ABSTRACT

The Impact of a Positive Teacher-Student Relationship with Judaic Studies Teachers on the

Religious Observance and Spiritual Connection of Modern Orthodox Adolescents

During Their Time in High School

Many studies have shown the impact Judaic studies teachers have on their students. However, those studies focused on the experiences of students in their post-high school gap years or reflections of young adults on their high school years. This study focused on the impact of the teacher-student relationship on the religious observance and spiritual connection of Modern Orthodox high school students during their time in high school. By gauging students' perceptions of their relationship with teachers while still in high school, one can more accurately measure the impact that relationship, in and of itself, has on their religious and spiritual life. This study was a secondary analysis of a quantitative study of 1,341 students from Modern Orthodox high schools. The students came from eighteen different schools and had a strong representation from all four grades. A regression model was used to analyze the relationship between a positive teacher-student relationship and the student's self-reported religious observance and spiritual connection. A positive teacher-student relationship was found to significantly predict overall religious observance (R^2=.19) and spiritual connection (R^2=.12). Gender was not found to be a mediator between a positive teacher-student relationship and the student's religious observance and spiritual connection. However, parental religious observance was considered to be a partial mediator between a positive teacher-student relationship and the student's religious observance and spiritual connection. These results demonstrate the significant importance that the teacher-student relationship plays on the religious and spiritual life of their students and

should encourage schools to prioritize teachers who develop positive relationships with

students and build time into the school day to foster those relationships.

The Impact of a Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

with Judaic Studies Teachers on the

Religious Observance and Spiritual Connection of

Modern Orthodox Adolescents

During Their Time in High School

By

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Seven years ago I made a career transition from Synagogue Rabbi to high school Jewish educator. I assumed that the transition would be relatively easy, joking that at least now I knew people would show up to my class every day. I quickly realized how much I didn't know. I have gained a tremendous appreciation for the profession of teaching. I have learned the artful balance of skills a high school teacher needs to have: being organized, yet spontaneous; taking the learning seriously, knowing when to have fun; being an authority figure, and developing a warm personal relationship.

It is that final challenge that most vexed me. Anecdotally, high school students thrive when they have a positive relationship with their teachers, especially in Judaic studies. Invariably, every Judaic studies teacher, myself included, recounts a teacher who served as a role model for their Jewish life. I couldn't shake the question if that was merely anecdotal or if it could be backed up by data. So when it was time for me to choose my dissertation topic I finally got the opportunity to research that very question. While they say a good dissertation is a finished dissertation, when you're researching a topic you find meaningful it is so much more.

I was always the student who wrote the book report the night before it was due by reading the summation on the inside cover. So the thought of completing a dissertation was daunting and overwhelming.

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to so many people, without whom I could have never completed my dissertation. The faculty at the Azrieli School of Jewish Education has been a tremendous resource. I thoroughly enjoyed the

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Dedication

To my children, Tehila, Tiferet, Meira, Akiva and Hillel,

Who never stop questioning and never stop learning

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

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One of the primary goals of Modern and Centrist Orthodox high schools is to inspire students spiritually and religiously. That task falls primarily on the shoulders of Judaic studies teachers, who are students' main connection to Torah learning. Inspiration does not simply come from learning text, it also emanates from spiritual role models who provide adolescents with a template on how to think and act as an Orthodox Jew (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2014). This study aims to examine the effectiveness of Modern and Centrist Orthodox Judaic high school teachers in meeting this goal of serving as spiritual mentors during their time in high school.

Spiritual mentorship, or modeling, is defined as mentoring that incorporates religious and spiritual components, with the mentor serving as a spiritual role model. Spiritual mentors are essential for religious growth and are particularly effective with adolescents (Cannister, 1999; Cook, 2000). Oman and Thoresen (2003) assert that spirituality and religious observance require skill that needs to be taught and refined, and a spiritual mentor is essential in achieving those skills. Spiritual modeling fits within the theoretical framework of observational learning, popularized by psychologist Albert Bandura. This form of learning takes place by watching and imitating others, regardless of whether the mentor intended to serve that role (Bandura, 2008). The theory of observational learning posits that people often learn by modeling the behavior of others, even without their knowledge or intent to teach that behavior (Bandura, 1986).

Spiritual mentoring is impactful for adolescents because relationships are a key component of their religious and spiritual growth (Haas & Schaefer, 2014; McPherson et al., 2001). Adolescents tend to form intense relationships with close emotional bonds that have strong influences on their behavior (de la Haye et al., 2013; Haas & Schaefer, 2014). Many relationships impact adolescents' spiritual growth, such as parents (Dollahite & Marks, 2019), friends (McPherson et al., 2001), and role models/mentors (Wagener et al., 2003) such as Judaic studies high school teachers (Scharf, 2020; Weinstein, 2020). Youth at this age are open to new ideas and have a heightened capacity for identity formation, so mentors are more likely to be impactful with adolescents than young adults or younger children (McNamara Barry et al., 2010).

Rhodes et al. (2006) defined mentorship as "a caring and supportive relationship between a youth and a non-parental adult". Within research studies, mentorship is divided into formal mentorship and informal, or natural, mentorship. Formal mentorship is intentionally pairing a mentor and mentee with the intent of creating an impactful relationship. Formal mentorship is more often studied, as its structure lends itself to quantifying results. However, natural mentorship has been found to be more impactful (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2013).

This study will focus on high school teachers as natural mentors. Natural mentoring is not set up by an outside individual but is an outgrowth of an organically formed relationship with an adult (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2013). Examples of natural mentors are teachers, coaches, family friends, and extended family. Natural mentoring is much more common than formal mentoring and has been found to be more effective (Hagler et al., 2020). Hagler and Rhodes (2018) and DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found that natural mentors are more impactful when they are outside of the mentee's close social circles, such as family members and

close family friends. Relative outsiders, such as teachers or coaches, are more impactful because they can provide a fresh perspective.

Teachers as Mentors

Teachers have been found to be effective natural mentors, and given their time with students, have ample opportunity to build relationships. Teachers who develop a strong teacher-student relationship, which is often considered synonymous with natural mentorship, enhance their student's academic success (Stronge et al., 2011), school engagement (Roorda et al., 2010) and student behavior (Baker, 2006). The two key elements in forming positive teacher-student relationships are building trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Casper, 2012) and the teacher exhibiting prosocial behaviors (Gay, 2010; Prewett et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers make for excellent mentors because of their idealism (See, 2004), and Judaic studies teachers show high rates of idealism with a sincere desire to work with children (Salomon, 2010).

Spiritual mentorship is a specific type of mentorship that can be either formal or informal. In this study, we will focus on spiritual informal mentorship. Spiritual mentoring is particularly impactful on adolescents because adolescence is a phase ripe for spiritual and religious development (Good & Willoughby, 2008). This is possible because of their unique stage in biological development (McNamara Barry et al., 2010) as well as the social and psychological needs of this developmental period (Good & Willoughby, 2008; King et al., 2013).

Judaic Studies Teachers as Spiritual Mentors

There have been some excellent studies on the impact of spiritual modeling on Orthodox Jewish youth, including their impact on high school students (Scharf,

2020; Weinstein, 2020). The religious impact of the post-high school gap year in Israel is due in large part to the spiritual modeling of teachers and rabbis (Eisenberg, 2010; Jacobson, 2004; Tannenbaum, 2011). Spiritual modeling by Judaic studies high school teachers has been shown to have a long-term impact on the religious lives of young adults, more so than spiritual models in college (Hait, 2014). Additionally, Cohen-Malayev et al. (2014) found that the combination of a positive teacher-student relationship and meaningful religious study had a moderate influence on the religious growth of adolescents in Israel.

Tannenbaum (2011) studied students who had just completed a year in Israel and found that their high school teachers had an overwhelming impact on their spiritual growth. This study only focused on those who spent the year in Israel, not all students in Orthodox high schools. It also surveyed students after their gap year in Israel, not during their high school years.

If Judaic studies teachers have such a positive impact on post-high school students, it stands to reason that students in Orthodox Jewish high schools would report that positive teacher-student relationships had impacted their religious and spiritual growth. This study will investigate the effectiveness of Judaic studies high school teachers as spiritual mentors during their time in high school. In order to better understand if Jewish high schools are accomplishing one of their primary goals, to spiritually inspire their students, we must examine how impactful their teachers are in that capacity.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the important role spirituality can play in the development of adolescents, and research suggesting Judaic studies teachers can be effective spiritual mentors (Eisenberg, 2010; Jacobson, 2004; Scharf, 2020; Tannenbaum, 2011; Weinstein, 2020), it would be important to understand the process of spiritual mentoring. This includes the characteristics of effective mentoring, the various ways teachers impact their students and the research that demonstrates the effectiveness of Judaic studies teachers as spiritual mentors. In this literature review, we first analyze spiritual mentorship and its theoretical framework of observational learning. We then delve into the impact of mentors and what makes them successful at impacting youth, with a particular focus on teachers. We will next hone in on the spiritual mentorship of adolescents and why it is particularly impactful during that phase in life. Finally, we will discuss a series of studies that demonstrate the value of Judaic Studies teachers as spiritual mentors.

Spiritual Mentorship

The focus of this study is the role of teachers as spiritual mentors. Spiritual mentors specialize in modeling religious and spiritual values and imparting them to their mentees. They play a similar role to a typical academic mentor, but with a focus on religion and spirituality. The spiritual mentor is modeling a belief system and lifestyle with the hope that the mentee will incorporate those spiritual and religious approaches into their beliefs and actions. Spiritual modeling assumes that living a life filled with spirituality and religious practice requires a skill that transcends what a person can learn through books or classes (Oman & Thoresen, 2003).

It may seem impossible to define spiritual modeling as a single concept as different faiths promote diverse values and goals. While religions focus on different spiritual and religious priorities, some common goals do emerge across faiths. For example, the ability to control one's greed and lust, to focus on spiritual pursuits, to be generous and develop wisdom is valued by the vast majority of religions (Walsh, 1999). Additionally, the moral behavior seen as a goal of many faiths requires self-control. The ability to overcome one's natural selfishness for the good of others is a "moral muscle" that must be cultivated over many years with tremendous skill (Baumeister & Exline, 1999). In order for a person to develop self-control over their vices and impulses it is vital to observe role models who demonstrate that ability, which is the core value of spiritual modeling (Oman & Thoresen, 2003). Spiritual modeling is vital in building these complex spiritual skills.

Observational learning

The theoretical framework for spiritual modeling is the concept of observational learning. Observational learning is a social learning phenomenon popularized by the renowned psychologist Albert Bandura. Observational learning takes place by watching and imitating the behavior of others. The modeling need not be intentional or explicit-people learn by simply watching the behavior of others and incorporating it into their own code of conduct (Bandura, 1986). Bandura posits that there are four phases of observational learning (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 2004; Bandura, 2008):

1. **Attentional processes** determine what information people extract from observing others. This is moderated by their thoughts and feelings about the person they are observing, their preconceived attitude toward the behavior being modeled and their ability to focus on the behavior

at that moment (Bandura, 1986).

   2.   **Retention** is the process of the person internalizing the

observed behavior. It involves an active process of turning the behavior into a

series of rules and concepts that allow them to incorporate this new behavior

into their existing personality. This process can be assisted by outside

influences. For example, a 3rd-grade student witnesses her teacher act

patiently with another student. Over time she learns Biblical stories that

promote patience. The stories help give the observed behavior richness and

detail that make it easier to replicate in the future (Bandura, 1986).

   3.   **The production process**—These rules and concepts begin to

be transformed into action. These actions and behaviors often begin in

stages and without complete expertise in carrying out the behavior. This may

include physically practicing the behavior. For example, someone may

observe a world-class guitarist perform, but they will only acquire those skills

by practicing the skill they observed.

   4.   **Motivational processes**: People do not perform everything

they learn or observe. The performance of observationally learned behavior is

influenced by three major types of incentive motivators: direct, vicarious, and

self-produced. People are more likely to act upon these newly observed and

internalized behaviors if it is rewarded by those around them, and less likely if

it is condemned either tacitly or implicitly. Therefore, someone may observe

behavior and be ready to institute it in practice, but refrain from doing so out

of social pressure (Bandura, 1986).

Observational learning impacts a person along three dimensions. First, a

person thinks about a situation in a new way and may want to change their approach

to that situation in the future. Second, the change in action or behavior comes about

by learning from new experiences. Third, changes through observational learning are repeated over time and become close to permanent. Observational learning may result in learning a new behavior or may increase or decrease existing behaviors. However, observational learning is not always a net positive for the learner. Both positive and negative behavior can be learned observationally. For example, a child who sees a parent continuously committing violence may often engage in aggression as well (Bandura, 2008).

Oman and Thoresen (2003) convincingly argue that observational learning is the theoretical framework for spiritual modeling. All religions promote spiritual exemplars, both living and deceased, to serve as models of faith and action. These role models not only teach specific behavior but also are instructive in promoting the cognitive function of embracing a particular religious belief system that serves as a "lens through which reality is perceived" (Silberman, 2003).

Spiritual modeling is not exclusively accomplished by elite religious leaders but can be done by laymen as well, individuals who exemplify a spiritual and religious persona. Williamson and Hood (2015) used the concept of spiritual modeling to explain the success of a particular faith-based substance abuse recovery program. A key aspect of the recovery program involves providing each patient with a mentor. Many of the mentors were once patients themselves. In studying the success of six mentors, they concluded that for mentorship to be successful the mentor needs to be willing to give time and effort, be genuine, and sincerely care about the patient. All of the mentors were volunteers with full-time jobs outside of the program, and their success is in their ability to become spiritual mentors to the patients. High school teachers, similar to the mentors in this study, may not be prominent religious leaders, but they can still serve as effective spiritual mentors.

The Importance of Relationships to an Adolescent's Spiritual Growth

At its core, the success of spiritual mentoring is due to the relationship developed between the mentor and mentee. Spiritual mentoring is especially impactful with adolescents because adolescence is a time of friendship and socialization. Adolescents tend to form intense relationships with close emotional bonds that have strong influences on their behavior (de la Haye et al., 2013; Haas & Schaefer, 2014). There are a variety of relationships that impact adolescents' religious and spiritual growth. Before examining how valuable teachers are to their religious growth, it is helpful to analyze other relationships in their lives. Namely, the adolescent's relationships with parents, friends, religious leaders and role models.

Parents

An adolescent's relationship with their parents plays a critical role in their spiritual and religious development (Dollahite & Marks, 2019; Regnerus & Burdette, 2006; Regnerus & Smith, 2005; Weinstein, 2020). Dollahite and Marks (2004) studied 60 highly religious Jewish, Christian and Muslim families and found that parents played an important role in espousing and modeling values that their children were able to articulate and internalize. This was primarily done in small interactions and experiences that demonstrated selflessness and a willingness to sacrifice for religious values.

Layton et al. (2011) performed a qualitative study of eighty religiously diverse adolescents and found parents were the fifth most common anchor of religious commitment for the adolescents they studied. They found that the impact of parents was in their role as a religious authority figure, and in the case of Muslim adolescents, as the recipient of a sense of duty to family. Additionally, many adolescents experience ritual functions as being strongly relational. For example, the

Passover Seder and Church attendance were less about spiritual connection than the family experience.

Parental relationships impact their children's religious growth in a variety of ways. Loser et al. (2008) did a qualitative study of 67 religious Latter Day Saints (LDS) families to explore how religion impacts day-to-day family life. They followed these families for 1.5 years and used a variety of methods to gather data: interviews, home observations and surveys. Religion had an overarching impact on all aspects of family life-playing a role in the way in which family members spoke to each other, dressed, spent family time, decorated their home, handled intrafamily conflict and more. Religion also provided additional meaning and structure to mundane activities such as mealtime, family conversations, recreational activities and family outings. Parents modeled these behaviors and created a family culture that their children absorbed and articulated. While this study focused on LDS families, it supports the above research that parents and home life promote religious growth through common daily activities and interactions.

As suggested by the research above, parents play a vital role in the religious growth of their children, and in this study, we will also analyze the moderating impact they have on their adolescent children's religious growth. We turn our attention now to other influential relationships that impact adolescent religiosity and spirituality.

Peer Groups

Friends are integral in the religious and spiritual development of adolescents. Friends have a tremendous influence on the lives of adolescents, as they become more independent and spend less time with their parents and siblings (Brown, 1990). For the most part, American adolescents tend to create social peer groups of similar age, class, race, gender, and religion (McPherson et al., 2001). Not only do people

gravitate to friendships of religious homophily, but the friendships themselves are also strengthened by their religious connection (McPherson et al., 2001). Attending religious services has been found to have a strong impact on religious connection for adults, due to the services themselves as well as the relationships formed in houses of worship (Lim, 2016; Lim & Putnam, 2010; Schwadel et al., 2015). Adolescent peer groups are no different, as religiosity, or lack thereof, is a relevant factor in their development of relationships (Cheadle & Schwadel, 2012; Cook et al., 2016).

The essential question with adolescents is a classic "chicken-and-egg" scenario: Do peer groups tend to be religiously homophilous because they choose friends based on religion, or do they choose friends based on other factors and the group becomes religiously homophilous over time? Adams et al. (2019) advocated for the latter with the concept of the religious mosaics-the notion that religious identity formation is much more complex than an individual's beliefs and values. Relationships and peer groups play an especially large role in identity formation. They analyzed two studies from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and found that adolescents did not choose friends based on religious homophily but instead made friends and then over time became more similar to their friends as the peer group became a religious cluster.

Cheadle and Schwadel (2012) agreed with that approach. In their study, they found that religion, whether it was measured by attendance, identity, or devotion was pervasively social among adolescents in grades 7-12. They found that all aspects of religious life gravitated towards their friends' approaches-showing that religion was subject to the same social influence as musical taste, smoking, or style of dress.

Cook et al. (2016) attempted to build on Schwadel and Cheadle's 2012 study. They found that social networks are formed in childhood with heavy influences from family, friends and religious tradition. As the youth grows into adolescence and

forms an expanded group of friends, their new friends' religiosity determines the amount of religiosity expressed. This suggests that while friends play an important role in the religious and spiritual growth of adolescents, their impact may be temporary. Adolescents have a need to fit in and belong so they naturally follow the religious behavior of their friends, but as they mature and their peer groups change that impact wanes.

Religious Leaders and Role Models

While parents and friends are influential in an adolescent's religious life, religious leaders and role models, such as teachers, also have a significant impact (Cannister, 1999; Cook, 2000). As they mature and have more sophisticated and consistent interactions with an expanded network of adults a growing number of role models begin to impact their religious and spiritual life. Furrow and Wagener (2000) demonstrated that religious youth had access to significantly more developmental assets, relationships and opportunities that help youth succeed, than non-religious youth. They studied data from a large survey of 6th-12th graders and found that relationships with a non-familial adult were key to the development of restraint and that youth with high levels of religious participation were much more likely to have access to those relationships. They conclude that religious participation, such as church attendance, was most impactful to the ability to develop restraint because it assisted in forming relationships with religious role models.

Wagener et al. (2003) built on that study and surveyed 20,020 youth from grades 6-12 from 213 U.S cities. They found that the primary way in which religious participation promoted prosocial behavior and limited risky behavior was access to developmental assets, people and services that positively influence teens. Religious participation helped youth develop relationships with role models whom they

otherwise would not have met, and these role models were the primary driver of their religious and spiritual growth. This study supports many researchers who argue that the improvement of prosocial behavior is caused by the access to role models that religious participation provides (Dubow et al., 2000; Scales et al., 2000).

Similarly, Gunnoe and Moore (2002) found that religiosity in young adults was best predicted by the presence of role models in childhood and adolescence. They defined role models broadly, remarking that friends and highly religious mothers had a strong influence. However, they also found that childhood attendance at church and religious schools was a strong indicator as well, as it provided a wide variety of role models for participating youth.

As shown above, role models play an essential role as mentors in the religious and spiritual growth of adolescents. Before considering how teachers serve in this role, we need to better understand the methodology and efficacy of mentoring.

Mentorship

Mentors matter. From the earliest moments of life, humans learn from the people around them. A toddler watches their parents and siblings to better understand the world. As youth grow into adolescence their access to potential role models expands and they have the option to choose whom they would like to model. DuBois et al. (2011) ran a meta-analysis of 73 independent evaluations of mentorship programs for both children and adults that were published between 1999-2010. They found that youth mentorship was impactful for a wide variety of ages, from preschool to adolescence. Adolescence is an ideal stage for mentoring to be effective. Youth at this age are open to new ideas and have a heightened capacity for identity formation (McNamara Barry et al., 2010).

Rhodes et al. (2006) provided a conceptual model for the specific ways in

which mentors influence developmental outcomes in youth, identifying three main areas of influence: "Social-Emotional Development", offering youth and companionship with a focus on building positive relationships; "Cognitive Development", challenging their mentees intellectually and exposing them to learning opportunities and support; "Identity Development", helping mentees develop new life skills and exposing them to new perspectives and individuals.

Rhodes et al. (2006) found that there are certain factors that limit the effectiveness of mentorship. Youth with very good relationships with their parents gain little impact from mentorship, and those with very poor relationships may seek to develop intense emotional bonds with mentors that are beyond the scope of a mentorship relationship (previous attachment). The mentor/mentee relationship needs to have the correct interpersonal chemistry to be effective (quality of relationship). Relationships take time to develop (Keller, 2005b). A mentorship relationship that is aborted or terminated early may have a negative impact on the mentee, as it touches on pre-existing vulnerabilities and insecurities and can damage their self-concept (longevity of relationship) (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Qualities of a Successful Mentorship Relationship

For a mentorship relationship to be successful, a meaningful connection must be made between the mentor and mentee (DuBois et al., 2011; Dubois et al., 2005; Rhodes et al., 2006). Mentors who have experience working with youth, have experience in helping professions and have a strong degree of self-efficacy form better and longer-lasting relationships with their mentees (DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2016). Grossman et al. (2012) studied 1,139 youth in grades 4-9 participating in Big Brothers and Big Sister of America (BBBSA) youth mentorship programs and found that adult mentors were more effective than high school or

college students. Judaic studies high school teachers match both of those characteristics.

Mentorship is not equally effective with all youth (Grossman et al., 2012; Kupersmidt et al., 2017). A number of mentee characteristics lead to a successful mentorship relationship. The mentee's personality and past experiences help determine the impact mentorship has on youth. Grossman et al. (2012) found that youth who had multiple life stressors before the advent of the mentorship relationship were more likely to terminate the relationship early. While mentors can be effective at steering youth in a positive direction, they are rarely equipped to assist in working through serious trauma (Grossman et al., 2012). Therefore, it follows that mentorship programs should carefully screen the adolescents in the program to ensure that their limited supply of mentors are paired with those most likely to benefit from the experience.

Other characteristics that negatively impacted the mentorship relationship were mentees who had a sensitivity to criticism and rejection (Grossman et al., 2012) and youth with combative relationships with parents and teachers (Schwartz et al., 2013). Kupersmidt et al. (2017) also found that students with high cumulative risk, such as substance abuse or criminal activity, were more likely to see their mentoring relationships terminate prematurely. This highlights one of the problems in mentorship research. A successful relationship is too often defined by the termination or continuation of the mentorship relationship, not the impact the relationship has on youth.

Another factor that is commonly studied is the mentee's age. Raposa et al. (2019) did not find age to be a predictive factor in effective mentorship relationships. However, Hagler et al. (2020) disagreed. They produced a thorough and incredibly useful review of the research on mentoring. They concluded that the ideal age for

mentorship is early adolescence (ages 14-16). Older youth (ages 12-13) tend to be more focused on peer relationships and have less of a desire to emotionally connect with mentors and older adolescents (ages 17-18) have been found to form shorter and less intimate relationships with mentors. Early adolescents are intensely working towards identity formation and embracing the role an adult mentor can play in helping them understand themselves (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Thomson & Zand, 2010). Further research can help pinpoint the age that produces the most effective and impactful mentorship.

Gender is another factor that plays a role in the success of a mentorship relationship. The vast majority of mentorship relationships, both formal and informal, are same-sex relationships, and there is no definitive answer to whether same-sex mentorship relationships are more effective than same-sex (Bogat & Liang, 2005). DuBois et al. (2011) found that mentorship tended to be more impactful for male participants than for female ones. DeWit et al. (2016) found that female youth were significantly more likely than males to terminate the mentor relationship prematurely. They surmise it might be part of a larger trend of females having higher expectations for relationships than males, and terminating those relationships when those expectations are not met. Other researchers also noticed that females were more likely to terminate the relationship early than males (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Kupersmidt et al., 2017). The impact of gender on the effectiveness of mentorship requires further study, and in my research, I will analyze the impact of gender.

Youth also need encouragement to engage in the mentorship process. DeWit et al. (2016) found that when a parent showed strong support for the mentorship relationship it greatly reduced the likelihood of early termination. However, they also found that if the youth entered the program through parental coercion and not an intrinsic motivation to grow, they were more likely to terminate the relationship early.

Race and ethnicity did not appear to be a factor in the effectiveness of mentorship (DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019), though Schwartz et al. (2013) found that when the mentor and mentee were of the same race the relationship tended to last longer. This was an important finding, as it would indicate that cultural homophily increases the likelihood of a successful mentorship relationship. This may increase the likelihood that Judaic studies teachers will be effective mentors to their students.

In summary, many factors impact the effectiveness of mentorship. Further study is needed on the impact of gender, mentee age and racial/cultural homophily on that relationship.

There are two primary forms of mentorship, formal mentorship and informal, or natural, mentorship. This study focuses on the informal mentorship of Judaic studies high school teachers and their students. To fully understand informal mentorship a brief explanation of formal mentorship is needed, as there are many similarities in what creates a successful mentoring relationship.

Formal Mentorship

Formal mentorship is intentionally pairing a mentor and a mentee to form an impactful relationship. This is the most common form of mentorship as it can be arranged by adults actively seeking to help youth in their school, religious institution, or community. Raposa et al. (2019) performed a meta-analysis of all English language youth mentorship evaluations and found there was a moderate to medium impact on youth outcomes. These results were nearly identical to a meta-analysis done by DuBois et al. (2011). Formal mentorship programs would be best served following research-based best practices which have been shown to maximize the impact of such programs (Raposa et al., 2019). Creators of formal mentorship programs often mistakenly believe that simply forming a relationship between youth and a non-parental adult will yield results, even though that is often not the case

(Raposa et al., 2019).

For mentorship to be effective the goals need to be detailed and concrete (Garringer et al., 2017). For example, in a national survey of 1271 mentoring organizations affiliated with MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, the most common program goals according to program directors were the broad development of life skills (53.9%), general youth development (51.2%), and providing a caring adult relationship (44.6%). However, only a small percentage of programs stated more specific goals such as supporting college access (17.9%), violence prevention (5.2%), STEM education (6.3%), or substance use prevention (2.9%). More specific and detailed goals help mentors focus the mentorship time on those goals and provide a sense of direction and purpose (Garringer et al., 2017).

Research shows that there are commonalities in the structure of effective mentorship programs. In order for the program to be effective the mentor needs to attend the sessions and stay in touch with the mentee. Too often this is not the case (Spencer, 2007). Therefore, Pryce and Keller (2012) remarked that one advantage of school-based programs over community-based programs is the built-in schedule. Grossman et al. (2012) found that mentees fared worse when their mentor relationship was terminated early and they were re-assigned to a new mentor (DuBois et al., 2011; Karcher, 2005). This highlights the importance for program leaders to create a culture of accountability and consistency.

Mentor training is an invaluable tool in improving the likelihood of an impactful formal mentorship (DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2016). Kupersmidt et al. (2017) state that effective pre-match mentor training can help strengthen the confidence and efficacy of mentors. The need for training does not end once the mentorship begins, as many issues will arise that require further mentor support (Kupersmidt et al., 2017). Herrera et al. (2013) published an extensive evaluation of

the Mentoring At-Risk youth program and found that a majority of mentors requested support after the mentorship began. They found that 89% of mentors were contacted at least monthly by program staff and 84% of mentors reported that the support was either very helpful or somewhat helpful. This demonstrates the importance of mentor training and follow-up by program supervisors.

In summary, formal mentorship is impactful when it is consistent, the mentors are properly trained and the pairings are effective. Further research is needed to study the impact of concrete and detailed goals on the mentorship relationship. While formal mentorship can be helpful, its impact pales in comparison to informal mentorship.

Informal (or Natural) Mentoring

The other primary form of mentoring, informal, or natural, mentoring, is not organized by any outside individual but is a natural outgrowth of a relationship that began organically (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2013). A wide variety of people can provide natural mentoring: a teacher, coach, family friend, or youth group leader. Many divide natural mentoring further into kin and non-kin, with kin referring to mentoring provided by the extended family such as aunts, uncles, and cousins (DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005). Natural mentoring outpaces formal mentoring by a large number, as seen by representative surveys in the United States (Hagler et al., 2020). About three-fourths of all youth report having a natural mentor, with half of them being family members and a quarter being a teacher or guidance counselor (Hagler et al., 2020).

The challenge in measuring the effectiveness of natural mentoring is its informal nature. Formal mentorship lends itself to structured data collection while natural mentoring is haphazard and unstructured, creating a challenge for

researchers (Chan et al., 2016). Therefore, serious analysis of the impact of formal mentorship predates its informal counterpart, but the latter has seen an uptick in research that sheds light on its effectiveness. The research on the impact of adolescent natural mentorship is often measured in young adulthood and will be discussed below. In this study, I will attempt to measure the impact during adolescence, which fills a gap in the current research.

Positive Impact of Informal Mentors

Informal mentorship of adolescents provides many benefits. Hurd and Zimmerman (2013) ran a longitudinal study of 396 young adults and found that natural mentoring relationships improved psychological well-being and improved key interpersonal skills but did not help the mentees avoid negative outcomes such as depression or anxiety. In their study, 53% of the participants reported having a natural mentor in their youth. They measured depressive symptoms and self-reported life satisfaction scores and contrasted their results with the 47% who did not report having a natural mentor in their youth. The mentor relationship was impactful provided that it either began in early adolescence and had a long duration (12-14 years) or began in late adolescence and had frequent contact (2-5 times a week). If the relationship contains either of those characteristics the mentor and mentee were able to create relational closeness and the adolescent saw decreased depressive symptoms and improved self-reported life satisfaction scores.

Informal mentorship offers other benefits to mentees. Chan et al. (2016) utilized data from a longitudinal study run by the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health of 4,882 adolescents and found that if an adolescent had a natural mentor as a young adult they had greater psychological well-being, greater overall satisfaction with a romantic partner, greater educational attainment and less

criminal activity than their counterparts who did not have a natural mentor. Using the conceptual model established by Rhodes et al. (2006), they found that adolescents that had natural mentors showed a 36.4% improvement in socioemotional development, a 25.58% improvement in cognitive development, and a 31.78% improvement in identity development as a young adult. These studies convincingly argue for the impact of natural mentorship on adolescents, as measured by its impact on young adulthood.

Research has shown that all forms of natural mentoring are not equally impactful. Hagler and Rhodes (2018) analyzed the impact having a natural mentor in adolescence had on the well-being of adults ages 33-42. They found that the existence of any type of natural mentor in adolescence was associated with having more close friends, educational attainment, and civic engagement in adulthood. However, "weak-tie" mentors outside of an adolescent's existing social circle, such as teachers, coaches, employers, or religious leaders, were more impactful and were associated with higher educational attainment, household income, and civic engagement but not social support or improved psychological outcomes.

One of the primary reasons mentors have a meaningful impact is their ability to expose their mentees to new approaches and perspectives (DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005; Raposa et al., 2018). Similarly, Hurd et al. (2014) found that a mentorship relationship with a familial member did not limit cigarette, alcohol and substance abuse, but a mentorship relationship with a non-familial member, such as a teacher, did.

Unfortunately, not everyone has equal access to natural mentors. Raposa et al. (2018) found that adolescents in low-income families or living in low-income neighborhoods were less likely to have a natural mentor because they tend to spend more time with extended family and family friends who they view as natural mentors,

but are less impactful as mentors than those outside their social circle, such as teachers or employers. Erickson et al. (2009) noted similarly in their research- the students who would benefit most from a natural mentor, disadvantaged youth, were the least likely to have access to one.

In summary, mentorship is extraordinarily impactful in the lives of adolescents. Natural mentorship has a greater impact than formal mentorship, and mentors from outside the mentee's family and social circle are most effective as they offer fresh perspectives and approaches. Teachers fall into that category and are therefore an ideal fit for natural mentorship. What is missing from the research is a real-time analysis of the impact of natural mentors. Measuring the impact of adolescent natural mentors in young adulthood creates a huge gap between the time of mentorship and its impact. Additionally, young adults might not have an accurate memory of their relationship with their mentor a decade or more after the fact. Judaic studies high school teachers often serve as natural mentors, and this study can uniquely analyze their impact.

Teachers' Impact as Mentors

Teachers have a unique opportunity to serve as mentors to adolescents. They interact with their students on a daily basis and have time in their day to converse with them about a range of topics. Additionally, teachers are specially qualified to serve as mentors due to their idealism (Burke, 2000; Salomon, 2010) and experience working with youth.

Research has shown that teachers are idealistic and passionate about their profession (Burke, 2000; See, 2004). The vast majority of teachers enter the field because of a love of children and a desire to make the world a better place (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Hellsten & Prytula, 2011). Holland (1973) states that in general people

look for professions that fit their personalities and allow them to express their true

selves. When individuals choose working environments that correspond to their

personality types, career satisfaction will increase. Therefore, the giving nature of

education is reflected in the personality of teachers.

Personality is only one part of the equation. Many teachers enter the field

because of their values as well. See (2004) surveyed a sample of 1,845 students

and professional trainees from four tertiary institutions in Southwest England and

Wales (response rate 82%). She concluded from the research that those who

planned to enter the teaching field were much more likely to be motivated by intrinsic

rewards, such as their desire to teach young people, than extrinsic rewards, such as

pay, benefits, or having summers off. Additionally, the negative perception of the

teaching profession or teacher pay was unlikely to dissuade them from entering the

field. She found that people that entered the field did so because they valued the

importance of teaching.

Essentially, teachers enter the field to better the lives of the youth they teach.

Lortie (1975) found that the primary reason teachers entered the field was a desire to

work with young people. Burke (2000) analyzed people who chose to teach as a

second career. The three main reasons they entered the teaching field, respectively,

were: because of a love of children; because teaching "would allow them to express

their creative abilities"; and thirdly, to "make a positive difference in the lives of

children". The majority of study participants stated that extrinsic rewards, such as

pay or work schedule, played only a small role in their decision. It is possible that

those choosing teaching as a second career are more idealistic as they were

dissatisfied with their first career.

Similarly, Bradley and Loadman (2005) studied urban high school teachers

and asked them to rate their agreement with twenty statements regarding their

motivation to enter the teaching profession. The highest-ranked statements were: "Because I love working with children, I became a teacher", "I am a teacher because I enjoy seeing the students learn new things" and "I became a teacher so I could make a difference in students' lives". The lowest ranking statement was: "I did not know what to do with my college education so I chose to teach." This study did have limitations as the survey was limited to only urban high school teachers in one U.S. midwestern city. Chambers (2017) in a qualitative study, interviewed approximately 20 New Jersey Teach for America (TFA) alumni. She found that their primary reason for remaining in the field was love for their students.

The research summarized above strongly endorses teachers' primary motivation for entering the field as a desire to work with young people and make a difference in their lives, which makes them ideal to serve as mentors. This is especially true for Judaic studies teachers in Orthodox Jewish day schools and high schools. As the following section will discuss, their interest in becoming a Judaic studies teacher is primarily connected to their desire to help the next generation be educated and committed Jews, which makes them ideal spiritual mentors.

We now turn to the benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship. While it is not an exact replica of mentorship, it serves as a very common example of mentorship because it encompasses many of the same qualities of mentorship. A positive teacher-student relationship offers numerous benefits to students. Some examples of these benefits which I will explore are: promoting academic success, school engagement, and prosocial behaviors of their students.

The most obvious way in which teachers impact their students is by enhancing their academic success. Erickson et al. (2009) found that teacher mentorship was highly effective at producing improved educational attainment. DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) noted that teachers and guidance counselors were

particularly successful in promoting increased rates of college attendance and decreasing substance abuse. Stronge et al. (2011) studied the math and English scores of 5th graders and found that the students of highly effective teachers had scored 30% higher than students of less effective teachers. They analyzed teachers on a number of factors to differentiate between effective and less effective teachers, and isolated a positive teacher-student relationship (teacher-student relationship) as a specific factor. They concluded that the most effective teachers had good classroom management, were organized and prepared, were fair and respectful to their students and had positive relationships with students. They demonstrate that it is not merely pedagogy and skill that promote their students' academic success, but the teacher's relationship with that student as well.

Additionally, Baker (2006) studied 1,310 students from Kindergarten to 5th grade in four rural schools and used the *Student–Teacher Relationship Scale* to determine the teacher-student relationship. She found that across all ages positive teacher-student relationships predicted behavioral and academic success in school. She described a positive teacher-student relationship as having a "protective effect" on the student. Students that had developmental vulnerabilities and a positive teacher-student relationship had a significant advantage over those without a positive teacher-student relationship. However, a positive teacher-student relationship was not a cure-all. It did not help students who had learning challenges, which she thinks are cognitive or neurological issues that are beyond the scope of what a positive teacher-student relationship can improve. Furthermore, many studies find positive correlations between a positive teacher-student relationship and school engagement and academic achievement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, 2011).

A common question studied is which has a larger impact: a positive or

negative teacher-student relationship. Roorda et al. (2010) found that negative teacher-student relationships had a stronger impact on engagement and academic achievement than positive teacher-student relationships in primary school, but positive teacher-student relationships had a stronger impact in secondary school. Later research found that while in the total sample of studies, negative teacher-student relationships had a lower correlation with engagement than positive teacher-student relationships, the longitudinal subset showed a higher correlation. This indicates that negative teacher-student relationships have a limited impact in the short term, but that the cumulative impact increases over time. Therefore, timely intervention is vital to limit the impact of negative teacher-student relationships (Martin & Collie, 2018; Roorda, et al., 2017).

Characteristics of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

There are many characteristics of a positive teacher-student relationship, but it all starts with trust. Trust serves as the foundation of the teacher-student relationship, without it the relationship slowly erodes and student success is compromised (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Student trust in a teacher is based on students' collective belief that their teacher is being open, honest, reliable, competent, and benevolent (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Teachers who demonstrate trust play an important role in a student's school adjustment, academic motivation and performance (Casper, 2012; Lee, 2007; Moore, 2008;).

In order for a student to perceive a positive teacher-student relationship they need to feel that their teacher cares about them (Stronge et al., 2011). Prewett et al. (2019) did a quantitative study focused on the impact positive relationships with math teachers had on the academic success of 336 5th and 6th graders. They found that teachers who offered social and emotional support to their students resulted in the student feeling that the teacher cared about them which led to a stronger

teacher-student relationship. A positive teacher-student relationship was then associated with their students' demonstrating a higher interest in math. The inverse is true as well. Teachers that were not emotionally supportive had a negative impact on their student's academic growth. Crosnoe et al. (2010) found that students who began their schooling with low-level math skills were able to bridge the achievement gap if there was a positive teacher-student relationship, defined by the teacher's patience and talking in a pleasant and calm tone. However, when there was a conflict between the teacher and student the achievement gap continued.

Prosocial teacher behaviors lead to academic success when they work in tandem with the teacher having high expectations for the students. While having a good relationship with the students is an important starting point, it must come in conjunction with the teacher having a strong desire to see the student grow (Dallavis, 2014; Stronge et al., 2011). Gay (2010) adroitly characterizes these two approaches as "caring for" students and "caring about" students. "Caring about" students refers to concern for another's feelings and situation in life. "Caring for" students is "active engagement in doing something positive". The teacher gets to know the student and their life circumstances not to pity them, but to figure out how to best help them by pushing them to reach their potential (Noddings, 2002).

The above research demonstrates that the idealism and values of teachers make them predisposed to be effective mentors. A positive teacher-student relationship, which is synonymous with natural mentoring, provides a number of benefits, and religious studies teachers have the additional ability to become spiritual mentors to their students. It is important to understand the unique nature of spiritual mentorship and its impact on adolescents.

Spiritual mentorship of adolescents

Spiritual mentorship is particularly impactful on adolescents because of a number of characteristics of that life stage. Religion and spirituality both provide several tangible benefits for adolescents (Lerner et al., 2003; Taylor-Collins et al., 2019; Youniss et al., 1999; Youniss et al., 1997). For example, religion and spirituality are strongly linked to adolescent volunteerism and communal service (Kerestes et al., 2004; Nolin et al., 1997; Smetana & Metzger, 2005), formation of positive emotions (Ciarrocchi & Deneke, 2005; Marques et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012), higher life satisfaction (Kor et al., 2019; Piedmont, 1999), coping with difficult life circumstances (Krok, 2015), civic engagement (Gibson, 2008; Kerestes, Youniss, and Metz, 2004) and development of leadership skills (Day, 2011; Day et al., 2014; Klau, 2016).

Process of Religious Growth in Adolescents

Spiritual mentoring is particularly impactful on adolescents because that stage of life is uniquely suited for spiritual and religious exploration that provides openness to being influenced by mentors (Cannister, 1999; Cook, 2000). There are unique neurological, psychological and emotional factors that converge to make adolescence an ideal phase for religious growth. The brain develops in several ways in adolescence and young adulthood which promotes higher-order thinking and abstract thought which leads to spiritual examination and introspection (McNamara Barry et al., 2010).

Emotionally, adolescents are engaged in intense identity formation, so they are more inclined to engage in spiritual exploration, have a spiritual conversation and make spiritual commitments that last a lifetime (Good & Willoughby, 2008). This makes them ideally suited to forming a meaningful spiritual mentorship relationship.

Young adolescence is more focused on exploring abstract concepts and beliefs while later adolescence focuses more on a commitment to religious behaviors and practice (Benson et al., 2012b), which would impact the approach a spiritual mentor should take. King et al. (2013) found that the appeal of spirituality that engaged adolescents can be distilled into three concepts: transcendence, fidelity and behavior. They labeled them as "spiritual exemplars" and defined them as

- Transcendence: connecting to something larger than yourself.

- Fidelity: certainty of values and beliefs and their commitment to them.

- Behavior: Intentionally living a moral life.

Based on the earlier research that demonstrated that adolescents are particularly impacted by mentorship and open to religious growth, it is logical that spiritual mentorship would be impactful for adolescents. Cook (2000) interviewed 31 inner-city teens in Boston and found that spiritual mentors were essential to their maturation. He studied sixteen teens who were churchgoers and fifteen who were non-churchgoers. He found that 12 of the 16 churchgoing teens mentioned mentorship as an important factor in developing prosocial skills. Nine churchgoing teens said that their mentor helped them make key life decisions, as opposed to only two in the non-churchgoing group. These spiritual mentors became important figures in the lives of adolescents.

Additionally, Cannister (1999) conducted a study placing incoming Freshmen at a small Christian college in two groups, one that attended a year-long mentorship seminar (students of 10 with a teacher that met twice a week) and one that did not. They gave the students a self-assessment survey in September and March and found significant differences between the two groups. The group that attended the seminar demonstrated positive changes in religious and emotional well-being; the students who were not in the seminar regressed spiritually. Interestingly, among the

students who were in the seminar, when asked if they had a faculty mentor that they had a positive relationship with, some chose a faculty member who was not their mentor. It may be that a positive mentoring relationship helps students see the value of mentoring and opens them to creating similar relationships with other mentors (Cannister, 1999). This study had some limitations. It was not a double-blind study and the faculty mentors volunteered for the study, increasing the likelihood that they would be energetic and effective mentors, as opposed to typical faculty members, assigned the task.

Spiritual mentoring with Orthodox Jewish adolescents

Judaic studies teachers are uniquely qualified to serve as spiritual mentors because of their idealism and desire to help young people grow religiously. There are a few key research studies that demonstrate the reasons Judaic studies teachers enter the field. Salomon (2010) conducted a qualitative study aimed at deciphering the reasons Orthodox Jewish day school teachers entered the profession. Based on her sample of 18 teachers she concluded that the primary reason teachers went into the field was to instill in their students a love of Judaism, a love for Torah and to impact the Jewish community. In describing their motivation for entering and staying in the field many stated their desire to be a Jewish role model. Many interviewees stated that having good teachers impacted their desire to become teachers themselves.

Similarly, Tamir (2010) ran a qualitative study of 30 teachers-in-training from three separate training programs, one being a program training Jewish teachers to teach in elementary Jewish Day Schools. She found that the two primary reasons these Jewish teachers-in-training were entering the field were to help children grow and their own personal fulfillment. These teachers consistently stated that those two

goals were a part of their Jewish values and their desire to inculcate them in their students. She surmised that a strong desire to impact Jewish youth not only brings teachers into the field, but it also helps keep teachers in the field. These two studies argue that Judaic studies teachers enter and stay in the field for intrinsic rewards focused on helping youth develop and grow. However, these two studies are qualitative and there is a need for a larger quantitative study to better understand the reasons Jewish teachers enter and remain in the field of education.

A number of studies have examined the effectiveness of spiritual mentors for Orthodox Jewish adolescents (Eisenberg, 2010; Hait, 2014; Jacobson, 2004; Tannenbaum, 2011). One particular point of interest has been the post-high school gap year studying in Israel. Many Orthodox Jewish Day School and Yeshiva graduates spend their first year, or first few years, the post-high school in an immersive full year of study of Jewish texts, often in Israel. Students live in a dormitory far from family and their "native culture" and have extensive exposure to the teachers at the year-long program and their families. The impact on the American Orthodox community has been profound, and the year in Israel is integral to the religious growth of the youth in the Modern and Centrist Orthodox community (Eisenberg, 2010; Jacobson, 2004). While there are many factors that have led to the potency of success for the year of Israel, the relationships students have with their teachers have been found to be an essential ingredient (Eisenberg, 2010; Jacobson, 2004).

Jacobson (2004) completed a qualitative study of eighteen students who had recently returned to America from their year, or years, of study in Israel. In his interviews, he seeks to clarify the ways the students grew religiously and their key influences. Seventeen students reported that an individual was a vital factor in their growth. These individuals comprised three groups: Rebbe/teacher, mentor (typically

an older student), or friend. Fourteen students reported a Rebbe/teacher as being instrumental in their change process, as opposed to seven who mentioned a mentor and five who mentioned a friend. However, when the friend was mentioned as an influence it was never as a sole influence but in addition to that of a teacher or mentor. Jacobson concludes that the role of the Rebbe/teacher is much more influential than the typical role a clergy member plays in the life of an adolescent.

Similarly, Eisenberg (2010) surveyed 581 students as they were finishing their year in Israel to explicitly examine the role their teachers played in their religious growth. He found that teacher support was a strong predictor of student religious belief and action. He noted that teachers in Yeshivas and Seminaries in Israel had certain advantages over high school teachers in becoming spiritual mentors to their students. Namely, students exclusively learn Judaic studies, are away from their parents and spend more time with teachers outside of the classroom. This supports the findings of Luce et al. (2017) that teachers develop positive relationships with students outside of the classroom, where their conversations can more easily expand to topics beyond the scope of the curriculum.

Eisenberg (2010) found no correlation between students with high family cohesion and strong teacher/student bond. It didn't matter if students came from cohesive or non-cohesive families, the relationship with teachers was strong in either case. The depth of the relationship was not analyzed, and that might have evolved as a distinction for students from different types of families. Male and female students had equal intellectual connections to teachers, but females had a higher emotional connection. These studies demonstrate the profound impact Judaic studies teachers play as spiritual mentors during the gap year in Israel. The current research seeks to determine whether Judaic studies teachers have a similar impact in high school.

Studies have shown that relationships with high school Judaic studies teachers were of vital importance to the religious and spiritual growth of their students, even with the limitations that Eisenberg (2010) mentions. Hait (2014) conducted a study of 160 emerging adults who graduated from Modern Orthodox high schools. She found that having positive role models in high school was important in students' religiosity and spirituality as emerging adults. However, role models in college positively correlated with spiritual growth but not religious growth. She found a positive correlation between positive role models in high school and religious observance in emerging adults, but no relationship between negative relationships in high school and students' religious observance. Of those who reported having a positive role model in high school, 76.1% of those role models mentioned were Judaic studies teachers. The most common mentorship trait mentioned was the level of respect the teacher showed to the student. This study demonstrates that high school Judaic studies teachers have an impact on the religious growth of their students as young adults. However, this study was not done in real-time and asked students to reflect on their high school experience years later, which may elicit an overly rosy view of the teacher-student relationship.

Cohen-Malayev et al. (2014) conducted a similar, though larger, study in Israel. They surveyed 2,691 male and female students (grades 9–12) in 152 classes of 25 schools from the Jewish public-religious sector in Israel. The students filled out a questionnaire that measured their perception of how much their teachers care about them, if they view their teachers as role models, how meaningful they find religious studies and if they view the classroom environment as non-threatening. They found that meaningful religious study in school had a moderate influence on religious growth in grades 9 and 11, and a substantial influence in grades 10 and 12, with grade 12 being especially strong. The effect of "teacher as a role model" and

"teacher caring" had a substantial impact on the existence of meaningful religious study. The students found their religious study meaningful when they viewed their teacher as a role model and felt that the teacher cared about them. They note that the importance of the "teacher as a role model" was vital and required further study.

Strulowitz (2020) studied a similar phenomenon. She conducted a qualitative study exploring the impact grades played on student motivation in Judaic studies in Modern Orthodox high schools. She noted that when asked to name their favorite subjects, students invariably referred to general studies classes by the subject matter and the Judaic studies classes by the teacher's name. This may suggest that students enjoyed their general studies classes because of the subject matter but their Judaic studies because of the teacher, which indicates the importance of the teacher in Judaic studies classes.

Cohen-Malayev et al. (2014) did not analyze why the students viewed certain teachers as role models and the impact of the teacher-student relationship. Additionally, their study only measured the impact on the meaningful religious study and not observance. It is possible the student's view of their teachers impacts their learning from that teacher but does not extend to their behavior outside the classroom. This study, done in North America, is useful to determine the impact of a positive teacher-student relationship on the students' religious and spiritual growth.

Tannenbaum (2011) demonstrated the impact of Judaic high school teachers. She anonymously surveyed 355 recent Yeshiva graduates from a wide variety of cities in the United States who had elected to study in the following year in Israel. To begin the survey she asked students to identify three things that led to their religious observance. She found that 63.5% of students named a high school Rabbi or teacher as a key factor, as opposed to friends (50.1%) or family (35.5%). The students' top three reasons as to why their Judaic studies teacher had such an

impact were: 1. Their teachers were interested in doing more than just providing facts and information. 2. They had a close, personal relationship with at least one teacher. 3. Their teachers cared about them and valued them as a person.

Additionally, Tannenbaum found that 69.5% of students stated that they enjoyed their Judaic studies classes more because of the relationship they had with the teacher outside of the classroom and 35.1% had personal meetings with teachers to encourage their religious growth. There were some discrepancies in gender regarding teachers as role models. She found that 65.8% of female students said they had a positive role model in high school, as opposed to 48.2% of males. Similarly, 72.6% of females stated that their teachers were positive role models that inspired growth, as opposed to 58.6% of males. This gender discrepancy will be analyzed in my study.

One important limitation of Tannenbaum's (2011) study is that it focuses exclusively on students who have graduated high school and have chosen to spend a year in Israel. It leaves open the question of how effective Judaic studies teachers are at spiritually mentoring younger students and those who do not choose to study in Israel post-high school. Additionally, the study gauges the students' perceptions at least a year after their graduation but does not track their religious connection during the high school years – and depends on their retroactive recollection of the high school experience.

In summary, spiritual mentoring is a form of mentorship that focuses on the spiritual growth of the mentee and is based on Albert Bandura's theory of observational learning. Mentoring can be either formal or informal, and informal mentoring is more effective. This study focuses on the effectiveness of natural spiritual mentoring of Judaic studies high school teachers, as seen through a positive teacher-student relationship. Many studies demonstrate that natural spiritual

mentorship is impactful on adolescents, especially Orthodox Jewish students. However, there is a dearth of studies focusing on North American high school studies that analyze the real-time impact of Judaic studies on their religious and spiritual growth. This study aims at studying that question, while also taking into account gender and parental religious observance.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

1. To what extent does a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic
   studies teachers predict a student's religious observance and spiritual
   connection?

   Hypothesis 1
    In this study I expect to find students will report that their Judaic studies high
   school teachers serve as effective and positive spiritual role models and this
   will be correlated with their religious observance and spiritual connection.

   Judaic studies teachers have been found to play a vital role in the spiritual
   development of students in post-high school gap year Israel programs
   (Eisenberg, 2010; Jacobson, 2004). Studies have also shown that young
   adults and college students when reflecting on their high school experience,
   name their Judaic studies high school teachers as a primary factor in their
   spiritual and religious growth (Hait, 2014; Tannenbaum, 2011). This study
   measures the real-time assessment of high school students on the
   effectiveness of their Judaic studies teachers as spiritual role models.

2. To what extent does the student's gender moderate the relationship between
   a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers and
   religious observance/spiritual connection?

Hypothesis 2

I expect to find that the student's gender does moderate the relationship between a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers and religious observance/spiritual connection

Mentorship has been found to be more impactful on male mentees than females (DuBois et al., 2011). Additionally, female mentees are more likely to break off the mentor/mentee relationship prematurely (DeWit et al., 2016; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Kupersmidt et al., 2017). Therefore, in this study, I expect to find that a positive teacher-student relationship will have a higher correlation with religious observance/spiritual connection for male students than female students.

3. To what extent does the student's parents' religious observance moderate the relationship between a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers and religious observance/spiritual connection?

Hypothesis

I expect to find that the student's parents' religious observance does moderate the relationship between a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers and religious observance/spiritual connection Parents play a vital role in the religious and spiritual growth of their children (Dollahite & Marks, 2019; Regnerus & Burdette, 2006; Regnerus & Smith, 2005; Weinstein, 2020).

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

The goal of this study is to examine the extent to which a positive teacher-student relationship predicts students' religious observance and spiritual connection. This will be accomplished through quantitative analysis to allow for a large sample that offers a wide variety of demographics to be analyzed. Quantitative analysis is often used to examine the impact of mentoring to gain a broad analysis of a wide variety of mentor-mentee relationships (DuBois et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2012). This study also analyzes gender and parental religious observance to see to what extent they moderate the impact of the teacher-student relationship on religious observance and spiritual connection.

This study will be a secondary analysis of data previously collected. The dataset was compiled by combining the results of a survey of students at 18 Modern Orthodox High Schools in the United States. At each of the 18 participating schools, the original researchers requested that a minimum of 50 students complete the survey. Researchers sent individualized emails to the principals of the schools during December 2016 and January 2017 to ask for participation. As an incentive, participating schools were offered a personalized summary of their individual data by the end of the 2017-2018 school year. Parents were informed of the research and were given the option to opt-out on behalf of their child. There was no penalty for the students who did not participate. Students completed the measure anonymously via Survey Monkey, an online survey platform. The students either received a direct link to the survey from their school or had designated class time to complete the measure. Each school determined which students they would invite to

participate. Some schools offered every student the opportunity to participate whereas others limited it to certain students.

Sample

There were 18 participating schools which resulted in a sample of 1341 high school students. Of those who responded, 39% were male, 58% were female and 3% classified themselves as "other." The participants were high school students in Modern Orthodox high schools; 26% were in 9th grade, 15% in 10th grade, 24% in 11th grade, and 33% in 12th grade.

Measures

The students provided an electronic agreement to participate in the survey. If they did, then they advanced to the survey which consisted of four sections.

Wherever possible, questions were asked on a seven-point Likert scale, offering the student the chance to choose between 0 (completely disagree) and 6 (completely agree) regarding their commitment to a certain belief or practice. The study concludes with a feedback section, offering students the opportunity to share any additional thoughts that they had regarding the measure.

The 83 items in the "beliefs and actions" section of the JewBALE 2.0 were based on the original 174-item JewBALE created in 2006. The original JewBALE was designed with input from religious teachers and laypeople. Its validity was supported by a review of ten experts in Jewish law. These experts organized the questions into distinct subscales that represented a certain construct and eliminated questions that were considered nonessential or that did not clearly fit into one subscale. The JewBALE 2.0 retained all the original

subscales, except for the 'Personal Character Traits' scale which was deleted due to its sophisticated nature that was deemed more appropriate for adult populations. No new subscales were added to the belief and actions section, and all original subscales were edited to eliminate redundancies. The JewBALE 2.0 was also sent to ten experts in Jewish law to validate that the questions in each subscale did, in fact, measure one's commitment to that construct. Shortening the belief and action portion of the measure allowed for the expansion of the demographic section, which included a robust 40 items, allowing for a better understanding of which factors in an adolescent's home, school and personal life play a role in their religious and spiritual outcomes. Two new sections were added in order to be able to appreciate further nuances in the adolescent's religious experience. A 27-item Socio-Religious Scale of Personal Beliefs was created to assess the impact that exposure to secular culture has had on personal beliefs. This scale was intended to uncover the extent to which there is a conflict between the adolescent's personal and religious beliefs and what impact this has, if any, on their religious practices. Finally, the 17-item Duke Health Profile was included to uncover potential relationships between the mental, physical and social health of an adolescent and his or her religious and spiritual outcomes. Using statistical and clinical rationale, this scale was derived from the 63-item Duke-UNC Health Profile (DUHP), resulting in a short survey that was reduced to measure ten valid scales.

The following variables were examined in the regression models: parental religious observance, relationship with Judaic studies teachers, spiritual connection, and religious observance. Parental religious observance was analyzed because of the strong impact they have on their children's religious observance (Dollahite & Marks, 2019; Regnerus & Burdette, 2006; Regnerus & Smith, 2005; Weinstein, 2020). Parental religious observance refers to whether primary religious practices, such as keeping Kosher and observing Shabbat, are kept in the home. This study also analyzed the extent to which the adolescent

views their observance compared to their parents and how much pleasing their parents impact their religious observance. Additionally, The study took into account the student's parent's marital status, as that might impact the parental relationship.

Relationships with Judaic studies teachers are measured by the quality of the relationship the students state they have with their teachers. The JewBALE is part of the study and other questions of this type are additional data points collected. This information is vital, as we lack a study that measures the student's real-time perception of their relationship. The study also analyzed the extent that the students enjoy their Judaic studies classes and find them relevant, which is often tied to the teacher-student relationship (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2014). The study also used different questions to analyze spiritual connection and religious observance. Spiritual connection focuses on questions about the student's relationship with God and religious observance focuses on the student's observance of primary religious practice. The study also took into account the student's gender because the impact of mentorship has been shown to vary based on gender (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Tannenbaum, 2011).

The following questions are used as proxies for the various hypotheses:

Variable	Survey Questions that will measure the variable
Parental religious observance	In your home, do you keep kosher, observe Shabbat, and/or live in multiple homes that have different standards of observance

	My religious practices in comparison to my parents' beliefs are
	My Jewish beliefs in comparison to my parents' beliefs are
	My religious observance is influenced by my desire to please my family.
Relationship with Judaic studies Teachers	I have a good relationship with my Judaic studies teachers
	I enjoy my Judaic studies classes
	My Judaic studies teachers care about me personally.
	I admire my Judaic studies teachers.
	I find what I am learning in Judaic studies classes relevant to my life.
	My religious observance is influenced by my desire to please my Rabbis/teachers.
Spiritual Connection	G-d cares about me
	G-d hears my prayers
	I fear G-d
	I love G-d

	I have personal conversations with God
Religious Observance	Behavior/Practice Subscale, for example,
	I perform community service activities even when not required.
	I eat only kosher food.
	I enjoy studying traditional Jewish texts.
	I plan/want to continue studying Jewish texts (Gemara, Tanakh, etc.) after high school.
	I follow the guidelines regarding modest clothes as set forth in halacha.
	I go to shul on Shabbat.
	I wear a kippah when in public (or other head covering for religious purposes).
	I put on tefillin every day that one is supposed to do so.
Confounding Variables	My biological parents are married to each other
	Gender

The current study subjected the survey data to a number of statistical analyses to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

In order to evaluate research question 1 regarding the extent to which the relationship between students and Judaic studies teachers predict their student's religious observance and spiritual connection, two regression analyses were conducted. For each regression analysis, the independent variable was the student-teacher relationship with Judaic studies teachers. The dependent variable for the first regression analysis was religious observance (actions) and for the second regression analysis was a spiritual connection (religious beliefs). In the first regression model, the student relationship with their Judaic studies teachers significantly predicted overall religious observance, R^2=.19, F(1,956)=218.12, p<.001. Nineteen percent of the variance of religious observance can be explained by a positive relationship with Judaic studies teachers. In the second regression model, the student relationship with their Judaic studies teachers significantly predicted overall religious beliefs, R^2=.12, F(1,956)=126.79, p<.001. Twelve percent of the variance of religious beliefs can be explained by a positive relationship with their Judaic studies teachers.

To explore research question 2 regarding whether gender mediates the relationship between Judaic Studies teachers and religious observance, Barron and Kenny's four-step approach was conducted.

Step one was to conduct a simple regression analysis with the Judaic Studies relationship as the predictor and religious observance as the dependent variable.

As shown above, the student relationship with their Judaic studies teachers significantly predicts overall religious observance, R^2=.19, F(1,956)=218.12, p<.001.

Nineteen percent of the variance of religious observance can be explained by a positive relationship with Judaic studies teachers.

Step two was to conduct a simple regression analysis evaluating whether the relationship with teachers predicts gender. A simple regression was conducted where the student relationship with Judaic studies teachers was entered as the predictor and gender was entered as the criterion. The overall model was significant, R^2=.021, F(1,955) = 20.96, p<.001. 2% of the variance of gender can be explained by the relationship with the Judaic studies teachers.

Step three was to determine whether gender predicts religious actions. A regression analysis was conducted where gender was entered as the predictor and religious actions were entered as the criterion variable while controlling for relationships with Judaic studies teachers. Gender was not found to significantly predict religious actions. R^2=.002, F(1,954)=2.64, ns.

Since gender does not predict religious actions, gender cannot be a mediator between the relationship of student relationships with Judaic studies teachers and religious observance.

Therefore, gender was evaluated as a moderator. When gender and having a good relationship with Judaic studies teachers were entered into the first step of the regression model while looking at whether they predict overall religious observance, the overall model was significant, R2=.19, F(2,954) = 110.71, p<.001. Since the model did not change in the amount of variance that can be explained by gender and having a positive relationship with Judaic studies teachers, gender can not be considered a moderator either.

In order to test whether gender mediates the relationship between Judaic Studies teachers and spirituality, Barron and Kenny's four-step approach was conducted.

Step one was to conduct a simple regression analysis with the Judaic Studies relationship as the predictor and religious spirituality as the dependent variable.

As shown above, the student relationship with their Judaic studies teachers significantly predicts overall religious beliefs, R^2=.12, $F(1,956)$=126.79, p<.001. Twelve percent of the variance of religious beliefs can be explained by a positive relationship with their Judaic studies teachers.

Step two was to conduct a simple regression analysis evaluating whether the relationship with teachers predicts gender. A simple regression was conducted where the student relationship with Judaic studies teachers was entered as the predictor and gender was entered as the criterion. The overall model was significant, ΔR^2=.021, $F(1,955)$ = 20.96, p<.001. 2% of the variance of gender can be explained by the relationship with the Judaic studies teachers.

Step three was to determine whether gender predicts religious spirituality. A simple regression was conducted with gender as the predictor variable and spirituality as the dependent variable. Gender was not found to significantly predict religious spirituality while controlling for the relationship with Judaic studies teachers, R^2=.002, $F(1,954)$=2.51, ns.

Since gender does not predict religious spirituality, gender is not considered a mediator of the relationship between Judaic studies teachers and religious beliefs.

In order to evaluate research question 3 as to whether parent religious observance mediates the relationship between Judaic Studies teachers and religious observance, Baron and Kenny's four-step approach was conducted.

Step one was to conduct a regression analysis with the Judaic Studies relationship as the predictor and religious observance as the dependent variable.

As shown above, the student relationship with their Judaic studies teachers significantly predicts overall religious actions, R^2=.19, F(1,956)=218.12, p<.001. Nineteen percent of the variance of religious actions can be explained by a positive relationship with their Judaic studies teachers.
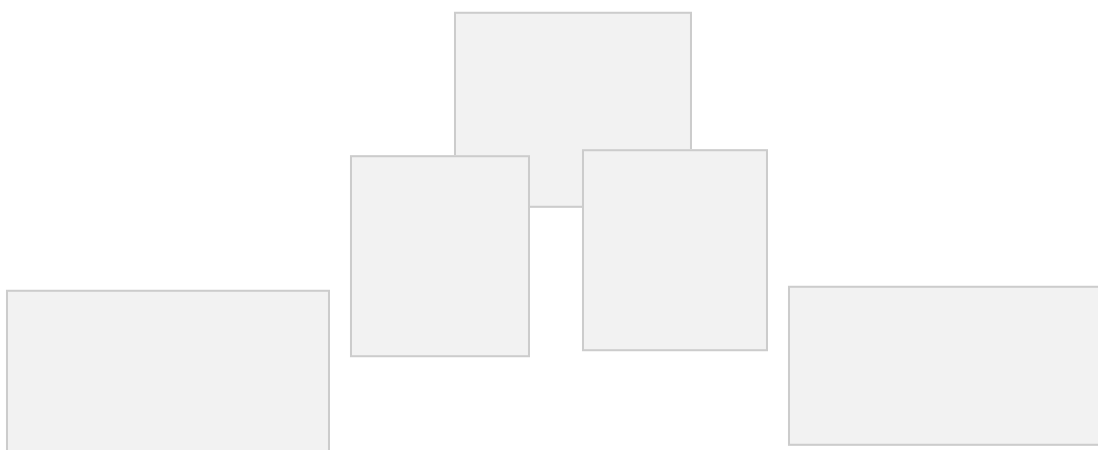
Step two was to conduct a simple regression analysis evaluating whether the relationship with Judaic studies teachers predicts parent religious observance. A simple regression was conducted where the student relationship with Judaic studies teachers was entered as the predictor and parent religious observance was entered as the criterion. The overall model was significant, R^2=.011, F(1,877) = 10.00, p<.01. One percent of the variance of gender can be explained by the relationship with the Judaic studies teachers.

Step three was to determine whether parent religious observance predicts religious actions. A simple regression was conducted with parent religious observance as the predictor variable and religious actions as the dependent variable. Parent religious observance was found to significantly predict religious observance while controlling for a relationship with Judaic studies teachers, ΔR^2=.07, F(1,876)=77.48, p<.001.

Step four was to evaluate what happens when the relationship with Judaic studies teachers is evaluated in relation to overall religious observance while controlling for parent religious observance. The overall model was significant, ΔR^2=.13, F(1,876) = 149.34, p<.001, while controlling for parent religious observance. Since the model is still significant, but less so, parent religious observance can be considered a partial mediator between the relationship with Judaic studies teachers and overall religious observance. Such that greater parent religious observance and stronger relationship with Judaic studies teachers predicts stronger religious observance.

Figure 1

Demonstration of Parent Religious Observance Mediating the Relationship Between the Relationships with Judaic Studies Teachers and Religious Actions

 The figure above shows that when taking parental religious observance into account, the relationship with Judaic Studies teachers was less impactful on their students' religious actions. In order to test whether gender mediates the relationship between Judaic Studies teachers and spirituality, Barron and Kenny's four-step approach was conducted.

Step one was to conduct a simple regression analysis with the Judaic Studies relationship as the predictor and religious beliefs as the dependent variable.

As shown above, the student relationship with their Judaic studies teachers significantly predicts overall religious actions, $R^2=.12$, $F(1,956)=126.79$, $p<.001$. Twelve percent of the variance of religious beliefs can be explained by a positive relationship with their Judaic studies teachers.

Step two was to conduct a simple regression analysis evaluating whether the relationship with Judaic studies teachers predicts parent religious observance. A simple regression was conducted where the student relationship with Judaic studies teachers was entered as the predictor and parent religious observance was entered as the criterion. The overall model was significant, R^2=.011, $F(1,877) = 10.00$, $p<.01$. One percent of the variance of gender can be explained by the relationship with the Judaic studies teachers.

Step three was to determine whether parents' observance level predicts religious spirituality. A simple regression was conducted with parents' observance level as the predictor variable and spirituality as the dependent variable. Parents' observance level was found to significantly predict religious spirituality while controlling for relationships with Judaic studies teachers, ΔR^2=.019, $F(1,876)=18.90$, $p<.001$.

Step four was to evaluate what happens when the relationship with Judaic studies teachers is evaluated in relation to overall religious beliefs while controlling for parent religious observance. The overall model was significant, ΔR^2=.08, $F(1,876) = 81.94$, $p<.001$, while controlling for parent religious observance. Since the model is still significant, but less so, parent religious observance can be considered a partial mediator between the relationship with Judaic studies teachers and overall religious beliefs, such that the greater the parental religious observance and the stronger the relationship with Judaic studies teachers predicts increased religious beliefs.

Figure 2

Demonstration of Parent Religious Observance Mediating the Relationship Between the Relationships with Judaic Studies Teachers and Religious Beliefs
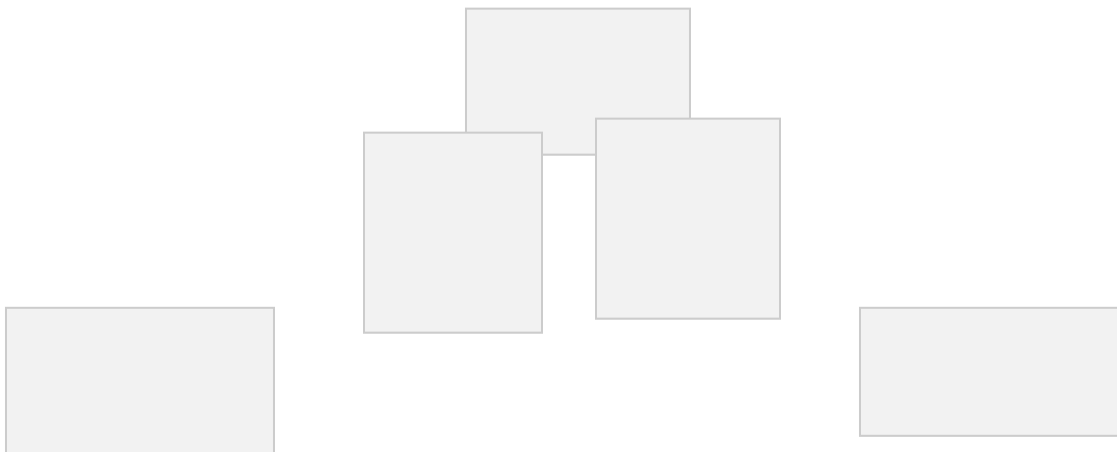
CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the effectiveness of Judaic high school teachers as natural spiritual mentors to their students during their time in high school. The study isolated the teacher-student relationship and explored how impactful it was on the religious observance and spiritual connection of their students. It was built on studies that found that spiritual mentoring has a significant impact on adolescents (Haas & Schaefer, 2014; McPherson et al., 2001). Additionally, this study builds on research demonstrating that natural mentoring is highly impactful for adolescents (DuBois & Silverthorn 2005; Hagler & Rhodes, 2018) and that teachers are often effective natural mentors (Roorda et al., 2010; Stronge et al., 2011). This study examined those three factors with the question: "Are Judaic studies high school teachers effective natural spiritual mentors for adolescents?"

The core question this study aimed to answer was the effectiveness of Judaic studies high school teachers as spiritual mentors during their time in high school. Studies done in the Orthodox Jewish community have shown that teachers serve as impactful spiritual mentors in American gap year programs located in Israel (Eisenberg, 2010; Jacobson, 2004). While these studies show the importance of Judaic studies teachers, there are certain aspects of the gap year programs that do not exist in high school. As compared to the high school experience, students in gap year programs are older and more mature, are living away from home, focus exclusively on religious studies, and spend many more hours with teachers both inside and outside the classroom. All of these factors make it easier for teachers to develop relationships with teachers and for teachers to religiously impact their students.

Another study showed that in Israeli high schools, a positive teacher-student relationship had a strong impact on the religious and spiritual lives of their students (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2014). While this study is instructive, it takes place in Israel as opposed to America. It is possible that cultural aspects of Israeli schools or Israeli society make it more likely that teachers have a positive impact on their students. Additionally, this study focused on the teacher's role in making the religious study meaningful for the students and did not focus on their overall ability to inspire the student's religious observance and spiritual connection.

Studies that focused on American high school students did not survey them during their high school years. Tannenbaum (2011) found high school teachers to be very impactful spiritual mentors. However, her study was based on students' reflections after they returned from their gap year in Israel. It is possible that students returning from a spiritually uplifting gap year in a Yeshiva or seminary recollect their high school teachers with rose-colored glasses. Additionally, many students do not go on to a gap year in Israel, and their experience was not reflected in the study. Hait (2014) also found that Judaic studies high school teachers were effective spiritual mentors. However, her study focused on young adults reflecting on their high school experience. It is possible that they remember their high school experience fondly and overestimate its impact on their adult religious experience. Additionally, it is possible that the participants overstate their relationship with teachers due to the time that had elapsed.

This study is based exclusively on the experience of high school students in real-time. The JewBale 2.0 study surveyed 1,341 high school students from 18 participating schools, offering a robust and broad sample. By focusing on high school students this study is able to analyze the experience of students during their high school years. This offers an accurate and unvarnished understanding of the impact of their Judaic studies teachers on their religious observance and spiritual connection. Since this study surveys their experience

in real-time we can confidently state that they are accurately describing their relationship with their teachers as well as their current level of religious observance and spiritual connection.

An analysis of the JewBALE 2.0 data showed that a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers significantly predicted religious observance (R^2=.19). The data also showed that a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers significantly predicts spiritual connection (R^2=.12). These results supported my hypothesis that Judaic studies high school teachers serve as impactful spiritual natural mentors. This is consistent with the previous research that found that Judaic studies teachers are effective spiritual mentors (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2014; Eisenberg, 2010; Jacobson, 2004; Stronge et al., 2011; Weinstein, 2020).

These results are significant, as they represent students' relationship with their teachers and its impact on their spiritual lives. These results demonstrate that high school students' relationship with their teachers has a significant impact on their religious observance and spiritual growth. Since a significant aspect of the Judaic studies teacher's goals is to impact their students' spiritual and religious identities, these results confirm the importance of their role. Additionally, these findings clarify that the spiritual and religious impact teachers have on their students is not confined to the content they teach) but also is based on their personal relationships as a positive teacher-student relationship significantly predicted religious observance and spiritual growth. While I expected a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers to predict their student's religious observance and spiritual connection, I was surprised by just how impactful they were.

This study also supports previous research that demonstrated the tremendous value of natural mentorship on adolescents (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2013). One of the challenges of analyzing natural mentorship is its informal nature (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2013). By nature, most forms of natural mentorship are never recorded (Chan, et al., 2016). An adolescent's

relationship with a teacher, family friend, or coach seems like an unremarkable aspect of daily life and therefore does not seem like something worth analyzing. Also, the impact the mentor has is often gradual and imperceptible, making its impact very difficult to measure and track. Since natural mentorship far outpaces formal mentorship (Hagler et al., 2020) and is the least studied of the two (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2013), data on the impact of natural mentorship is invaluable. By using JewBale 2.0 I was able to measure the impact of natural mentorship across 1,341 students and 18 schools, providing valuable data on the overall impact of natural mentorship. By demonstrating the significant impact natural mentorship had on the religious observance and spiritual connection of the students, this study builds on the data demonstrating the value natural mentorship has on the lives of adolescents.

In order to track natural mentorship, I used a positive teacher-student relationship to quantify natural mentorship, as it is a common example of this form of mentorship. Research has shown that the benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship are similar to that of an impactful natural mentor (Baker, 2006; Stronge et al., 2011).

Another element that makes this study important is the research showing teachers' impact as spiritual mentors. Oman and Thoresen (2003) assert that spiritual connection and religious observance require effective role models who can help their pupils understand the nuances of religious life and how to apply religious values to a complex world. This study strongly supports the idea that adolescents' religious life is greatly enhanced by effective spiritual mentors, as their teachers have such a strong impact on their religious life.

Finally, this data was gathered to encompass students from all four years of high school. As opposed to the previous research on American Orthodox Jewish schools, which focused on students who had graduated from high school, this research gives us a glimpse into the perspective of students from all four years of high school. This helps us expand the age range in which we have data about the impact Judaic studies teachers have on the religious observance and spiritual connection of their students. This allows us to see the

importance of Judaic studies teachers for individuals in early and mid-adolescence, whose experiences may be very different than those in late adolescence.

Gender

My hypothesis was that a positive teacher-student relationship would be more impactful for males than females. My hypothesis was based on research that showed that females were more likely to end mentorship relationships prematurely (DeWit et al., 2016; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Kupersmidt et al., 2017). Additionally, formal mentorship has been shown to be more impactful for male adolescents (DuBois et al., 2011). However, the results did not show any discrepancy based on gender. Gender did not mediate/moderate the relationship between a positive teacher-student relationship with Judaic studies teachers and religious beliefs and observance.

There are some possible explanations for why many studies found mentorship to be more impactful for males but this study did not. The studies that found a stronger impact on males studied formal mentorship (DeWit et al., 2016; DuBois et al., 2011; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Kupersmidt et al., 2017). This is expected because it is common for researchers to focus on formal mentorship because their organized structure lends itself to data collection (Chan, et al., 2016). It is possible that these results demonstrate the danger of applying data from formal mentorship and applying them to informal mentorship.

While some aspects of formal mentorship can apply to informal mentorship, there are certainly some aspects that are not applicable. It is possible that the gender discrepancy in formal mentorship is not present in natural mentorship. DeWit et al. (2016) theorized that the reason female adolescents were likely to terminate the mentorship relationship early was part of a general trend of females having higher expectations in their relationships. When those expectations aren't met they are more likely to terminate the relationship. It is possible that this concern does not apply to natural mentorship.

Formal mentorship is a forced relationship imposed on the adolescent, predominantly with the best of intentions. Females may only be willing to invest in these contrived relationships if it matches their expectations. However, natural mentorship is willingly chosen by both parties at the outset. The mentee has already vetted the mentor before entering an informal mentoring relationship. Therefore, female adolescents have already determined that the mentorship relationship is meeting their needs and they will be open to learning from their mentor and maintaining the relationship.

Parents' Religious Observance

Parental religious observance was demonstrated to be a partial mediator between the relationship with Judaic studies teachers and overall religious beliefs, such that the greater the parental religious observance and the stronger the relationship with Judaic studies teachers predicts increased religious beliefs. Similarly, parent religious observance served as a partial mediator between the relationship with Judaic studies teachers and overall religious observance. Such that greater parent religious observance and stronger relationship with Judaic studies teachers predicts stronger religious observance.

The results supported my hypothesis that parental religious observance would serve as a partial mediator of the impact of Judaic studies teachers on religious practice. This supports prior research that found parents to have a significant role in the religious and spiritual growth of their children (Dollahite & Marks, 2019; Regnerus & Burdette, 2006; Regnerus & Smith, 2005; Weinstein, 2020).

Conclusion and Practical Implications

This study demonstrated that Judaic studies teachers in United States high schools have a significant impact on the religious observance and spiritual connection of their students. This research should serve as a boon for Jewish education, as it provides further

evidence of the importance of a secondary Judaic studies education. There is a segment of the Jewish community that views primary school as the most vital year of Jewish education as it establishes the student's religious identity and skills. Others view the primary value of the Judaic high school experience as convincing the students to go to a gap year program in Israel where students can grow religiously in an immersive Jewish environment. Therefore, Judaic high school teachers often get short shrift.

This study provides strong evidence that Judaic studies teachers play an invaluable role in the lives of their students. The positive relationship students have with their teachers, in and of itself, serves as a bedrock for their students' religious and spiritual life. There are some important implications of this research. First, it serves as a reminder for the Jewish community to continue investing in Jewish high schools. Second, it stresses the importance for the Jewish community to identify potential teachers and invest in their education and training, not just as content providers, but as spiritual role models.

Adolescents are at a stage in life where they are gradually becoming independent from their parents and are seeking new adult role models to help them explore their identity. Judaic studies teachers are in the ideal position to serve as role models, due to the built-in time they spend with the students and the nature of the subject matter. Schools should look to create more opportunities for teachers and students to spend time together in supervised informal settings which will encourage free-flowing conversations outside of the curriculum. Additionally, it is important for schools to prioritize training and hiring teachers that develop positive teacher-student relationships. It is also vital that school administrators understand how to define a positive teacher-student relationship. Common characteristics to look for are teachers that build trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), have prosocial attitudes (Crosnoe, et al., 2010), have a genuine concern for the students (Stronge et al., 2011), want to see their students grow (Dallavis, 2014; Stronge et al., 2011), and "care for" the student, not just "care about" them (Gay, 2010).

CHAPTER VII: LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

This study found that a positive teacher-student relationship significantly predicted the student's religious actions (R^2=.19) and religious beliefs (R^2=.12). While both of these numbers are significant, a positive teacher-student relationship was noticeably more predictive for religious actions than religious beliefs. This may or may not be indicative of a larger trend as both numbers are significant, but future studies could either confirm or deny the relevance of this discrepancy. The theory of observational learning focuses on one's penchant for learning specific actions by watching others (Bandura, 1986), and it is possible that it is easier for students to emulate specific actions from mentors as opposed to beliefs, which are predominantly internal and multi-faceted. It is possible that teaching beliefs require a more conscious focus in which Judaic studies teachers intentionally include more aspects of spirituality and belief in their curriculum.

This study has some limitations. The JewBale 2.0 dataset, like all datasets, has some limitations. While a positive teacher-student relationship is an excellent example of natural mentorship, it is not foolproof. It is possible for students to have a positive teacher-student relationship and not consider their teacher as a mentor. Students may state that they have a broadly positive relationship with Judaic studies teachers without having a close enough relationship for them to fall under the classic definition of a "natural mentor" (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). This may limit how this study can be used to examine the impact of natural mentorship as a whole.

The positive teacher-student relationship may be impactful to some students because it improves the educational experience and makes them more open to religious

instruction (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2014) even though the teachers are not full-fledged

mentors. Conversely, the impact of this limited relationship may encourage researchers to

expand the definition of "natural mentors" to role models who adolescents watch and learn

from at a distance. This would be consistent with the theoretical framework of observational

learning, in which people often learn by watching and mimicking others, even without the

knowledge of the person being observed (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 2004; Bandura, 2008).

Further studies on relationships that lend themselves to observational learning, such as

teachers and coaches, could yield interesting results that help us broaden our understanding

of natural mentoring.

Future studies could give valuable insights by analyzing students in each grade

separately. This study combined the data from all four years of high school. However, there

are many discrepancies between the maturity, intellectual capability, and religious and

spiritual needs of various ages. A secondary analysis could probe the data of various grades

to determine if the impact of a positive teacher-student relationship differs by age. It would

be especially intriguing to examine if younger adolescents are more focused on the spiritual

connection while older adolescents are more focused on religious observance, as previous

research found (Benson et al., 2012b). Determining the effectiveness of teachers as natural

mentors in different grades could help schools tailor programs and place teachers in specific

grades to maximize their impact.

Regarding gender, this study did not find a disparity in the impact of a positive

teacher-student relationship. This differed from previous research on formal mentorship

programs, which research has shown to be more impactful for males (DuBois et al., 2011). I

surmised that females may be more likely to terminate formal mentorship relationships

because they have been imposed on them. This requires further study, as it would mark a

significant distinction between formal and informal mentoring, which could help mentorship

programs create programs more suitable for females. For example, formal mentorship

programs could allow female mentees to choose their mentor or switch mentors more easily, to borrow some of the characteristics of natural mentorship. Studies could be done that contrast the impact of formal mentorship on female adolescents based on the method of pairing the mentor and mentee.

Future Studies could also take into account the gender of the teachers. The JewBale 2.0 dataset focused on the student's overall relationships with teachers, not their relationships with a specific teacher. Therefore, it wasn't possible to ask the students the gender of the teacher they had a positive relationship. A future study could explore which teachers had the best relationship with their students. This could help us understand to what extent the gender of the teacher is significant. This information could also add to the research on mentorship, as there is currently a dearth of studies on the impact of intragender versus intergender mentoring relationships (Bogat & Liang, 2005). Additionally, future studies could explore the impact that a positive relationship with general studies teachers has on the religious growth of their students.

Future studies could also analyze specific aspects of the teacher-student relationship, as opposed to a subscale of questions that describe a positive teacher-student relationship. This study did not analyze each of the six questions found in the subscale individually to see if some of the descriptive aspects of a positive teacher-student relationship are more predictive of religious observance and spiritual connection. For example, the question "My Judaic studies teachers care about me personally" focuses on prosocial behavior from the teacher while the question "I find what I am learning in Judaic studies classes relevant to my life" focuses on the teacher's ability to make the subject matter interesting and relevant. A secondary analysis of each individual question could provide important information on what aspects of a positive teacher-student relationship are most predictive of religious growth and spiritual connection.

Another limitation of this study is geography. The 18 schools that participated in the JewBale 2.0 study are all located in the United States. It is possible that schools in other countries would yield different results which would provide more context to this study. It would help explain if this study is describing a universal understanding of the impact of Judaic studies teachers, or if something about the nature of American Jewish schools leads to teachers being more impactful as spiritual mentors. It is possible that American teachers are more successful at creating positive relationships with students or that American students are more in need of teachers as spiritual mentors. Comparing this research to research from other countries would help answer those questions.

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