



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Educate the child according to his own way : a Jewish ultra orthodox version of independent self construal

Haller, Rachel; Tavecchio, L.W.C.; Stams, Geert Jan; van Dam, Levi

**DOI**

[10.1080/13617672.2023.2184128](https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2023.2184128)

**Publication date**

2024

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Journal of Beliefs and Values

**License**

Unspecified

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Haller, R., Tavecchio, L. W. C., Stams, G. J., & van Dam, L. (2024). Educate the child according to his own way : a Jewish ultra orthodox version of independent self construal. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 44(4), 503-517. Article 45:4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2023.2184128>

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

*UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)*



# Educate the child according to his own way: a Jewish ultra-orthodox version of independent self-construal

Rachel Haller, Louis W. C. Tavecchio, Geert-Jan J. M. Stams & Levi van Dam

**To cite this article:** Rachel Haller, Louis W. C. Tavecchio, Geert-Jan J. M. Stams & Levi van Dam (2024) Educate the child according to his own way: a Jewish ultra-orthodox version of independent self-construal, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 45:4, 503-517, DOI: [10.1080/13617672.2023.2184128](https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2023.2184128)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2023.2184128>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 05 Mar 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 859



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

# Educate the child according to his own way: a Jewish ultra-orthodox version of independent self-construal

Rachel Haller, Louis W. C. Tavecchio, Geert-Jan J. M. Stams and Levi van Dam

Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam Netherlands

## ABSTRACT

The concept of Thirdspace was employed to explore the interface of Haredi religious perception and contemporary psychological notions, focusing on male Haredi (Jewish ultra-Orthodox) kindergarten teachers' perceptions of *self*. A two years ethnographic study was conducted, based on interactions with 90 male kindergarten teachers and 13 in-depth interviews in a Haredi Enrichment Centre for kindergarten children in Israel. The findings reveal a local notion of self-construal, including several features of contemporary Western independent self-construal along with Haredi religious perceptions. Together, these encouraged the development of an autonomous individual, capable of independently conducting his life as an adult. Children were perceived as distinct individuals with unique personal attributes whose expression would engender personal success, increase self-esteem, and encourage self-expression – all this in a religious framework that sought to enhance the joy produced by experiencing the religious way of life. This paper additionally discusses limitations and implications for other multi-cultural educational settings.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 March 2022  
Accepted 20 February 2023

## KEYWORDS

Haredi; male kindergarten teachers; thirdspace; independent/interdependent self-construal

## Introduction

This article explores an intercultural junction between contemporary notions and a religious tradition, focusing on male Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) kindergarten teachers at the interface between their religious views and the contemporary psychological notion of self-construal. The negotiations of distinct different notions at intercultural junctions are common in diverse communities worldwide, both those that are ubiquitous throughout the Western world and are accustomed to its culture, and those in traditional distant communities foreign to Western culture (Adely and Seale-Collazo 2013; Hellemans 2004; Knauft 2019).

The Haredi religious community in Israel comprises approximately 12.5% of the country's population (Cahaner and Malach 2019). Although it is described in existing studies as a diverse, dynamic, and changing community comprising several distinct groups (Shomron 2022), certain beliefs and ways of life are shared by all of its members. These include strict adherence to religious principles, the compliance to observe God's commandments as they are interpreted in the Talmud and in latter rabbinical literature

**CONTACT** Louis W. C. Tavecchio  [l.w.c.tavecchio@uva.nl](mailto:l.w.c.tavecchio@uva.nl)  Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

(Friedman and Hakak 2015; Shomron 2022), and perceiving Jewish law as pertaining to all aspects of life (Engelman et al. 2020).

The Haredi community is additionally distinguishing itself from the more secular oriented Israeli Jewish society surrounding it, by external characteristics that usually stem from its religious life style, such as modest cloths and a partially autonomous segregated educational system (Yaffe 2001). Being accustomed to Western culture, it is described in previous research as displaying a complex ambivalent attitude towards contemporary Western notions including isolation, rejection, or selective instrumental adoption and appropriation; partially accepting contemporary practical notions while rejecting their ideological underpinnings (Hakak 2011; Spiegel 2011).

This paper investigates aspects of selective adoption and appropriation in the community. Previous studies described processes of modernisation in the community, wishing to preserve its unique characteristics to integrate but not to assimilate (Friedman and Hakak 2015), without compromising on its religious values (Hakak 2011; Haller, Golden, and Tavecchio 2018; Kalagy 2020). Some studies noted adopting western attitude to masculinity (e.g. Hakak 2009a, 2009b, 2016), instrumental adoption in attitudes to computer use (Zilka and Cohen 2022), and appropriating western notions for conservative religious aims such as using psychological discourse (Hakak 2011), or harnessing technologies for establishing Haredi media and Haredi cinema (Friedman and Hakak 2015; Shomron 2022). In the process, adopted notions are amended to suit Haredi values. For example: cellular phones without internet access or with filtered internet programs (Shomron 2022). Similar processes were described in previous studies of the Haredi community in the USA (e.g. Fader 2006, 2007, 2009 and more).

The current study focuses on exploring attitudes of teachers in Haredi kindergarten, themselves graduates of the Haredi education system for boys.

The segregated Haredi boys' education system is autonomous in its curriculum and free from government control, integrating some general studies in primary school, but focusing solely on religious studies of Talmud in secondary school (Matemba 2020). It is described in previous studies as rejecting change and modernity (Katzir and Perry-Hazan 2022; Matemba 2020), building high ideological walls for insulating their pupils from the secular world outside (Katzir and Perry-Hazan 2022; Spiegel 2011).

Focusing on the study of the highly complex Talmudic text was described in previous research as developing advanced cognitive skills, such as in-depth comprehension (Brandes 2016; Schwarz and Bekerman 2021; Spiegel 2011) and analytical logical processing (Schwarz and Bekerman 2021; Spiegel 2011), pivotal to understanding the underpinning religious principles that are interwoven in the Talmudic text (Brandes 2016). The specific mode of Talmud study additionally develops discerning abilities and sensitivity to subtleties (Brandes 2016; Dembo, Levin, and Siegler 1997; Spiegel 2011), which are qualities that facilitate the analysis of new ideas in accordance with the aforementioned religious principles (Brandes 2016).

The present study focuses on male Haredi kindergarten teachers, aiming to analyse their cultural strategies in negotiating the adoption of features of contemporary individualistic self-construal, by looking at intercultural encounters between the teachers' theocentric religious views on the one hand and contemporary psychological notions on the other. We will employ the theoretical prism of Thirdspace (Soja 1996) to focus on

negotiating at intercultural junctions, highlighting the possibility of coexistence of seemingly conflicting notions.

### **Thirdspace**

The notion of Thirdspace suggested by Soja (1996) accentuates a deliberate aspect of negotiation. Thirdspace proposes a creative new way of thinking about seemingly conflicting concepts – not as dichotomous entities, but rather as entities that may coexist (Ingram and Abrahams 2015). It eliminates either/or options such as assimilation, imitation or rejection as the only option in intercultural encounters, and suggests instead deliberately interjecting a Thirdspace as a different frame of mind that can encompass a ‘multiplicity of perspectives’ (Soja 1996, 5). For Soja such a deliberate combination of seemingly opposing concepts is not a general, vague process, but rather a process of creative restructuring, which can be accomplished through ‘draw[ing] selectively and strategically from the [...] opposing categories to open new alternatives’ (Soja 1996, *ibid.*). Thirdspace may find expression and continuity in the Haredi community in Israel, facilitating the understanding of the Haredi research participants at the interface of their religious views and the seemingly conflicting contemporary psychological notion of independent self-construal.

### **Independent and interdependent self-construal**

Based on a model originally proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991), self-construal refers to the extent to which the self is defined interdependently with others or independently of them (Cross, Hardin, and Gercek-Swing 2011). The cultural environment in which the independent self-construal is prominent tends to perceive the individual as separate, distinct, and independent from others. Every person is considered unique and autonomous, defined by his/her individual, personal attributes, abilities, traits, desires, and motives (Markus and Kitayama 1991), and individual’s personal goals are given priority over the goals of collectives (Triandis 1996). Furthermore, the individualistic cultural environment promotes the development and expression of individual attributes as well as their use as referents for personal actions. Self-expression and personal choices are encouraged (Greenfield et al. 2003), and individual achievements are considered to be a source of happiness, pride and high self-esteem since they reflect internal personal attributes (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

Alternatively, a collectivistic environment emphasises an interdependent self-construal wherein the self is perceived as being connected to others and as part of an encompassing social entity. Relationships with others, rather than personal attributes, constitute the defining features of the self, while others serve as referents for one’s own behaviour. Self-esteem is derived from the ability to restrain one’s self and to fulfill role obligations rather than from one’s personal achievements (Greenfield et al. 2003; Markus and Kitayama 1991).

Markus and Kitayama’s original model was replaced with the more dynamic ‘cycle of mutual constitution’ (Markus and Kitayama 2010, 423). Moreover, the distinction between the two types of self-construal, which was originally attributed to Western individualistic societies versus non-Western collectivistic societies was later understood

to represent different dimensions. These may coexist within one individual as well as within one community (Suizzo 2007).

In light of current understandings of self-construal, the present study strives to explore the extent and the form of the coexistence of both individualistic features of self-construal and religious views within individuals in one community. It searches for possible features of Western individualistic self-construal that may coexist within individuals in the Haredi community, primarily described in previous studies as collectivistic (e.g. Rosenthal, Gat, and Zur 2009; Yaffe 2001). By doing so, we do not seek to characterise the Haredi community as either individualistic or collectivistic; neither do we aim to present a holistic description of the Haredi perception of the self, or to negate the existence of Haredi collectivistic features. Rather, we aim to explore the coexistence of seemingly conflicting notions, employing Thirdspace as a frame of interpretation for encompassing a 'multiplicity of perspectives', i.e. religious traditional perceptions on the one hand, and contemporary psychological notions on the other.

In sum, the present study investigates the ways in which visiting male kindergarten teachers related to their pupils, from an educational perspective. We examined the degree to which the teachers' perception of self included features of contemporary Western independent self-construal and whether they could coexist with Haredi religious views. We describe the cultural strategies in this process of negotiation, focusing on wider cultural meanings and implications. The study is unique, because it explores how modern and traditional views on education can coexist in a transactional process of negotiation in the orthodox religious education of male pupils in Israel.

## The present study

The present ethnographic study described below was part of a larger research project conducted by the first author at an Enrichment Centre for preschool Haredi children located in a large city in Israel. The Centre offered the children extracurricular activities that promoted cognitive development, emotional well-being, sensorimotor proficiency, and the arts.

The first author participated in the Enrichment Centre's activities three mornings a week for almost two years (2008–2010), observing and informally conversing with close to 90 visiting male kindergarten teachers. Observations and conversations were recorded as field notes in numerous photographs and video clips as well as more than ten videos of full sessions, each approximately 30 minutes long. Photos and video clips were focused on the activities, carefully avoiding the children or identifiable features of the adults (from back). These were not meant for publication but rather used for a more profound analysis and understanding of the observations. Additionally, 13 in-depth interviews were conducted with participating male kindergarten teachers, each approximately one hour long. All visiting teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire, asking for a feedback and impressions from their visits, and asking for volunteers to be interviewed for research at the time and place of their preference. Documents were collected in the following two years (2011–2012), both in the field and in the community, including ancient religious sources.

All participants were married and had children, ranging in age (30–60 years old) and teaching experience (7–30 years), but sharing similar academic training. They all had

teaching certificates from the Ministry of Education as well as some background in special education. Only Rav Sason additionally held a Master's degree in counselling.

Building a rapport with the teachers was facilitated by their acquaintance with the researcher as a member of the community. Out of deference to the Haredi cultural codes of gender separation, non-formal conversations with the teachers were respectfully distant, and most interviews were conducted either at the Centre or by phone. All those who volunteered for an interview gave their informed consent for participating in the study. They were fully informed about the study, its requirements and possible risks, and about their right to participate, or withdraw participation at any point. Care was taken to treat all participants with respect, and to protect their confidentiality by masking all identifying details and using pseudo names. The graduate school committee of the Department of Child Development and Education (Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences) of the University of Amsterdam and its Doctorate Board approved the current study, which followed ethical guidelines from the American Psychological Association and the Dutch organisation of scientific research as well as guidelines on privacy from the Dutch government.

Striving to construct meanings within the broader cultural contexts, the procedure of 'member checking' (Creswell 2018; Levitt et al. 2018) was employed, and research findings were discussed with both the teachers and other members of the community. Cognisant of the significance of ancient religious texts (Bible, Talmud and related rabbinical literature) and their relevance for guiding everyday life in the community, references were sought to those religious sources in contemporary Haredi guidance books for educators and parents in which contemporary psychological ideas and terminology were integrated. Furthermore, recognising the multiplicity of cultural frames of reference by means of which social orders are structured (Delamont and Atkinson 2018), additional documents and visual data were collected in the field and in the community. These included correspondence between founders, communication papers, thank-you letters, the guest book, and relevant articles or commercials published in the daily Haredi newspaper, *Yated Neeman*, which enjoys a broad readership in the Haredi community.

The researcher's active role in knowledge production has long been recognised (Byrne 2022). Even so, researching one's own community as a researcher from an insider perspective is considered to be justified, enhancing the researcher's ability to understand culture-bound phrases and silent understandings (Choi 2006). However, it remains important to analyse the possible influences of insider researchers on the research outcomes, because they may overly identify with participants, thus lose their objectivity, jeopardising their role as a researcher, affecting their ability to interpret the data from an unbiased perspective (Baker 2006). Additionally, they may lack the 'culture shock' of a novel environment, which enables researchers to illuminate cultural differences, and translate implicit cultural knowledge into explicit ethnographic understandings (Lie 2013).

In order to cope with these challenges and enhance awareness of possible pitfalls, the researcher's impressions, reactions and thoughts were continuously recorded in a field diary as recommended by Bleiker et al. (2019). Throughout the research a conscious effort was made to defamiliarize oneself and establish a sufficiently detached unbiased point of view (Baker 2006; Gothóni 2015). Notably, the inside researcher's contemporary worldviews and religious traditional views as well as being a woman interviewing men in

a community where gender separation is endorsed may have influenced the research process and outcomes. Therefore, constant reflection was required as well as employing the procedures of ‘member checking’ and peer debriefing recommended by Creswell (2018) to refrain from assuming similarities where they may not exist, and to be aware of differences between oneself as a researcher and the participants. Additionally, it was vital to be aware of the imaginary influence of audiences both outside and inside the Haredi community, particularly given the climate in Israel in which the Haredi community often senses itself ‘under fire’ by anti-Haredi media.

These procedures adhered to the inductive analysis of data that continued throughout the various stages of the research. The analysis involved ongoing dialogues with the participants, constant reflective examinations of self, and a recursive process of emergent meaning and sharpening of understanding. Finally, through thematic analysis, conceptual structures of meaning were assembled (LeCompte 2000).

## Findings

This section presents first notions expressed by the teachers reflecting their perceptions of self-construal, then the cultural meaning of such perceptions is analysed, and finally a cultural negotiating strategy openly declared in Haredi educational books is discussed.

### ***‘Educate the child according to his way’ (book of proverbs, 22:6)***

The findings revealed a local version of self-construal that included several features of the contemporary Western independent self-construal along with the Haredi religious perceptions.

### ***‘It is extremely important . . . to get to know the children’- teachers’ perception of each child as a unique individual***

Getting to know the children and learning about each child’s distinct capabilities seemed to be significant for research participants visiting the Enrichment Centre, apparently reflecting teachers’ perception of each child as a discrete individual with unique attributes and talents. This was expressed in teachers’ willingness to invest time and effort in order to learn about their pupils’ distinct attributes, particularly those of the withdrawn children who did not occupy centre stage in kindergarten.

There were teachers who used their visit to the Centre, where the children engaged in extracurricular activities, as an opportunity to observe them ‘in a different way’, thereby enabling the teachers to discover new talents that were not apparent in the routine kindergarten setting. In his interview, Rav Winer said, *‘[In the Centre, it was as] if we pressed on a button that we hadn’t previously pressed. We discovered abilities that . . . [the child] didn’t [seem to] have’*. Thus, instead of relaxing during his visit to the Centre or taking the time to learn about its programmes, this teacher opted to take advantage of this unique opportunity, when he was exempt from carrying out his routine duties, to observe the children and learn about their individual attributes.

At the Centre, some teachers were observing children and writing down notes and comments. Rav Goldberg described how he prepared for the observation by coming to the Centre with a list of pupils he wished to observe. Rav Sason described how he



systematically observed many children and wrote ‘a whole *megila* [lengthy scroll]’ about each child. Rav Levi felt that it was necessary to make the effort and observe the children several times a year. In his interview, he said: ‘*For me it wasn’t a day off, but a - working day . . . It is extremely important . . . to get to know the children . . . you have to come [to the Centre to observe them] four times [a year]*’. Devoting time and effort to observe each child, these teachers wanted to learn about their pupils’ individual attributes so that these unique abilities could be further developed and expressed.

### ***‘If he can play the drums, it will increase his self-esteem’ – teachers’ perception of individual attributes as a source of self-esteem***

While observing the children engaging in extracurricular activities, some teachers described discerning talents not previously evident in school. Rav Malca expressed his surprise and delight to see an introverted child performing skilfully in the music room, and both Rav Baum and Rav Frank were impressed with a boy’s motor proficiency. The teachers stressed how important it was for each child to find strengths within himself that would allow him to experience success and a sense of self-worth. They were adamant that it was particularly crucial for children who did not possess high cognitive skills to discover other latent talents that would enable them, too, to enjoy the experience of success. During his interview, Rav Steiner said: ‘*There are children who are not strong enough in other areas; they can express themselves . . . here. A weak child who can play the drums and the trumpet, as opposed to a more dominant child who doesn’t manage it so well – that increases the self-esteem of the weak child*’. Rav Steiner stressed not only the need of each child to discover his inner attributes and find a place where he, too, could excel, but also the child’s need to feel unique and blessed with special attributes that others lacked.

Uncovering unknown attributes and discerning personal preferences was a starting-point for many teachers. They further sought to develop these personal attributes for two reasons: (1) to enable the children to experience self-efficacy (2) to acquire tools that would enable them to help their pupils succeed in kindergarten based on each child’s specific learning abilities. Some teachers scrutinised the new environmental conditions offered by the Centre in which a child’s personal attributes and preferences could be expressed, seeking ways to replicate some of these conditions in their kindergartens in order to allow each child to learn ‘in his own way’. For instance, when Rav Frank saw a child with language deficiencies succeed in following the instructions on an illustrated recipe at the Centre, he decided to add more visual aids to the kindergarten as well. When Rav Goldberg saw a child with reading difficulties – a child who usually refused to cooperate in reading sessions – choose on his own initiative to prepare cookies in the shape of the alphabet, he exclaimed: ‘*Look, we can teach him through something he enjoys!*’. Rav Sason described in detail how he learned about a child’s interest and looked for creative ways to harness this interest so as to engage the child in kindergarten:

*‘I had a very mischievous and naughty boy and [at the Centre] I saw that . . . the dough . . . attracted him. When I sat and talked to him, I saw that at home he loves to help his mother with the challot [special bread that is baked for the Sabbath], so I started to think “how could I use that to help a child who can’t sit still in class” . . . [Previously] I used to send him to go round the building twice . . . every once in a while I gave him errands . . .*

*[but now, I have an additional tool], during recess I let him help our cook prepare lunch . . . then he feels at home'.*

Rav Sason went on to provide a detailed description of all the work he had invested in making the child experience self-worth by observing the child's preferences, by talking to the child about it, by sitting down, contemplating and devising ways of engaging the child in kindergarten by way of the child's own interests. He had long realised that it was difficult for this child to sit still in class. As a teacher, he had accepted this child's difficulties and had tried to make allowances by sending the child to circle the building, thereby enabling him to release energy in a positive way. Now, however, after observing the child's interest in cooking, Rav Sason was able to relate to him not only as a child with a unique concentration problem, but also as a child with unique interests that rendered him a person with self-worth, appreciated by his teacher for his positive attributes. The fact that the teacher made every effort to notice the child's preferences and harness his distinct abilities in order to achieve useful performance highlights the teacher's desire to enhance the child's self-esteem and help him feel successful, confident, and proud of his attributes.

### ***'He really opened up . . . really blossomed' – teachers' vision of self-expression as significant for children's development***

Some teachers expressed satisfaction at seeing the children experience success and feel comfortable with themselves. They were concerned about introverted children who did not open their mouths in class, and were pleased to discover that when children experienced success, they often felt more comfortable and less restrained, they usually 'opened up' and 'blossomed'. On the personal level, the teachers were impressed with children who 'opened up' and expressed themselves confidently on the stage in the Centre's theatre. Rav Winer was happy to see how introverted children who were confused and 'don't find themselves' in the day-to-day activities experienced a sense of self-worth at the Centre, accepted themselves, and felt more confident to express 'who they are'. Rav Levi was impressed with children who dared 'to really reveal themselves' to others, and Rav Sason described children who gained confidence and expressed themselves unrestrainedly, 'children simply let out [expressed] everything they had. They felt secure'. On the interpersonal level, some teachers were impressed with children who 'opened up' and displayed confidence in their social relationships. Rav Levi described a child with a reading difficulty who generally shied away from social contact, 'but after drama he opened up' and plucked up the courage to talk to his friends'. Rav Liener spoke about a child who had experienced a trauma in the past and was socially withdrawn, 'but here he opened up [and talked freely with his friends]. I heard him talk here in a way I hadn't heard since the beginning of the year'. Rav Silver described a quiet child who was free and unrestrained with his friends: 'He completely opened up (and talked) . . . about the family and about everything'.

Other teachers stressed the significance of the expression of self-contentment in the form of a physical release of energy and bodily relaxation. Rav Sason described children who were previously 'closed' and had 'all kinds of stress and . . . fears', [but at the Centre], 'they were peaceful and relaxed'. He felt that 'once a week, a child should come to the Centre and unwind . . . in the trampolines, one can go wild'. Rav Goldberg was impressed with the Gymboree that allowed the children to unwind and release energy. Rav Levi described

physical expressions of comfort and delight as the child, free of bodily constraints, jumped with joy: *'He started to talk, to rejoice, to be happy, to jump, and to recount home experiences . . . in short, he opened up'*.

Thus, it seemed that the teachers sought to allow each child to experience self-fulfilment. They recognised each child's unique attributes and sought ways in which these attributes could be expressed, they sought to enhance self-esteem and did allow each child to 'open up', that is, to express himself, to be socially confident, to unwind, and to experience joy and pride. However, in addition to the feeling of joy in one's self, the teachers seemed to be concerned that the child experiences joy in the religious way of life.

### ***'That he should enjoy learning . . . ' – teachers' vision on the significance of joy in religious teaching***

A concern for the children's joy was stressed by some teachers when asked about their visit to the Enrichment Centre. Rav Cohen felt *'that without any other benefit, for me it was enough that the children enjoyed [their visit to the Centre]'*. He emphasised his concern that the children should experience joy in the religious way of life: *'Our approach is to let the kids enjoy themselves, the more the better . . . [they should learn to experience joy] in order for them to enjoy learning Torah'*. Other teachers were content to see the children motivated to learn and feel enthusiastic about it. Rav Malca indicated experiential learning in science as a factor for increasing motivation and for making learning an exciting experience, *'helping even a quiet child to be full of enthusiasm and full of life'*. Rav Wagner spoke enthusiastically about his happiness to see children *'immersed in learning, engaged by it, and fulfilled'*. Rav Sason articulated his concern that learning in kindergarten – particularly religious learning – be an enjoyable experience, *'that the child should enjoy to learn. Torah should be loved by them . . . [it should be] sweet'*. Rav Perl elaborated on his efforts to make the study of the Jewish holidays a living experience by bringing all sorts of dolls that *'revived the children' [perked them up]*. Rav Frank described how he helped the children enjoy learning by adding drama to his Bible lesson:

*'After [the visit to the Centre], the whole "parasha" [weekly portion of the Bible], we acted it out in a play . . . the children enjoyed it "up to the roof" [immensely] [satisfaction in his voice], and this week I read the notes [from the parents], I simply enjoyed reading that everyone had internalized it through the play. A play is tangible . . . they lived it'*.

The wish to see the kids engaged, fulfilled, and 'perked up' by learning seems to emphasise the teachers' concern that the children should experience life in general and religious learning in particular as enjoyable and fulfilling. The concern for joy and self-fulfilment of each child as a unique individual is similarly expressed in Haredi guidance books for educators, underscoring the importance of learning about each child's distinct attributes in order to provide him with optimal conditions for personal development (e.g. Stein 2016).

### ***Consulting ancient Haredi sources***

Although communication with the teacher revealed no signs of negotiation conflicts or of adopting notions that originating outside the community, in Haredi educational guidance books the adoption of contemporary psychological ideas and practices was openly declared. Furthermore, authors of these Haredi books elaborately described the cultural strategy they employed in order to adopt only psychological notions that resonated with

Haredi principals, consulting Haredi ancient sources to determine the suitability of the adopted psychological notions (Hakak 2011; Stein 2016).

This strategy of consulting, exploring, and depending on ancient religious sources (e.g. Talmud) in the process of adopting contemporary notions is commonly employed in the Haredi community. It is prevalent in numerous *Halachic* (i.e. pertaining to Jewish law) volumes in which Haredi scholars apply underpinning religious principles to new innovative situations (ranging from the use of microwave energy to *in-vitro* fertilisation procedures (e.g. Ivry, 2010). In this Halachic literature, the underpinning principles are frequently traced to their Talmudic sources, and diverse opinions pertaining their relevance to current events are discussed.

### **Tools for independent adult life**

Proficiency in this strategy of consulting Haredi ancient sources for guiding the adoption of new concepts seems to be an important tool for promoting autonomy, enabling individuals in the Haredi community to conduct their religious life independently of others. However, acquiring this tool necessitates formal knowledge and training. In order to consult religious sources, one must have extensive familiarity with these sources, in-depth understanding of underpinning Haredi principles, and training in applying these principles to the relevant situations, all of which are learned and practiced in the Haredi boys' schools (Spiegel 2011).

## **Discussion**

This article addressed the interface of seemingly opposing notions, of the God-centred religious perceptions of male Haredi kindergarten teachers on the one hand, and the individual centred contemporary psychological notion of independent self-construal on the other. It focused on notions expressed by the teachers concerning their perceptions of self, exploring cultural processes and meanings.

The paper described a conceptual Thirdspace (Soja 1996), encompassing seemingly conflicting conceptions, a Haredi version in which several features of the contemporary independent Western perception of self-construal coexisted alongside Haredi religious perceptions with no apparent sense of conflict. Teachers perceived children as distinct individuals with unique personal attributes whose expression would engender personal success, increase self-esteem, and encourage self-expression, capable of independently conducting their life as an adult – all this in a religious framework that sought to enhance the joy engendered by experiencing the religious way of life.

Additionally, examining Haredi educational guidance books, the article unfolded a cultural negotiating strategy of consulting religious sources in order to determine the suitability of an adopted contemporary notion to Haredi principles. As described above, this cultural strategy for adopting contemporary Western notions is a common practice in the Haredi community, developed in the boys' schools by means of Talmud study. Thus, although it may appear to be a paradox, the boys' education system, which has been described as seeking to isolate pupils by shielding them from the secular world outside (e.g. Spiegel 2011), may actually serve to furnish them with the requisite knowledge and skills for negotiating the novel situations they will encounter there.

It might be assumed, that the Haredi male teachers, graduates of the Haredi boys' schools, were accustomed to the practice of adopting contemporary notions, and to the cultural strategies involved. Then, what may be a possible explanation for the fact that no sign of adoption was observed in the Haredi version of the independent self-construal? One explanation may be that the features of independent self-construal apparent in the Haredi version were not perceived by the teachers as foreign to their religious views, but rather seen as authentic Haredi values. Another explanation suggests that processes of negotiation and adoption may have occurred in the past, leaving no traces in the present.

The research seems to confirm Suizzo (2007) views that features of independent and interdependent self-construal, not as distinct constructs, but rather as representing different dimensions that may exist to some extent within one individual and one community. As such, these views seem to exhibit a particular case of Thirdspace (Soja 1996) simultaneously embracing two seemingly conflicting notions, i.e. the theocentric values of the teachers' religious tradition alongside the egocentric values of contemporary psychology.

The Haredi teachers seemed to endorse this possibility, which is inherent to the concept of Thirdspace (Soja 1996). They were not forced to abandon one set of values for another, and were not limited to choose between the previous binary options of assimilation versus rejection, since adopting elements associated with one was not seen as at the expense of sacrificing the other.

Although this particular aspect of Thirdspace, in which contemporary perceptions are negotiated with traditional views, seems to be a common structural feature in other settings struggling with similar conflicts, the anthropological emphasis on local distinctiveness would suggest that their form and extent would vary from one context to another. Indeed, studies reveal diverse intercultural combinations. In religious settings, Hellemans (2004) elaborated on the modernisation of the Catholic Church, Larson (2004) and Numbers (2006) presented Creation Science as a way in which a fundamentalist Christian group negotiated the secular concept of evolution by seeking scientific evidence for God's creation of the world. Similarly, Anjum (2007) described Islamic tradition as a discursive relationship of thinking subjects with foundational religious texts, allowing change, diversity, and the mixing of tradition and modernity.

It is important to reflect on some limitations of the present study. Although the non-formal setting in which the research was conducted may be considered a strength of the study by offering a novel perspective for investigating intercultural negotiations, it may additionally be considered as a limitation. Further research conducted in formal educational settings, may provide additional insights. Similarly, the current study explored preschool educators where contemporary developmental issues are naturally focused on; examining perceptions of teachers of older children, where the development of cognitive skills for Torah studies is focused on, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Finally, due to gender separation in the Haredi community, the researcher's positioning as a Haredi woman may have influenced various aspects of the interactions with the Haredi male teachers participating in the study. It would be worthwhile to compare the findings of the present study with findings of previous studies on Haredi male educators conducted by same gender researchers.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the current research provides important insights for understanding Thirdspace and intercultural encounters, and may have significance to

other populations coping with similar challenges, beyond the specific population of research participants. A more comprehensive understanding of intercultural negotiations in one particular group of religious teachers might assist teachers at other multicultural educational settings in understanding the ambivalent attitude of parents and children from different cultural backgrounds towards various aspects of Western culture. This is an important and urgent topic in the global world, where mass immigration brings issues of intercultural negotiations close to home.

## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Dr. D. Golden of Haifa university for her meaningful help in the research process.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation [ISR-2005-018 & numeric extensions 1.1;1.2 & 1.3].

## Notes on contributors

*Dr. Rachel Haller* is a graduate of Research in Childcare at the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests include cultural ethnography, evaluation of learning disabilities, and psychotherapy.

*Dr. Louis Tavecchio* is professor emeritus of the Research Institute of Child Development and Education at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Research interests are in quality of center daycare, child rearing/parenting (especially fathering), gender identity (especially boys), and internal and external validity issues related to (clinical) interventions.

*Dr. Geert Jan Stams* is professor of Child Development and Education at the University of Amsterdam. Research interests are in meta-analyse, experimental and longitudinal research in moral development, juvenile delinquency, and child maltreatment, child rearing, education, and quality of social relationships (e.g., attachment, mentoring). He was one of the founders and first chair of the accreditation committee for behavioural youth interventions in The Netherlands.

*Dr. Levi van Dam* from the University of Amsterdam is a child psychologist working as a scientist practitioner in the field of child and youth care. He developed, researched and implemented several interventions in the field of natural mentoring (Youth Initiated Mentoring), and created novel combinations of design and technology.

## References

Adely, F., and C. Seale-Collazo. 2013. "Introduction to Special Issue: Ethnographies of Religion Education." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 44 (4): 340–344. doi:10.1111/aeq.12035.

- Anjum, O. 2007. "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (3): 656–672. doi:10.1215/1089201x-2007-041.
- Baker, L. 2006. "Observation: A Complex Research Method." *Library Trends* 55 (1): 171–189. doi:10.1353/lib.2006.0045.
- Bleiker, J., S. Morgan-Trimmer, K. Knapp, and S. Hopkins. 2019. "Navigating the Maze: Qualitative Research Methodologies and Their Philosophical Foundations." *Radiography* 25: S4–S8. doi:10.1016/j.radi.2019.06.008.
- Brandes, Y. 2016. "Talmud Study: From Proficiency to Meaning." *Hakirah* 21: 81–112.
- Byrne, D. 2022. "A Worked Example of Braun and Clarke's Approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis." *Quality & Quantity* 56 (3): 1391–1412. doi:10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y.
- Cahaner, L., and G. Malach. 2019. *The Yearbook of Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel 2019 Jerusalem*. Israel: Israel Democracy Institute. (Hebrew).
- Choi, J. 2006. "Doing Poststructural Ethnography in the Life History of Dropouts in South Korea: Methodological Ruminations on Subjectivity, Positionality and Reflexivity." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 19 (4): 435–453. doi:10.1080/09518390600773163.
- Creswell, J. W. 2018. *Research Design*. UK: Sage Publications.
- Cross, S. E., E. E. Hardin, and B. Gercek-Swing. 2011. "The What, How, Why, and Where of Self-Construction." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15 (2): 142–179. doi:10.1177/1088868310373752.
- Delamont, S., and P. Atkinson. 2018. "Communities of practice and pedagogy." In *The Wiley Handbook of Ethnography of Education*, edited by D. Beach, C. Bagley, and S. M. da Silva, 71–89. London and New York: Wiley.
- Dembo, Y., I. Levin, and R. S. Siegler. 1997. "A Comparison of the Geometric Reasoning of Students Attending Israeli Ultraorthodox and Mainstream Schools." *Developmental Psychology* 33 (1): 92–103. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.33.1.92.
- Engelman, J., G. Milstein, I. S. Schonfeld, and J. B. Grubbs. 2020. "Leaving a Covenantal Religion: Orthodox Jewish Disaffiliation from an Immigration Psychology Perspective." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 23 (2): 153–172. doi:10.1080/13674676.2020.1744547.
- Fader, A. 2006. "Learning Faith: Language Socialization in a Community of Hasidic Jews." *Language in Society* 35 (2): 205–229. doi:10.1017/S004740450606009X.
- Fader, A. 2007. "Reclaiming Sacred Sparks: Linguistic Syncretism and Gendered Language Shift among Hasidic Jews in New York." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 17 (1): 1–22. doi:10.1525/jlin.2007.17.1.1.
- Fader, A. 2009. *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Friedman, Y., and Y. Hakak. 2015. "Jewish Revenge: Haredi Action in the Zionist Sphere". *Jewish Film & New Media* 3 (1): 48–76. doi:10.13110/jewfilmnewmedi.3.1.0048.
- Gothóni, R. 2015. "Emic, Etic and Ethics. Some Remarks on Studying a "Foreign" Religion." *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 50: 29–42.
- Greenfield, P. M., H. Keller, A. Fuligni, and A. Maynard. 2003. "Cultural Pathways through Universal Development." *Annual Review of Psychology* 54 (1): 461–490. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145221.
- Hakak, Y. 2009a. "Haredi Male Bodies in the Public Sphere: Negotiating with the Religious Text and Secular Israeli Men." *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spiritualities* 3 (2): 100–122.
- Hakak, Y. 2009b. "Youthful Bodies Rebel: Young Men in Israeli Haredi Yeshivas Today." *Young* 17 (3): 221–240. doi:10.1177/110330880901700301.
- Hakak, Y. 2011. "Psychology and Democracy in the Name of God? the Invocation of Modern and Secular Discourses on Parenting in the Service of Conservative Religious Aims." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 14 (5): 433–458. doi:10.1080/13674671003793698.
- Hakak, Y. 2016. *Haredi Masculinities between the Yeshiva, the Army, Work and Politics: The Sage, the Warrior and the Entrepreneur*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.

- Haller, R., D. Golden, and L. Tavecchio. 2018. "Negotiating Tradition and Contemporary Education: An Enrichment Center for Jewish Ultra-Orthodox Children in Israel." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 49 (3): 230–245. doi:10.1111/aeq.12250.
- Hellems, S. 2004. "How Modern Is Religion in Modernity?". In *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation*, edited by J. Frishman, W. Otten, and G. Rouwhorst, 76–94. Leiden: Brill.
- Ingram, N., and J. Abrahams. 2015. "Stepping outside of Oneself: How a cleft-habitus Can Lead to Greater Reflexivity through Occupying "The Third Space"". In *Bourdieu: The Next Generation: The Development of Bourdieu's Intellectual Heritage in Contemporary UK Sociology*, edited by J. Thatcher, N. Ingram, C. Burke, and J. Abrahams, 140–156. London: Routledge.
- Ivry, T. 2010. "Kosher Medicine and Medicalized Halacha: An Exploration of Triadic Relations Among Israeli Rabbis, Doctors, and Infertility Patients." *American Ethnologist* 37 (4): 662–680.
- Kalagy, T. 2020. "'Enclave in Transition': Ways of Coping of Academics from Ultra-Orthodox (Haredim) Minority Group with Challenges of Integration into the Workforce." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17 (7): 2373. doi:10.3390/ijerph17072373.
- Katzir, S., and L. Perry-Hazan. 2022. "Promoting Educational Change in Religious Enclave Schools: A Comparison of Radical and Moderate Haredi Activists in Israel." *Educational Review* 1–21. doi:10.1080/00131911.2021.2023104.
- Knauff, B. 2019. "Good Anthropology in Dark Times: Critical Appraisal and Ethnographic Application." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 30 (1): 3–17. doi:10.1111/taja.12300.
- Larson, E. J. 2004. *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory Modern Library Chronicles*, Vol. 17. New York: Modern Library.
- LeCompte, M. D. 2000. "Analyzing Qualitative Data." *Theory into Practice* 39 (3): 146–154. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip3903\_5.
- Levitt, H. M., M. Bamberg, J. W. Creswell, D. M. Frost, R. Josselson, and C. Suárez-Orozco. 2018. "Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Primary, Qualitative meta-analytic, and Mixed Methods Research in Psychology: The APA Publications and Communications Board Task Force Report." *American Psychologist* 73 (1): 26. doi:10.1037/amp0000151.
- Lie, J. H. S. 2013. "Challenging Anthropology: Anthropological Reflections on the Ethnographic Turn in International Relations." *Millennium* 41 (2): 201–220. doi:10.1177/0305829812463835.
- Markus, H. R., and S. Kitayama. 1991. "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation." *Psychological Review* 98 (2): 224. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224.
- Markus, H. R., and S. Kitayama. 2010. "Cultures and Selves: A Cycle of Mutual Constitution." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5 (4): 420–430. doi:10.1177/1745691610375557.
- Matemba, Y. 2020. "Gazing Back and Moving Forward." *British Journal of Religious Education* 42 (2): 115–119. doi:10.1080/01416200.2020.1719464.
- Numbers, R. L. 2006. *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (No. 33). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rosenthal, M., L. Gat, and H. Zur. 2009. *No One Is Born Violent*. Tel Aviv, Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House. (Hebrew).
- Schwarz, B. B., and Z. Bekerman. 2021. "Learning Practices and Development in Yeshivas: Historical, Social, and Cultural Perspectives". *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 36 (4): 1181–1198. doi:10.1007/s10212-020-00508-y.
- Shomron, B. 2022. "The "Ambassadorial" Journalist: Twitter as a Performative Platform for Ultra-Orthodox Journalists during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Contemporary Jewry* 42: 1–29.
- Soja, E. 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Spiegel, E. 2011. *Talmud Torah Is Equivalent to All. The ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Education System for Boys in Jerusalem*. Jerusalem, Israel: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies. (Hebrew).
- Stein, M. S. 2016. *Conversations with Rav Shlomo Hoffman: On Awareness and Coping*. Jerusalem, Israel: Havaad lehotza'at citve Harav Hoffman. (Hebrew).
- Suizzo, M. A. 2007. "Parents' Goals and Values for Children: Dimensions of Independence and Interdependence across Four US Ethnic Groups." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 38 (4): 506–530. doi:10.1177/0022022107302365.



- Triandis, H. C. 1996. "The Psychological Measurement of Cultural Syndroms." *American Psychologist* 51 (4): 407–415. doi:[10.1037/0003-066X.51.4.407](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.51.4.407).
- Yaffe, O. 2001. "Psychological Aspects of Orthodox Children's Literature: Perception of the Child and the Self." *Megamot* 41 (1–2): 19–44. (Hebrew).
- Zilka, G. C., and R. Cohen. 2022. "The Digital Literacy of Students Belonging to Different Sectors and Studying on Multicultural Campuses". *Israel Affairs* 28 (2): 297–315. doi:[10.1080/13537121.2022.2041828](https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2022.2041828).