that the sample for this study would be around 280 students from four schools. The four schools were selected randomly via lottery from a list of 10 NYC schools that taught Talmud and who agreed to participate in the study. The sampling strategy for the study was an equal probability sampling method. This means that each of the 10 schools had an equal chance of being chosen for the study, creating randomization and, therefore, increasing the generalizability of the study to Orthodox Jewish male sixth and seventh grade students in New York City.

For the first part of the study, the expected sample size was 52 students in each school. This was based on three variables, at a power level of .80 and an effect size of .06. The multiple regression analysis had an expected sample size of 72. This was based on a sample size calculator (Soper, 2013) using a power level of .80,

an effect size of .16, a power of .80, and a probability level of .05. Cohen (1988) explained that an effect size of .15 for a multiple regression analysis is considered a medium effect size. I looked to recruit at least 72 students in each school to satisfy the sample size needs for both parts of the study. The population was expected to be approximately 288 individuals divided by the four schools.

Participants

Participants were gathered from four all-male Orthodox Jewish junior high schools that taught Talmud in the New York City area. Four schools that practice ability grouping for Talmud were randomly selected from a list of 10 ability-grouped schools. Each school name was written on a small piece of paper and placed in a bowl. Four papers were randomly selected from that bowl identifying the ability-grouped schools that had the potential to be part of the study.

A letter and e-mail was sent to the religious studies principal of each school explaining the opportunity to partake in the study, the goals and intentions of the study, and the necessity to have access to the individual student records of participating student with parent consent. Upon receipt of permission from the religious studies principal, I placed advertisements in the schools' weekly paper, as well as the local newspaper. The participants who responded to the advertisement were sent an informed consent by mail/e-mail (Appendix A).

Individual students were only eligible to participate with parental written consent. On the day of the study, children were given and explained their rights in the form of an assent form. Once the students agreed and signed the assent form they were permitted to

participate in the study. The assent form explained what the study was about and what was expected to participate.

Procedures and Data Collection

The religious studies principal of the identified school was contacted via email/phone to obtain his or her permission to conduct the study and to gain access to Talmud report card grades. A Letter of Cooperation was sent to the principal via e-mail. After the principal responded with an e-mail approving the study, the researcher placed an advertisement in the school's weekly paper as well as in the local Jewish newspapers of the identified schools. The participants who responded to the advertisement were sent an informed consent to be completed by a parent (Appendix A) and were informed of the date and time when they could come and complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaires and gift cards were prepared before the dates of testing. The researcher e-mailed the parents the night before reminding them about the study and where and when the students should go. On the day of data collection, the researcher made an announcement in each class right before the break so participating students would be informed of where to go. The actual data collection took place in a specified room assigned by the principal of each school.

The questionnaire was administered by the researcher. Participants completed the questionnaires in groups. After a warm greeting, the assent form (Appendix B) was read aloud to the group. I asked the participants if they wanted to fill out the questionnaires and reminded the participants that there is no connection between the study and school

administration. The participants were also told they are not penalized if they choose not to participate at any point.

The participants that agreed to continue participation were then instructed that the researcher was going to read each question aloud and the participants were to answer after each question is read. After all 10 questions participants had an opportunity to go back and respond to any question they may have skipped. The raw scores resulting from the questionnaires were kept as the total score for the measure. Although there are standard scaled scores for the SDQ-II (1992), these scores were not intended for Talmud and were therefore not used for the study.

The questionnaire is a 6-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to respond to simple declarative statements with one of six responses: False, Mostly False, More False than True, More True than False, Mostly True, True. The resulting scores were based on the responses to the 10 items, half of which were positively worded statements and half which were negatively worded to control for positive response bias. There were no correct or incorrect answers on this type of questionnaire. After the completion of the questionnaire, the researcher gave each participant a Modell's gift card as thanks for their participation.

Academic achievement data were collected from the school secretary for each participant. The secretary was sent an Excel file with the student names and Academic Self-concept scores for Talmud. She entered the GPA scores into the GPA column, erased the names of the participants to de-identify the data and e-mailed the file back.

After data analysis, a 1 page summary of the findings was emailed to the principals and to the participating parents and students.

Data Analysis Plan

The independent variable for the first part of the study, ability grouping, was measured on an ordinal scale. In other words, students were placed in classes based on ability. They were placed in a low-level, middle-level or high-level class. The dependent variable of academic self-concept for Talmud was measured on an approximating interval scale. The term approximate is because ideally an interval scale should have two qualities: objective numerical data and equidistant value between intervals. One of the difficulties with Likert scales is that the numerical values of the scale have no objective value. The construct is arbitrary and based on the study and the levels are assigned numbers by the researcher. Researchers try to balance Likert scales by providing the same amount of positive responses as negative responses. Although the 6-point scale used for the SDQ-2 (1992) has three positive responses balanced by three negative responses, the values between each value on the scale are not necessarily equidistant from the perspective of the respondent.

The statistical analysis that was used to analyze the data of the first part of the study was the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This statistical method was used to compare the means of the three groups for the academic self-concept. The mean scores of the low, middle, and high ability classes were compared to one another. This was done to assess if there is a statistical significance between the mean scores. Chiu (2012) performed a similar study on the effect of ability grouping on Math Self-Concept and

used the same statistical method. SPSS (2009) was the statistical program used to analyze the statistical data. The results may add to the understanding of how the academic self-concept of middle school students is influenced by ability grouping.

The statistical analysis that was used to examine the BFLPE for Talmud is a multilevel regression analysis. Marsh et al. (2008) recommended the use of multilevel regression analysis when investigating the BFLPE. Regression analysis estimates the relationships among variables. In this study, there were two predictor/independent variables and it was therefore necessary to examine the relationship of each variable and the dependent variable as well as the interaction between the two predictor variables and the relationship the interaction has on the dependent variable (BFLPE). The relationship among individual academic achievement and academic self-concept for Talmud was analyzed. The relationship among school achievement and academic self-concept for Talmud was also analyzed. The interaction between individual and school achievement and their relationship to Academic self-concept in Talmud was the final analysis of the study.

The research questions asked were: Will students placed in the lower ability group have a lower academic self-concept for the subject of Talmud than students placed in the higher ability grouped class? What is the relationship among individual academic achievement, school average achievement, and academic self-concept?

Null hypothesis #1: Students placed in a high ability group class for Talmud will not have a significantly higher Talmud academic self-concept as measured by a self-report

questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992) than students placed in the low ability group class,

1. Will students placed in the lower ability group have a lower academic self-concept for the subject of Talmud than students placed in the higher ability grouped class?

$H_0$1: There will be no significant difference between the Academic Self Concept for Talmud as measured by a self-report questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992) when the scores of the high ability class are compared to the low ability class.

$H_1$1: There will be a significant difference between the Academic Self Concept for Talmud as measured by a self-report questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992) when the scores of the high ability class are compared to the low ability class.

Does school academic achievement and Individual academic achievement predict academic self- concept in Talmud?

$H_0$2: There will not be a predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school achievement and academic self-concept for Talmud.

$H_1$2: School academic achievement, as measured by GPA, will have a negative relationship with academic self-concept for Talmud which will be measured by a self-report questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992).

Instrumentation and Materials

Talmud Academic Self-Concept Survey

Although there are a number of tools that assess self-concept, there is no tool in existence that evaluates Talmud self-concept. It was therefore necessary to create a questionnaire for the purpose of this study. Solely using one of the established self-concept tools would be inappropriate based on the theoretical framework of multidimensional self-concept theory. In other words, because we are dealing with the context of Talmud, it would therefore have been appropriate to assess the specific domain of Talmud as it is not included in the previously existing scales. However, the 10 items that were used for Talmud Self-Concept was based on the SDQ-II (1992), which is a Self-Concept tool used in a previous important BFLPE study examining the BFLPE across 41 countries (Seaton, Marsh & Craven, 2009). In fact, the questionnaire in their study was also a modified version for the use of their study. The researcher utilized questions that are similar to the Verbal scale items.

Levels of Talmud Self-Concept were measured using the results of a 10 item self-report inventory designed to measure Talmud Self-Concept on a 6 point Likert Scale. Comparisons will be made based on the raw score of each participant. Participants were asked to respond to simple declarative statements with one of six responses: False, Mostly False, More False than True, More True than False, Mostly True, True. The resulting scores will be based on the responses to the 10 items, half of which are positively worded statements and half which are negatively worded to control for

positive response bias. The negatively worded responses were reversed-scored so that higher responses will reflect higher Talmud Self-Concept. The Questionnaire took approximately 3 minutes to complete.

Although the actual SDQ-II will not be used for the study, because the items were based on it, a brief review of its reliability and validity will be presented.

Reliability

Cronbach's coefficient alpha method measured the internal consistency reliability of the SDQ-II across 5 age groups and yielded coefficients from .83-.91 and are considered acceptable according to Aiken (2000). The academic areas of Math, verbal and general school yielded coefficient alphas of .86, .87, and .90. This means that there is homogeneity among the different items within each scale suggesting that the SDQ-II reliably measures different aspects of self-concept.

Another reliability issue when it comes to using instruments for research is that the results will remain consistent with the passing of time. This ensures that the tool will consistently yield the same results for the same individual. Test-Retest reliability coefficients yielded .82 for General school, .85 for Verbal and .88 for Math (Marsh, 1992).

Validity

The SDQ-II has demonstrated good content validity as it is consistent with Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) multifaceted, hierarchical model of self-concept. Construct Identification Validity is the extent to which a test measures a theoretical construct (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). Construct validity investigations are done within-

network and between-network. Within-network approaches use factor analysis to show that the multidimensional view of self-concept is consistent and has distinct components. Factor analysis was performed using item pairs and yielded median scores of .99 across 13 scales. In addition, each scale was clearly identified and correlations ranged from .48-.80. Correlations between the General school scale and Math was .37 and between general school and Verbal was .41.

Between-factor network studies show relationships between the measure of self-concept and other logically related constructs. The SDQ-II was found to have similar age and sex effects and patterns on self-concept as other tools (Marsh, 1992). The construct validity was also examined and similar mean performance was found in various cultures including the United States, Australia, France, Germany, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Kenya (Harter 1989, 1996; Hoge & Renzulli, 1993; Marsh & Hau, 2004; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Muchera & Finch, 2010).

Ethical Procedures

Before conducting any part of the study an IRB approval notification was received to make sure that the procedures of the study are safe and ethical and maximum consideration of the participants were taken into account. The first step of the study was to send letters to the four principals requesting permission to recruit from their sixth and seventh grade student population and to ask for access to the Talmud records of the students that participated. Accessing school records required the permission of the school.

Parent consent was required for the students to participate in the study and for access to the academic record of each student. The students' parents were informed that their child's participation in the study was voluntary and that they would receive a $5 gift card from Modells for their participation in the study. They were also informed that their decision to allow their children to participate in the study would not affect the faculty-student interaction or their child's education as I did not want them to feel pressured in any way to participate. The participants and their parents were informed in the parent consent form and in the assent form that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

In addition, the student GPA had to be matched to the questionnaire so the data could be analyzed properly. Data were collected using a number code for each participant. A separate document will include the names associated with the number code for each participant so the coded questionnaire could be given to the right participant. Once GPA scores were matched up to the Talmud Self-Concept scores the separate document with the names were erased leaving the coded data set alone. Students did not write any identifying information on the questionnaire. Questionnaires had the responses to the 10 items and response to which Rabbi they have for Talmud. This was done to protect the identity of the participants.

One ethical concern mentioned in the Walden IRB Form is that collecting data from students cannot replace or occur during instructional time. The study was therefore structured in a way where data collection occurred during Sunday school because it is optional to attend and there is no impact on academics. The data collection was designed to take place during half of the break time so the students still had the benefit of their

break. To avoid pressure or association of the study with the school, the researcher clarified in the advertisement and the explanation of the study to the students before assent forms were signed that the study had nothing to do with the school and was for dissertation purposes only. Data were collected during the optional Sunday school program at each school to avoid any possible consequences to the regular curriculum or grades. Another ethical concern is that only male middle school students from orthodox Jewish schools were included in the study. This excluded many other ethnicities and females from participating in the study. Females were also not included in the study. Although the population only represented one gender within one ethnic group, this was only because other ethnicities do not study Talmud as part of their school curriculum. This was also the reason that only males were included in the study. There were no schools that practice ability grouping and also have female students. If a female or a member of a different ethnic group would attend these schools they would have been included in the study.

The questionnaires, parental consent forms, and the student assent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet. After the documents were properly secured, scores from the questionnaire and GPA scores were transferred to a password protected external hard drive in order to compute the statistical analysis. An independent auditor was randomly reviewing the statistical records. He has access to the raw data and statistical computations. The research is be confidential. The researcher, independent auditor, dissertation committee and the parents of the participants will be the only individuals

who have access to the anonymous records. After 7 years, the record forms will be shredded and the hard drive will be wiped clean by a program called cc cleaner.

There were no expected significant risks associated with participation in the study. However, parents were be informed that the researcher will be available to discuss any concerns they may have had.

Conclusion

This study used a self-report questionnaire and achievement scores in Talmud to examine the effect of ability grouping on middle school students' academic self-concept for Talmud. The study sample was comprised of sixth and seventh grade students from four Orthodox Jewish middle school schools that practice ability grouping for Talmud. The data were examined using SPSS. The necessary precautions were taken for protection of participants' rights by the original gatherers of the data. The following chapter presents the results of the study, and the data supporting the conclusion. The stated hypotheses were addressed, and consistencies and the findings are discussed. The chapter concludes with an in-depth summary of the research findings and their relevance to the stated hypotheses.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between ability grouping for the study of Talmud and academic self-concept for Talmud of middle school students and to see if the BFLPE was present in four New York City schools. The relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept has been researched over the past 30 years. Although the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept has been researched before, no researcher has investigated the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept for Talmud and there is no research on the predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school average achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud. Academic self-concept is an outcome variable because academic self-concept has been found to be correlated to personality development, academic achievement, long-term job satisfaction, aspirations, criminal activity, coping skills, health, SES, and relationships to others (Reinherz & Pakiz, 1997; Trzesniewski et al., 2006).

There were two hypotheses for the study. The first hypothesis was that middle school students placed in the high ability group for the study of Talmud will have a higher academic self-concept in Talmud than middle school students placed in a low ability group class. The null hypothesis was that there would be no significant difference between the academic self-concept for Talmud as measured by a self-report questionnaire based on the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992) when the scores of the high ability class were compared to the low ability class. The second hypothesis was that there is a predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school average achievement, and

academic self-concept for Talmud. Academic self-concept for Talmud is negatively predicted by school average achievement in Talmud. It was also hypothesized that academic self-concept for Talmud will be positively related to individual student academic achievement. The null hypothesis was that there is no predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school average achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud.

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide the results of the study by reporting what occurred during the recruiting process, discrepancies between the proposed process and what actually occurred, demographic and descriptive information about the participants, and how representative the sample was to the general population. I will report the results from the statistical analysis, evaluate the statistical assumptions of the study, and report the findings of the statistical analyses based on the research questions and hypotheses.

Data Collection Process

The data collection process took approximately 6 weeks. Advertisements were placed in the school newspapers for all four schools the week following IRB approval until the data were collected in each school. Out of the total 1,152 possible participants in the four schools, 293 responses were received yielding a response rate of 25.4 %. Of the 293 students who participated in the study, 64 students were from School 1 with 30 sixth graders and 34 seventh graders. Seventy eight students participated from School 2 with 37 sixth graders and 41 seventh graders. Seventy five students participated from School 3 with 37 sixth graders and 38 seventh graders. Seventy six students from School 4

participated with 44 sixth graders and 32 seventh graders. Of the 293 students, 164 students were placed in the higher ability group and 129 were placed in the lower ability group.

One deviation in data collection from the original plan presented in Chapter 3 was that it took the students around 12 minutes to complete the entire process because the assent forms took a little longer than originally thought. Another deviation from the original proposal was that the study was planned to recruit 288 participants and in actuality 293 were recruited. This is not a significant difference in effect size. A third change in procedure was that one of the schools dropped out of the study and needed to be replaced by another school.

Demographics

The population sample for the study consisted of Orthodox Jewish male middle school students from Grades 6 and 7 from four schools in New York City that taught Talmud. The ages of the participants ranged from 10.9 to 13.4 with a mean age of 11.9. The participants came from families varying in degree of SES, as all four schools were community schools for their respective locations. Participants represented Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Hassidic, and Modern Orthodox groups within the Jewish community.

Results

The purpose of the first part of the study was to compare the academic self-concept for the subject of Talmud of sixth and seventh graders placed in a low ability group to students placed in a high ability group to see if there was a statistically

significant difference between students placed in the higher ability class and students placed in the low ability class and the high ability class.

An ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between level of ability grouping and academic self-concept in Talmud. The independent variable was the ability grouping, with three levels: (a) low ability class, (b) middle ability class, and (c) high ability class. The dependent variable was the raw score of academic self-concept. My first hypothesis stated that middle school students placed in the high ability group for the study of Talmud will have a higher academic self-concept in Talmud than middle school students placed in a low ability group class. As seen in Table 1, sixth and seventh grade students placed in high ability classes had a higher academic self-concept for Talmud than sixth and seventh grade students placed in low ability groups and the ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 290) = 7.49$, $p = .01$. The high-ability group had a mean of 46.73 ($SD = 8.14$), the middle level ability group had a mean of 48.29 ($SD = 7.49$), and the low ability group had a mean of 43.20 ($SD = 10.34$). Therefore, my first hypothesis that students placed in a high ability group have a higher academic self-concept for Talmud than students placed in a low ability group was confirmed. Students placed in the middle group had a statistically significant higher academic self-concept in Talmud than the low ability group and a higher academic self-concept than the high ability group (although not a statistically significant difference).

Posthoc tests were run using Dunnet C to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. There was a significant difference in the means between the high ability group and the low ability group and between the middle group and the low ability group. The

95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences, as well as the means and standard deviations for the three levels of ability grouping are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Talmud Academic Self-Concept Scores for Ability Groups

	High Group	Middle Group	Low Group	F	Sig.
Talmud ASC	46.73	48.29	43.20	7.49	. 01
Confidence Interval	45.33- 48.13	46.48-50.11	41.05-45.34		
SD	8.15	7.49	10.34		

The purpose of the second part of the study was to examine the BFLPE for the study of Talmud in four Orthodox Jewish schools in NYC. This involved examining the predictive relationship between school academic achievement, individual academic achievement, and academic self-concept in Talmud. The second hypothesis was that students' academic self-concept for Talmud is negatively predicted by school average achievement in Talmud. The third hypothesis was that students' academic self-concepts in Talmud would be positively predicted by their individual academic achievement.

The 293 students scored a mean of 45.98 (*SD* = 8.83) for academic self-concept in Talmud, a mean of 89.8 for individual academic achievement (*SD* = 10.24) and a mean school average achievement of 88.20 (*SD* = 1.85).

Hierarchal multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the predictive relationship among individual academic achievement, school average achievement, and academic self-concept for Talmud. Basic descriptive statistics and regression coefficients are shown in Table 2 When academic self-concept was predicted it was found that individual academic achievement (Beta = .29, p <.01) and average school achievement (Beta = .11, p < .01) were significant predictors. Individual academic achievement and average school achievement accounted for 11% of the variance in academic self-concept in Talmud, $F(1, 290) = 18.7$ (p < .01). The first hypothesis was not confirmed by the results of this study. The second hypothesis was confirmed by the results of the study.

Table 2

Multi-regression Analyses of Individual Achievement, School Achievement and ASC

				Multiple regression weights	
Variable	Mean	*STD*	Correlation with Talmud ASC	*B*	***B***
Talmud ASC	45.98	8.8			
Individual Achievement	89.98	10.24	.33	.25	.29
School Average Achievement	88.82	1.85	.15	.73	.15

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept in Talmud and to examine the BFLPE for the subject of Talmud in four schools in NYC. Hypothesis 1 was supported as I found a statistically significant difference in academic self-concept scores in Talmud for students placed in a higher ability group in comparison to students placed in the lower ability group. The middle ability group scored significantly higher for academic self-concept in Talmud than low ability groups. The second hypothesis, that students' academic self-concept for Talmud study is negatively predicted by school average achievement in Talmud, was not confirmed by the results of the study as students placed in schools with a higher average academic achievement predicted higher academic self-concept. This contradicts one of the aspects of the BFLPE. The third hypothesis, that students with higher individual academic achievement in Talmud would have a higher academic self-concept for Talmud, was confirmed and was statistically significant. In the next chapter, I will interpret the results and draw implications from them. Additionally, I will examine limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was twofold: (a) to examine the relationship between ability grouping for the study of Talmud and academic self-concept for Talmud of middle school students and (b) to see if the BFLPE was present in four NYC schools for the course of Talmud. I collected data in the form of report card grades for Talmud which produced individual and school academic achievement. Data for academic self-concept for Talmud were collected via questionnaire produced by the researcher and was based on a well-used questionnaire known as the SDQ-2 (Marsh, 1992). Participants were sixth and seventh graders ranging in age from 10.9 to 13.4. Recruited participants attended an optional after school Sunday program. Although the methodology of the research was similar to previous studies done in the area, there were two identified gaps in the previous research. One limitation of the previous research was that no scholar had examined the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept for the subject of Talmud. Based on the multidimensional self-concept theory, Talmud should need its own scale and tool because it would be considered a separate domain. Another gap in the research was the fact that none of the BFLPE studies included the subject of Talmud. A third limitation was that the BFLPE research has been inconsistent over the years with some researchers finding a higher self-concept in schools with high academic achievement and other researchers finding students in schools with lower academic achievement to have higher academic self-concept.

I hypothesized that, based on the frame of reference, individuals placed in the higher track for Talmud would have a higher academic self-concept for Talmud. I found that students placed in the higher ability group had a higher academic self-concept for Talmud than students in the lower ability group. In the second part of the study, I examined two aspects of The BFLPE. The first hypothesis was that students in a higher achieving school would have a lower academic self-concept than students in a lower achieving school. I found the opposite effect. Students placed in a higher achieving school had a higher academic self-concept than students in a lower achieving school. The next hypothesis was that individual academic achievement would predict academic self-concept for Talmud. I found that individual academic achievement was the strongest predictor of academic self-concept in Talmud.

This chapter will provide an interpretation of the findings, an explanation of the limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Interpretations of the Findings

In the first part of this study I found that students placed in a higher ability group class had a higher academic self-concept than students placed in a lower ability group class. These findings have implications for educational administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Higher academic self-concept in Talmud was related to students placed in a higher ability-grouped class, suggesting that class placement itself may be a factor in determining how students look at themselves and relate to the subject matter. Scholars have shown that students who possess a low self-concept display depression, may have

thoughts of suicide and are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers (Bhar, Ghahramanlou-Holloway, & Brown, 2008; Robles-Pina, Defrance, & Cox, 2008; Santos, Saraiva, & De Sousa, 2009). Males with low self-concept may have higher levels of unemployment and females with low self-concept may develop eating disorders (Chius, 2012). Identifying grouping as an important predictive factor raises the need to consider its possible implications on students.

The results from the first part of the study were consistent with a previous study done by Kulik (1993). Kulik performed a meta-analysis of the effects of ability grouping on multiple self-concept measures and found that the effects were positive for all ability groups and higher for the higher ability groups. This is in concordance with the findings of my study insofar as the higher ability groups resulted in a higher level of academic self-concept.

The results of my study seem to be contrary to a study by Preckel (2010). Preckel examined the effect of ability grouping in a school with 186 ninth grade students and found that ability grouping had a negative effect on the math self-concept of gifted students. A limitation of the Preckel study was that the participants were all from one school while the participants of my study were from four different schools. Talmud may also have different significance than math self-concept because of religious and social dynamics.

Another study which seems to be contrary to the findings of the current study was the study by Ireson, Hallam, and Plewis (2001) in which they surveyed 3,000 ninth grade students and found no relationship between ability grouping and self-concept for

science and math, but they did find a positive effect for low ability grouped students for English and a negative effect for the high ability group for English. One possible explanation is that the effect of ability grouping is subject specific. Some subjects have different significance to the population being studied and will therefore have a different dynamic and effect. It is possible that the social and religious significance of Talmud allows the dynamics of the BFLPE to take effect.

In the second part of this study, I examined the BFLPE in four Orthodox Jewish middle schools in NYC. More specifically, both individual academic achievement and school average achievement positively predicted academic self-concept for Talmud. Both high individual academic achievement and being in a high achieving school predicted higher academic self-concept for Talmud with individual academic achievement being the stronger predictor of the two. These findings are important for school administrators and counselors insofar as putting a focus on student achievement for students that have low academic self-concepts and further implications for parents choosing Talmud schools for their children. Being a part of a high achieving Talmud school or class is an important predictive factor in the child's academic self-concept for Talmud.

The results of this study seem to indicate that the reflected glory effect is the primary frame of reference process. Marsh and Craven (2002) identified two processes that can occur as a result of using a frame of reference: the contrast effect and assimilation or reflected glory effect. The contrast effect occurs when an individual of lower ability compares him or herself to individuals with higher ability. Assimilation or

reflected glory effect occurs when an individual is part of a group that performs well and takes pride in having membership within the group. The results from this study seem to confirm a reflected glory effect when it comes to the study of Talmud. This may result from a greater social importance given to Talmud within the orthodox Jewish community so being part of the school of high Talmud achievers gives students a greater academic self-concept for Talmud.

The findings of the study are consistent with a study performed by Kong, Hau, and Chen (1998). Kong et al. (1998) explored the BFLPE phenomenon in 10,366 secondary school students, which was the same age as the participants in my study. Kong et al. (1998) found that students in a high achieving school had an assimilation or reflected glory effect and had a higher self-concept because they belonged to a high achieving school.

Although these findings seem to support a reflected glory effect, Marsh and Craven (2006) maintained that children seem to become less positive about their self-evaluations as they move through middle school because there is more social comparison and realistic external feedback. The results of the study may be different with the same participants when they are in ninth and 10th grade.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the current study. The first limitation in terms of generalizability was that the study consisted of males only. Although most Orthodox Jewish schools only offer Talmud to males, there are a significant number of females that study Talmud as well and they were not represented in this sample.

Another limitation in terms of generalizability was that the study only included sixth and seventh graders. The reflected glory effect seen in this research may not hold true if the same students were followed into higher grades, like in high school. It may take a few years for social effects to show. Sixth and seventh grade were chosen because that is when Talmud study begins. Because of the academic nature of the study, this study did not include as many schools as previous studies of the BFLPE. Ideally, more schools would be included as recommended by Dai and Rinn (2004). Despite these limitations, the findings are a good start to beginning the conversation about investigating ability grouping and the BFLPE in the subject of Talmud as no current knowledge base exists.

Another limitation in terms of methodology was that the tools used to measure academic achievement and academic self-concept in Talmud should be examined with more objective measures. Academic achievement was measured by report card grades. Ideally, like previous research, academic achievement would be measured by an objective standardized achievement test. However, no objective achievement test has been developed for Talmud. In addition, no objective survey was developed for academic self-concept for Talmud. I had to create a tool based on the SDQ-2 (1992) which was developed for other subjects.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between ability grouping for the subject of Talmud and academic self-concept for Talmud. It was also to investigate the predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school average achievement and academic self-concept for Talmud. Although the

findings were found to be significant, further research should include a few more variables when investigating this relationship. One general area that should be expanded upon is the importance of the social domain. Talmud is not merely a subject for Orthodox Jews; it is a way of life and has social implications attached to it. Future researchers might want to include some factors like personal or familial importance of Talmud as possible independent variables along with individual and school achievement. In addition, it was not the purpose of this study to examine the role of having three levels of ability grouping. However, since the findings suggest a statistically significant high academic self-concept for the middle ability group when compared to the low and high ability groups, future research should focus on whether there is a different dynamic in schools with a middle level ability group.

Ideally, future research will be longitudinal in nature and follow the same group over a number of years of schooling to see if the effects stay constant. A study by Trautwein (2008) found that although initially students attending a high achieving high school started school with a reflected glory effect, after 4 years a contrasting effect occurred resulting in lower academic self-concept. Future researchers may look at whether this holds true for Talmud as well given its social significance in the Orthodox Jewish community.

Most BFLPE studies include at the minimum 50 schools. Future researchers may want to include more orthodox Jewish schools that teach Talmud from around the United States to have a more representative study and give a more global insight into the dynamics of the BFLPE in orthodox Jewish schools in general. This research would

also include schools that teach Talmud in heterogeneous grouping. It is unclear whether the dynamic is different for the students studying Talmud in those schools. In addition to adding to the minimal knowledge base, it would also provide valuable insight to policymakers and administrators.

Implications and Social Change

Most of the previous research investigating the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept an the BFLPE research these dynamics for the subjects of math, language arts, and science (Abadzi,1983; Brunner et al., 2010; Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003; Chiu, 2012). The results of those studies were inconclusive and inconsistent. The studies never included orthodox Jewish schools and did not pertain to the study of Talmud. My study investigated these relationships within the context of four orthodox Jewish schools and specifically for the subject of Talmud. The study was structured in a way that it took into account three levels of ability grouping, individual and school academic achievement based on report card grades and academic self-concept based on responses to a questionnaire.

Low academic self-concept has been related to poor economic and life outcomes. It has a developmental progression and is based on individual success and skills, feedback from significant adults and peers within the individual's social environment (Harter, 1995). Based on a multidimensional theory of self-concept, it is clear that self-concept is domain specific and includes social variables as well as academic. It is therefore of great importance not only to develop awareness of the factors related to self-concept but to actually help that knowledge to intervention.

The importance of student academic achievement is not merely of practical significance to pass a class, it has emotional and life implications as well. Even mere school membership has significance in how a student feels about him or herself as a student within a specific subject. This self-concept may have an influence into whether a student continues learning Talmud into adulthood. If it is important to a parent that their children learn Talmud throughout their lives, the parent will need to take both the level of the school achievement and the development of their child's skill development into consideration.

At the administrative level, school officials have to decide whether they want to practice ability grouping for Talmud in their schools. Obviously both political and educational factors are taken into consideration into that decision. However, it is the responsibility of the school leader to make an informed decision that can be implemented in a political way but more importantly that is in the best educational interests of the students. This may take the form of having ability grouping for some subjects and not for others. It may mean practicing ability grouping while maintaining a strong focus on developing skills in the lower ability group.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, the results suggest that the frame of reference in orthodox Jewish schools in NYC is not made to students within one's own class but the comparison is made to the students in the "other" class. This may be helpful for administrators to create opportunities and activities that make class comparisons minimal like by having grade-wide activities within the subject of Talmud that make

class membership less important. Schools may need to make students more aware that there are different frames of reference the students could evaluate themselves to develop self-concept.

The findings suggest a reflected glory effect and that can be viewed in two ways. One possibility is that the reflected glory effect is a result of the subject of Talmud and there is something specific to Talmud that results in the reflected glory effect. Another possibility is that the reflected glory effect is not a result of the subject of Talmud but a result of cultural implication of Orthodox Jewish schools. School administrators must be sensitive to these possibilities and be very knowledgeable of the culture within their own schools and communities so they could develop academic self-concept for all their students regardless of ability.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept in Talmud and to investigate the predictive relationship between individual academic achievement, school academic achievement and academic self-concept in Talmud. This study is the first investigation into these relationships within the context of Orthodox Jewish schools and for the study of Talmud. The study may provide a foundation for the study of these factors for Talmud and for the development of more objective measures to investigate these variables. Maybe Jewish educators will begin to take student placement more into consideration insofar as it significantly affects the way students perceive themselves as Talmud learners.

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Appendix A: Parental Consent Form

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent,

Your child is invited to take part in a research study that will be looking at how ability grouping for Talmud affects his academic self-concept. The researcher is inviting students in sixth and seventh grade from around the tri-state area to participate in this study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to allow your child to take part.

This study is being done by a researcher named . He is a Doctoral Student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to look at the relationship between ability grouping and academic self-concept.

Procedures:
If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, your child will be asked to:

- Come to a specified room during part of his recess time at Sunday school
- Fill out a ten item questionnaire asking about his attitudes about Talmud
- ***The researcher will have to have access to your son's last three report card grades in Talmud. If you are part of this study the principal of your school has agreed to give the researcher access pending your consent. No one other than the researcher will have access to this information and it will remain strictly confidential***
- A $5 gift card to Modells Sporting Goods will be given to those who participate
- This will take approximately 3 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want your child to be in the study. Of course, your child's decision is also an important factor. After obtaining parent consent, the researcher will explain the study and let each child decide if he wishes to volunteer. <u>This research is not in any way associated with the school your child attends although permission from the school was asked.</u> No one at the your child's school will treat you or your child differently if you or your child decides

not to be in the study. If you decide to consent now, you or your child can still change your mind later. Any children who feel stressed or uncomfortable during the assessment may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some minimal risk of the minor discomforts that your child might encounter in daily life, such as questions that may be difficult to answer. Being in this study would not pose risk to your child's safety or well-being.

The benefit of this study will be to add to the overall knowledge of the potential impact that ability grouping for Talmud may on the development of academic self-concept.

A summary of the overall findings noting whether ability grouping affects academic self-concept will be mailed after the study is concluded. The information will not include any of the student's individual information.

Privacy:
Any information your child provides will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your child's information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your child's name or anything else that could identify your child in any reports of the study. Data will be kept secure by keeping it in a locked filing cabinet. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years, as required by the university. The data will be kept in a private location under lock and key.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via my cellphone number at If you want to talk privately about your child's rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University staff member who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is # 10-23-13-0036234 and it expires on October 2, 2014.

The researcher will provide an extra copy of this form for you to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make

a decision about my child's involvement in this optional research project. Signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Parent	
Printed Name of Child,	
Child's Grade and Talmud Rabbi	
Date of consent	
Parent's Signature	
Researcher's Signature	
School	

Appendix B: Child Assent Form

ASSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Hello, my name is and I am conducting a study to learn about how tracking affects what students think about themselves. I am inviting you to join my project. I am inviting some students in the sixth and seventh grade at your school to participate in this study. I am going to read this form to you. I want you to learn about the project before you decide if you want to be in it. This study is not connected to your school. It is separately being conducted for my own schooling.

WHO I AM:
I am a student at Walden University seeking a PhD in School Psychology.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:
If you agree to be in this project, you will be asked to:

- Spend approximately 3 minutes answering question about Gemara
- Receive a $5 gift card

IT'S YOUR CHOICE:
You don't have to be in this project if you don't want to. If you decide now that you want to join the project, you can still change your mind later. If you want to stop, you can.

Being in this project might make you stressed like if you were asked an uncomfortable question. I am hoping this project might help people understand how students are affected by the class they are placed in.

Everyone participating in the study completes the questionnaire and gets the gift certificate.

PRIVACY:
Everything you tell me during this project will be kept private. That means that no one else will know your name or what answers you gave. The only time I have to tell someone is if I learn about something that could hurt you or someone else.

ASKING QUESTIONS:
You can ask me any questions you want now. If you think of a question later, you or

your parents can reach me at . If you or your parents would like to ask the university a

question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, then dial 1210.

I will give you a copy of this form.

Please sign your name below if you want to join this project.

Name of Child _____

Child Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher Signature _____

Curriculum Vitae

Education:

Walden University Doctoral Student- Expected Graduation August 2014

Lookstein Online-Principals Program Completed Program January 2013

Lookstein Principals Program Completed Program July 2011

Queens College Certified School Psychology Masters in June 2004

Touro College BA – Graduated June 2000 Magna Cum Laude-3.6

Awards

O. Bernard Leibman Award in School Psychology- January 2004

Given to an intern in their internship year for caring and empathic relationships with clients and colleagues.

Professional Experience:

Fall 2006-Present Principal Yeshiva Darchei Torah-Middle School Grades 6-8

- Collaborated with teachers, parents and students to reach individual and global educational goals

- Created effective educational and disciplinary systems to promote student growth and achievement
- Organized and implemented professional development for staff
- Promoted a positive school environment while maintaining high standard of education
- Expanded and modified school curriculum to incorporate technology and project based-learning.

Fall 2004-2007 Director of Rabenstein Learning Center- Far Rockaway, New York

- Coordinated special education and related services for grade K-8
- Conducted comprehensive psycho-educational and personality assessments of children
- Consulted with teachers, parents and administrators regarding students
- Chaired CSE, IEP, and CST meetings
- Counseled students individually and in groups to help increase academic skills and improve emotional coping and social interaction skills
- Developed behavioral management and academic interventions

Fall 2003 School Psychology Internship-Howell Road Elementary School-Valley Stream

- Conducted comprehensive psycho-educational and personality assessments of children
- Consulted with teachers, parents and administrators regarding students
- Actively participated in CSE and CST meetings
- Counseled students individually and in groups to help increase academic skills and improve emotional coping and social interaction skills
- Developed Behavioral management and academic interventions
- Presented workshop about Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program

- Collected and analyzed data for a behavioral program used in the school

Fall 2003 School Psychology Internship-East Rockaway High School-East Rockaway

- Administered psychological test batteries to populations including Learning Disabled, Emotionally Disturbed, Other Health Impaired and Speech Impaired
- Consulted with teachers, parents and administrators regarding individual students
- Participated in Committee on Special Education and Pupil Personnel Team Meetings
- Counseled individual students
- Conducted structured and narrative observations in classrooms
- Participated in developing 504 accommodation plans

Spring 2003 School Psychology Externship-Dutch Lane Elementary School-Hicksville

- Administered psychological evaluations to preschool students
- Consulted with teachers, parents and administrators regarding individual preschool and elementary students
- Participated in meetings with Committee on Special Education and Committee on Preschool Education
- Counseled individual students
- Traveled to numerous out-of-district visitations sites

June 2002-present Director- Diamond Summer Program, Far Rockaway, NY

- Organized all activities and services
- Performed initial evaluations of families and children
- Offered clinical advice to the counselors for critical situations
- Trained staff in behavior modification techniques
- Collaborated with parents about management strategies
- Worked with children with ADHD, ODD, PDD and Aspergers

- Attended 12 hour training with Russel Barkley on working with ADHD

Fall 2002 Special Education Teacher-Yeshiva Darchei Torah, Far Rockaway,NY

- Taught a variety of subjects including Language Arts, Math, Science and History
- Participated in IEP and parent meetings

June 2001 Supervisor-Hebrew Academy for Special Children, Brooklyn, NY

- Created and implemented a program that helped train individuals with developmental disabilities in vocational, social and life skills.
- Organized and obtained worksites.
- Worked with the case managers to insure the proper services for the individuals in the program.
- Supervised and trained others to work with individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Set up a system to help track and evaluate the progress of the group.

Sept 1999 Assistant Teacher-Gesher Yehuda, Brooklyn, NY

- Taught students, as individuals and in groups.
- Used behavior modification techniques, to motivate students to accomplish educational and behavioral goals set by the school.
- Implemented an after-school tutoring program to support the school's goal of "mainstreaming" students.
- Built a social skills training system
- Developed and provided a training seminar for the staff
- Assisted individual teachers to design educational and behavioral programs.
- Attended 12 hour training with Toni Attwood on how to treat children with Asperger's Syndrome