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UPWARD SOCIAL COMPARISONS : ANGEL OR DEVIL ?

On the Opposite Effects of Forced and Deliberate Comparisons in the Context of the BFLPE

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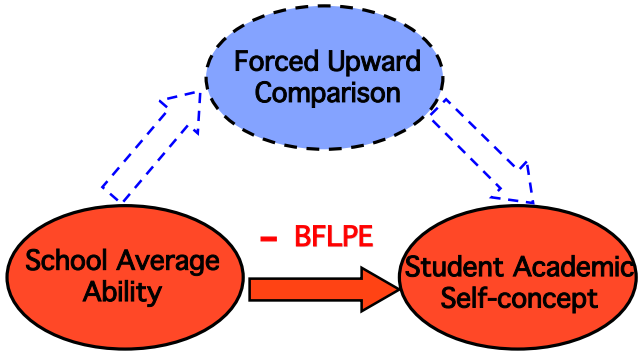

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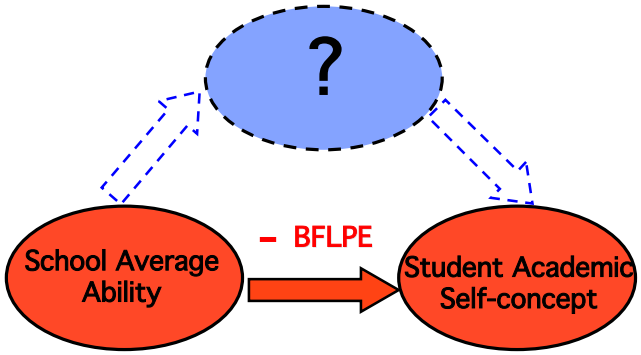

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✓ **Research on BFLPE emphasize only one aspect of social comparison : forced upward comparisons.**

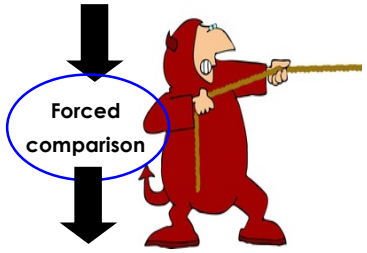
✓ **Students' deliberate comparisons (their comparison *choices*) have been neglected.**

✓ **Most students engage in slightly upward comparison choices, with same-sex others**

✓ **... With a POSITIVE effect on their performance**
(Blanton et al., 1999, JPSP ; Huguet, Dumas, et al., 2001, EJSP).

Upward comparison may have different effects :

Research on the BFLPE
(Marsh & Hau, 2003 ; Marsh, 1991)



Negative effects (contrast)
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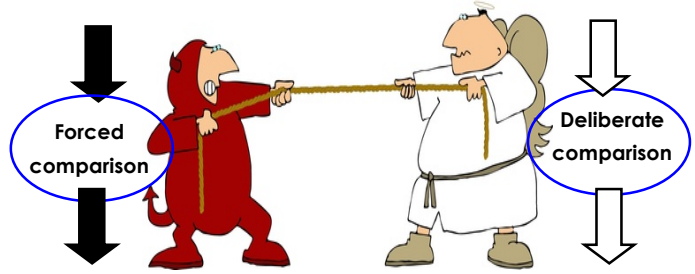

Negative effects (contrast)
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Positive effects
(assimilation) on grades

Do students' comparison choices make a difference in the context of the BFLPE ?

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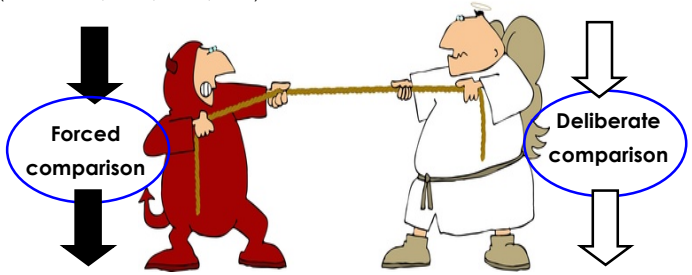

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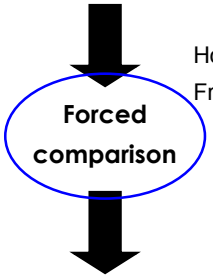
How to measure FORCED COMPARISON in the context of the BFLPE ?



PERCEIVED RELATIVE STANDING IN CLASS :

How much better/worse are you in Math (vs. French) compared to most of your classmates ?

(1 = much better, 3 = the same, 5 = much worse)

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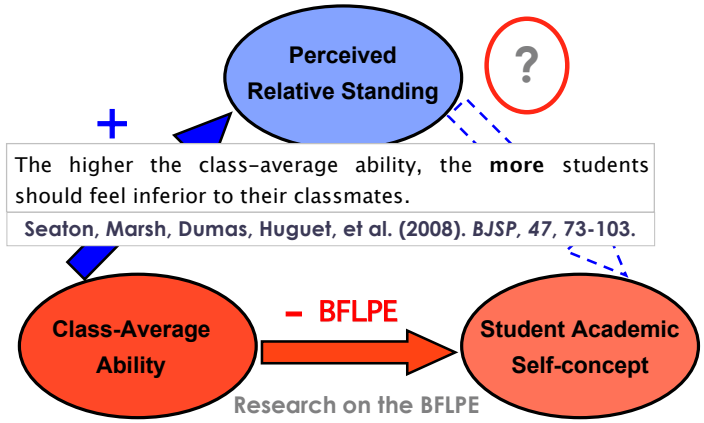

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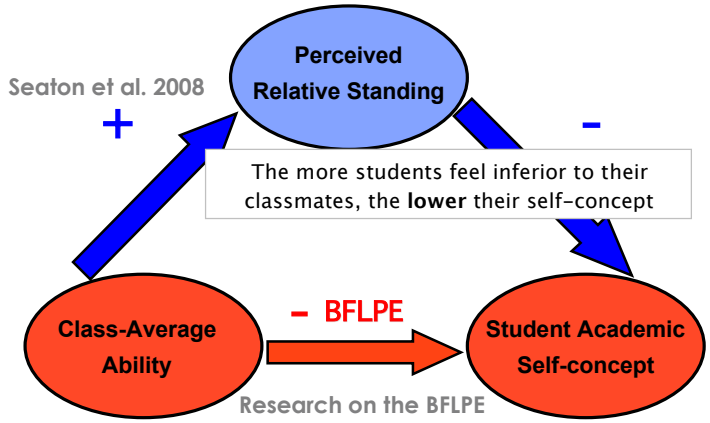

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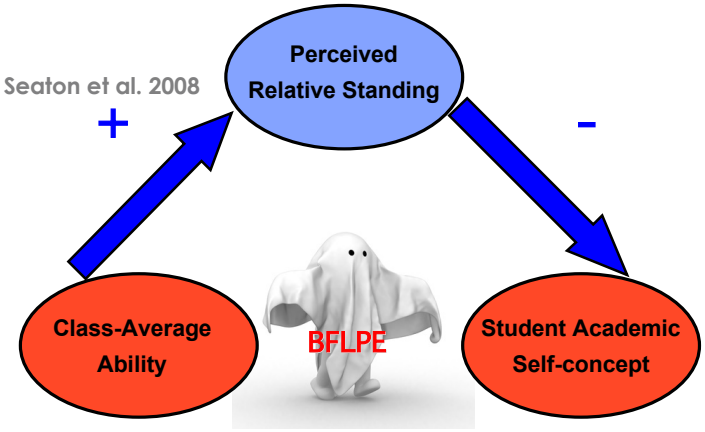
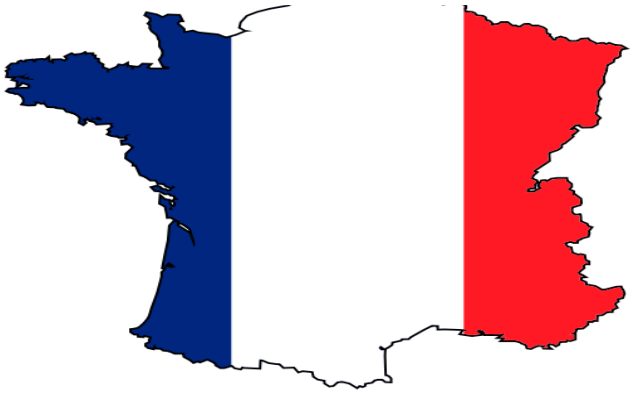


Huguet, Dumas, Marsh, Régner, Wheeler, Suls, Seaton, & Nezlek (2009). *JPSP, 97*, 156-170.

2015 students (989 girls) in Grade 6 (12-14 years old) from **99** **classes** across **16** French public schools.



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- **ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT :** Six-item Math (vs. French) self concept scale
- **PERCEIVED RELATIVE STANDING :** How much better/worse are you in Math (vs. French) compared to most of your classmates ?

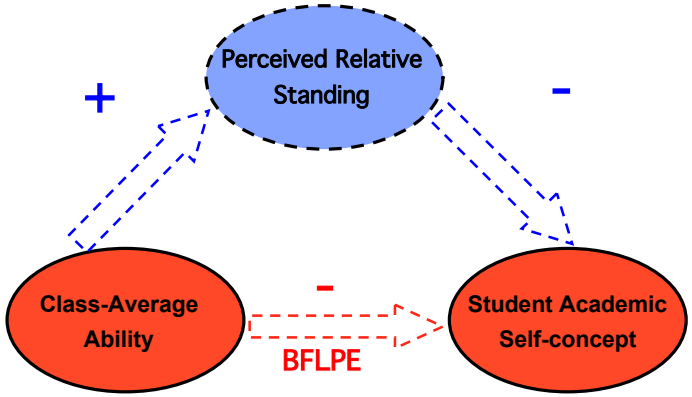
✓ Series of multi-level random coefficients models (HLM 6)

- **STUDENT ABILITY & CLASS AVERAGE ABILITY :**

  Based on national standardized academic achievement tests in Math (vs. French)

MEDIATION in MATH :

How much better/worse are you in **Math** compared to most of your classmates ? (1 = much better, 3 = the same, 5 = much worse)



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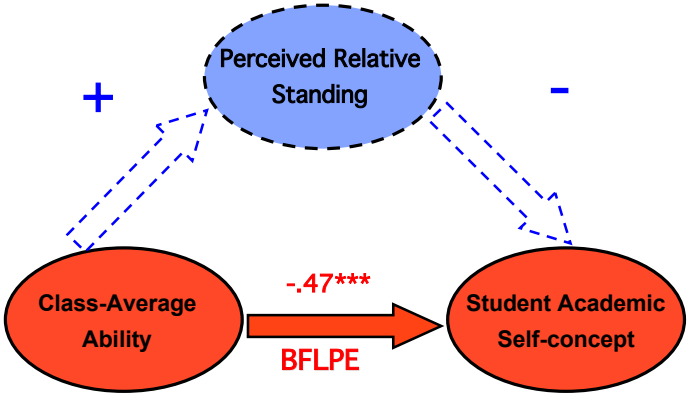

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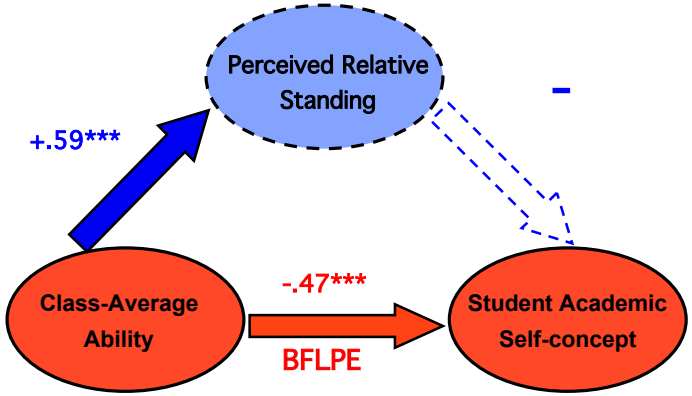

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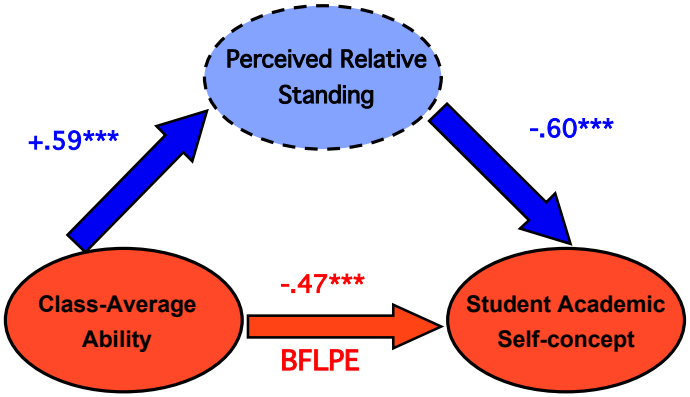

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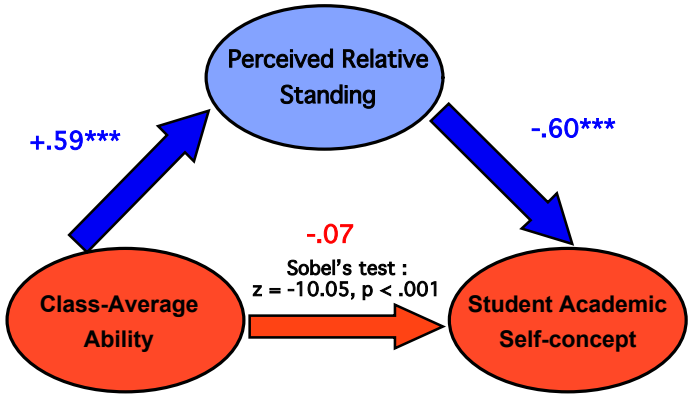
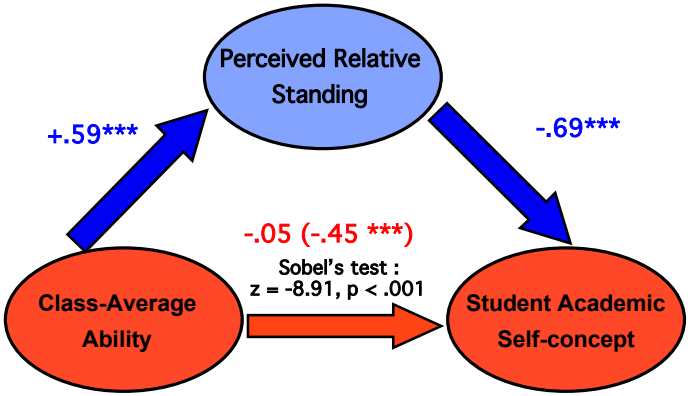


MEDIATION in FRENCH :

How much better/worse are you in **French** compared to most of your classmates ? (1 = much better, 3 = the same, 5 = much worse)



DELIBERATE COMPARISONS (COMPARISON CHOICES)

NOMINATION TASK :

With which student (boy or girl) do you prefer to compare your grades in Math (vs. French) ?

Students could leave this item blank if they did not usually compare their grades.

Comparison-level choice was the 2nd trimester grade in Math (vs. French) of the student nominated (comparison target).

RESULTS ON COMPARISON-LEVEL CHOICE :

As in past research on social comparison choices,

a majority of students (90%) nominated comparison-targets.

Most of them selected **same-sex** classmates who were doing **slightly better** than they themselves in Math or French.

RESULTS : DV = Academic Self-concept (Math vs. French)

	Math		French	
Fixed effect	*B*	*t*	*B*	*t*
Intercept	.02	.43	-.04	1.24
Student Ability	.64***	17.96	.47***	12.83
Class Average Ability				
Comparison-Level Choice				

UPWARD ASSIMILATION ON SELF-CONCEPT ?

Note. *** $p < .001$

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Does comparison choice make a difference for the BFLPE ?

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Intercept	.02	.43	-.04	1.24
Student Ability	.64***	17.96	.47***	12.83
Class Average Ability	**-.51*** **	7.97	**-.49*** **	9.05
*Class Average Ability **without** Comparison-Level Choice*	(-.47 ***)		(-.45 ***)	
Comparison-Level Choice	.11***	4.61	.14***	5.06

Note. *** $p < .001$

This additional finding suggests that the BFLPE is the net effect of **counterbalancing forces** :

Stronger negative contrast effects associated with forced exposure to upward comparison at the class level and **weaker assimilation effects** associated with upward social comparison *choice*.

OUR LAST QUESTION :

What does motivate upward comparison choices ?

2 x 2 Achievement Goal Questionnaire

(12 items ; Elliot & McGregor, JPSP, 2001)

ACHIEVEMENT GOALS :

- PERFORMANCE APPROACH : Attainment of competence relative to others.

  In Math, it is important for you to do well compared to others in your class.

- PERFORMANCE AVOIDANCE : Avoidance of incompetence relative to others.

  In Math, you just want to avoid doing poorly in class.

- MASTERY APPROACH : Development of competence through task mastery.

  In Math (vs. French), you want to learn as much as possible in class.

- MASTERY AVOIDANCE : To avoid doing worse than one has done before.

  In Math, sometimes you are afraid that you may not understand what the teacher explains in class as thoroughly as possible.

It has been suggested before that students engaged in upward comparison choices as a means to **self-improve** (Wood, 1989 ; Blanton et al., 1999 ; Huguet et al., 2001).

If it is correct, then students' comparison-level choice should be associated with a **mastery approach goal**.

Is it ?

RESULTS :

- **DV = Comparison-Level Choice**

	Math		French	
Fixed effect	*B*	*t*	*B*	*t*
Intercept	-.08	2.18	-.09	1.77
Student Ability	.31**	9.06	.37**	10.78
Class Average Ability	.25*	3.38	.11	1.53
Performance App.	.01	0.62	.03	1.22
Performance Av.	-.02	0.76	-.02	0.83
Mastery Approach	**.07***	3.29	**.06***	2.39
Mastery Avoidance	-.01	0.59	-.04	1.48

Note. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

CONCLUSION (1)

The present research offers more **direct evidence** that the way students' compare with their class standard **underlies** the BFLPE.

It is also clear that upward comparison, when it is deliberate, is ***positively*** related to the academic **self-concept.**

So, it seems that upward comparison does **not always** have negative consequences on the self-concept.

CONCLUSION (2)

In addition, the present findings offer first evidence of a **positive relationship** between upward comparison choices and **mastery approach goals**.

Finally, taken together these findings also suggest **not to eliminate social comparison** from the classroom. Deliberate social comparison with slightly better classmates may have a positive effect on the **self-concept** and perhaps **learning**.

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Thank you for your attention !