Teacher Perceptions of Social Behavior in Learning Disabled and Socially Normal Children and Youth

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Several writers have argued that teacher perception of the behavior of students affects the interaction between teacher and student. This study attempted to determine if teachers perceive a difference between learning disabled and socially normal students in terms of interpersonal behavior. A total of 534 subjects between the ages of 8 and 15 classified as either learning disabled (LD) or socially normal (SN) were assessed using the Social Performance Survey Schedule. *Data analysis included the MANOVA and one-way analysis of variance. The MANOVA indicated differences at the .000 level by category between the LD and SN groups on the positive subscale and on the negative subscale. There were also differences at the .000 level by sex on the positive subscale. There was one significant interaction, on the negative subscale, between sex and category at the .01 level. A one-way ANOVA was used as a follow-up on the MANOVA to identify the individual items contributing to the differences found by the MANOVA. On the positive subscale, 42 items were significantly different between LD and SN males, and 33 items were significantly different between LD and SN females. On the negative subscale, 20 items were significantly different between LD and SN males, and 35 items were significantly different between LD and SN females. The results indicated that SN subjects were perceived as having significantly more prosocial behavior and significantly less antisocial behavior than LD subjects. Further, female subjects were perceived as having significantly more prosocial behavior than males. There was no significant difference between males and females in antisocial behavior. Finally, there was one significant interaction. The analysis indicated that there was a highly significant difference perceived between SN and LD females in favor of the SN females. Implications of the findings are discussed.*

Teacher perception of students is an important variable influencing the way teachers respond to students (Brophy & Good, 1970). In the Brophy and Good (1970) study, these researchers found that teacher expectations influenced the number and types of questions asked students, the type of feedback given to student answers to questions, and the number and type of teacher–initiated interactions with students. Similar results have been found by Bryan (1974), who noted that interactions initiated by LD students were more likely to be ignored by a teacher than those initiated by a normal student. It was also found that LD students were twice as likely to receive criticism from a teacher in comparison to normal students. These observed effects are probably due, in part, to teachers' perception of the teachability of their students (Kornblau & Keogh, 1980). As one's perception of a student's behavior shifts toward inappropriateness, it would be expected that the teacher's opinion of the student's teachability will also decline. No doubt this will affect the nature of student/teacher interaction. These same attitudes can also affect the success of mainstreaming efforts (Kornblau & Keogh, 1980). Finally, these teacher perceptions can impact on referrals and placement decisions, as has been shown by Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Richey, and Graden (1982). In fact, Ysseldyke et al. (1982) suggest that opinion about a student may be more influential than objective information.

This study examined the social behavior of learning disabled (LD) and socially normal (SN) children and youth. In particular, the study focused on 100 specific interpersonal social behaviors in the two populations.

The study attempted to answer two questions. One, are there differences in teachers' perceptions of prosocial behavior and antisocial behavior in the LD and SN populations? Two, will the perceptions of social behavior be different for male and female children and youth?

METHOD

Subjects

Learning disabled students were defined in terms of the criteria used by the State of Alabama Department of Education (Teague, Baker, & McLaney, 1980) in classifying students as LD. Socially normal was defined as any student in a regular education program who had not been identified as a special education student, nor referred for possible placement in special education.

Learning disabled subjects were obtained by conducting a survey of directors of special education in all of the school systems in the state of Alabama to determine which systems would be willing to participate in the study. A total of 40 systems agreed to participate. Socially normal subjects were obtained by asking teachers enrolled in courses at the University of South Alabama (Mobile), Mississippi State University (Starkville and Meridian), and teachers in the Huntsville, Alabama, public schools to participate in the study. Participation by these students was voluntary.

Measurement

A modification of the *Social Performance Survey Schedule* (SPSS) developed by Cautela and Lowe[1] was used to assess interpersonal social behavior. The SPSS is a self–report rating scale using nominal/numeric ratings on 100 items of social behavior divided evenly between positive and negative behaviors. The pos-

[1]Cautela, J.R., & Lowe, M.R. *The social performance survey schedule.* Unpublished manuscript, 1976. Available from M.R. Lowe, Psychological Service Center, Department of Psychology, Washington University, St. Louis, MO 63130.

itive and negative items are intermingled to avoid response set. The modifications made in the SPSS included using it as an informant scored rating scale instead of as a self–report scale which required some minor changes in wording, and having each item scored on a five–point (1–5) Likert–type scale with the bipolar extremes represented by the terms "almost always" and "almost never." The decision not to use the SPSS as a self–report scale was based on the report of Futch and Lisman (1977) that they found self–report measures of interpersonal social behaviors to be unrelated to behavioral measures, particularly in males. More recently, Ledingham, Younger, Schwartzman, and Bergeron (1982) studied the relationship between teacher, peer, and self–report ratings of social behavior. Teacher and peer ratings were significantly related while self–ratings were not significantly related to either teacher or peer ratings. Further, self–ratings were shown to be influenced by social desirability bias and to provide the lowest estimate of deviance. The use of rating scales as measures of behavior has been criticized for being too sensitive to various sources of bias (Sulzbacher, 1973; Sroufe, 1973). However, Siegel, Dragovich, and Marholin (1976) demonstrated that a rating scale employing specific items of behavior, e.g., hitting, as opposed to ratings on more general or global traits, e.g., hostility, was quite resistant to biasing influences. Finally, use of the SPSS as a rating scale rather than as a self–report instrument allowed data to be collected without direct involvement of the subjects. Since the subjects were not directly involved and were not identified anyway, the necessity of having to obtain permission to test the subjects was avoided. Had the subjects been directly involved and permission to test required, it would have been virtually impossible to collect the data.

The SPSS is based on a definition of social skill used by Libet and Lewinsohn (1973). This definition broadly defines social skills as consisting of the emission of behaviors that are potentially reinforcing to others and likely to result in positive reinforcement and of the absence of behaviors that are potentially punitive to others and likely to result in punishment. The construction of the SPSS followed a procedure which began with general traits and ended with specific behaviors. Lowe and Cautela (1978) report that they developed the items for the SPSS by asking college students to list all the social traits that they used descriptively. After eliminating redundant items, the traits were defined by listing the behaviors associated with each trait. From this list of behaviors were selected those judged to be the most common and/or important. These selected items were then used to make up the 100 items on the SPSS.

When used as a self–report instrument, Lowe and Cautela (1978) report that the SPSS had an internal consistency of .94 and test–retest reliability (over four weeks) of .87 overall, with .88 and .85 for the positive and negative scales, respectively. Validity was established by correlating scores on the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale with the SPSS. Significant negative correlations were obtained between the two scales. The overall correlation was −.42 with −.39 and −.27 for the positive and negative scales, respectively. These negative correlations demonstrated an inverse relationship between social anxiety and social skill and were in the predicted direction.

Recently, Miller and Funabiki (1983) attempted to establish the predictive validity of the SPSS by selecting high and low socially competent college students on the basis of the scale's positive and negative scores. They then assessed their social behaviors in a simulated interpersonal setting. The results yielded strong support for the predictive validity of the SPSS in differentiating high socially competent and low socially competent subjects on both observed behaviors as well as global ratings and self–report measures.

New reliability data were obtained on the modified SPSS as a part of this study. A coefficient of equivalence (Cronbach, 1960) was computed using randomly formed half–tests. The split–half reliability was .91. Test–retest reliability using a four–week interval was .89 overall with .89 and .86 for the positive and negative scales, respectively. Both the original reliability data and the reliability data obtained as part of this study indicate that the SPSS has good internal consistency and stability over time.

New validity data were obtained on the modified SPSS as part of this study. A criterion–related validity study was done using the Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay & Peterson, 1967). Correlations among the SPSS scales and the subscales of the criterion test were computed using 29 subjects who were rated on both the SPSS and the BPC. The correlations between the positive, negative, and total SPSS scores and the conduct disorder, personality problem, inadequacy/immaturity and total BPC scores ranged from $r = .29$ ($p < .06$) to $r = .78$ ($p < .000$). The correlation for the total scores on the two instruments was $r = .72$ ($p < .000$). Guilford (1956) has argued that correlations of .30 or greater are acceptable. All of the correlations except one meet or exceed this value. The one that fails comes very close. Thus, the results support a finding of acceptable criterion–related validity for the SPSS.

Procedures

The data on learning disabled subjects were obtained by mailing copies of the SPSS to the director of special education in each of the school systems that had agreed to participate in the study. The special education directors distributed the SPSS to their special education teachers with instructions to complete an SPSS on each student served according to the directions provided on the cover page of the SPSS. The special education teachers were instructed to rate only students they had known for at least 60 days. They were also instructed to try to recall, for each item, a particular situation or situations in which the student demonstrated the behavior or should have demonstrated it. The special education directors collected the completed SPSS forms and returned them.

The data on socially normal subjects were then obtained by asking teachers enrolled in courses at the University of South Alabama, Mississippi State University, and teachers in the Huntsville, Alabama Public Schools to complete the SPSS on one of their students who met the definition of socially normal. The teachers were given other criteria as well concerning sex, race, etc. These additional criteria were used in order to insure that the SN group had a composition similar to that of the LD group. The

same instructions on completing the SPSS described earlier were used with these teachers also. The teachers were asked to select their students at random from those who met the criteria given. There was, however, no way to determine if this, in fact, was done.

RESULTS

All of the statistical analysis in this study was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975). All data on positive items from the SPSS were inverted prior to statistical analysis. This was done so that the scoring would be comparable between the positive and negative items, i.e., the lower the score, the better for both types of items.

The first statistical analysis performed on the data was a 2 by 2 by 2 MANOVA to determine if there were any significant differences on the two levels of each of the two independent variables and the two levels of the dependent variable. The MANOVA yielded a significant interaction ($p < .01$) between sex and category on the negative subscale. The effect by sex was significant ($p < .000$) for the positive subscale. The effect by category was significant ($p < .000$) on both the positive and negative subscales.

Table 2
An array providing the items on which a significant difference was found for females and the significance level of the difference. Positive items are indicated by an asterisk (*). The items themselves are provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Female

1		26	.0013	51*	.0068	76	.0132
2	.0064	27*	.0073	52		77	.0472
3	.0000	28		53	.0112	78*	.0015
4*	.0024	29	.0008	54		79*	.0004
5		30		55*	.0040	80	.0050
6		31	.0006	56		81*	.0041
7		32	.0001	57*	.0083	82	
8*	.0138	33		58		83	.0053
9	.0005	34*	.0491	59		84*	.0068
10	.0005	35		60*	.0019	85	.0000
11	.0010	36*	.0013	61*	.0013	86*	.0163
12		37	.0016	62		87	.0001
13	.0109	38*	.0002	63*	.0219	88	
14*	.0051	39*	.0064	64		89*	.0070
15		40*	.0028	65		90	.0000
16	.0010	41	.0087	66		91*	.0001
17*	.0124	42*	.0070	67		92	.0010
18	.0064	43		68*	.0060	93	
19*	.0230	44	.0052	69	.0023	94	.0012
20		45		70	.0224	95*	.0080
21		46	.0002	71*	.0002	96	
22		47	.0020	72	.0041	97	
23	.0034	48	.0333	73		98*	.0001
24*	.0257	49*	.0010	74	.0153	99*	.0000
25*	.0093	50	.0246	75		100	.0000

Table 1
An array providing the items on which a significant difference was found for males and the significance level of the difference. Positive items are indicated by an asterisk (*). The items themselves are provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Male

1*	.0001	26	.0032	51*	.0015	76	
2		27*	.0000	52		77	
3	.0138	28		53	.0015	78*	.0009
4*	.0000	29	.0002	54*	.0000	79*	.0000
5		30		55*	.0000	80	
6		31	.0115	56		81*	.0003
7*	.0000	32	.0067	57*	.0001	82	
8*	.0027	33*	.0000	58		83	
9	.0000	34*	.0000	59		84*	.0008
10	.0208	35		60*	.0000	85	.0003
11	.0109	36*	.0004	61*	.0000	86*	.0013
12*	.0000	37	.0036	62		87	
13	.0380	38		63		88*	.0344
14*	.0015	39*	.0002	64		89*	.0000
15		40*	.0000	65*	.0039	90	
16		41		66	.0010	91*	.0000
17*	.0001	42		67*	.0010	92	
18		43		68*	.0003	93*	.0001
19*	.0101	44		69		94	
20		45*	.0040	70	.0323	95*	.0001
21*	.0066	46	.0002	71*	.0004	96	
22*	.0208	47		72		97	.0064
23	.0359	48	.0037	73		98*	.0000
24		49*	.0000	74		99*	.0000
25*	.0000	50	.0090	75*	.0153	100	.0157

The mean scores for the positive subscale for males were 149.4 (LD) and 131.7 (SN). For females, the means were 140.2 (LD) and 120.5 (SN). On the negative subscale, the means for males were 126.2 (LD) and 118.6 (SN). The means for females were 131.2 (LD) and 106.7 (SN). The mean total scores for males on the positive subscale were 275.6 (LD) and 250.3 (SN). For females, the means were 271.4 (LD) and 227.3 (SN). The MANOVA was followed by a one way ANOVA by item to identify the individual social behavior variables contributing to the differences found by the MANOVA. This analysis was done by sex and category for both the positive and negative subscales. Table 1 summarizes the results for males and Table 2 for females. The positive and negative items are provided in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. As can be seen in the tables, LD males differed from SN males on 42 of the positive items and on 20 of the negative items. LD females differed from SN females on 33 positive items and 35 negative items.

Table 3
Positive Items on the *Social Performance Survey Schedule*

1. The student has eye contact when speaking.
4. The student shows enthusiasm for others' good fortunes.
5. The student keeps secrets or confidential information to him/herself.
7. The student initiates contact and conversation with others.
8. The student shares what s/he has with others.
12. The student makes other people laugh (with jokes, funny stories, etc.).
14. The student tries to work out problems with others by talking to them.
17. The student shows appreciation when someone does something for him/her.
19. The student demonstrates concern for others' rights.
21. The student reveals personal information and feelings to those with whom s/he is close.
22. The student talks readily to people s/he hasn't met before.
24. The student is able to accept other people despite their faults.
25. The student smiles when s/he first sees someone s/he knows.
27. The student is able to make people who are anxious or upset feel better by talking to them.
30. The student, when facing conflict with others, knows what to do or say to avoid offending them.
33. The student asks others how they've been, what they've been up to, etc.
34. The student laughs at other people's jokes and funny stories.
36. The student listens when spoken to.
38. The student keeps the significance of his/her accomplishments in perspective.
39. The student remembers and discusses topics previously discussed with others.
40. The student shows interest in what another is saying (e.g., with appropriate facial movements, comments, and questions).
42. The student knows when to leave people alone.
45. The student directs conversation with other people toward topics the other person is interested in.
49. The student shows appreciation when people seek him/her out.
51. The student asks questions when talking with others.
52. The student admits to mistakes or errors s/he makes.
54. The student gives positive feedback to others.
55. The student considers the opinions given by others.
57. The student does things others like to do.
60. The student is able to recognize when people are troubled.
61. The student keeps in touch with friends.
63. The student apologizes when s/he wrongs someone.
65. The student finds something to be optimistic about in hard times.
67. The student shows a willingness to compromise to resolve conflicts.
68. The student compliments others on their clothes, hairstyle, etc.
71. The student tries to help others find solutions to problems they face.
75. The student stands up for his/her rights.
78. The student has eye contact when listening.
79. The student stands up for his/her friends.
81. The student expresses concern to others about their misfortunes.
84. The student shares responsibility equally with the members of groups s/he belongs to.
86. The student takes care of others' property as if it were his/her own.
88. The student asks if s/he can be of help.
89. The student gets to know people in depth.
91. The student discusses a variety of topics with others.
93. The student reevaluates his/her position when s/he receives new information.
95. The student considers the effects of his/her statements and actions on others' feelings.
96. The student mentions people's names when talking to them.
98. The student keeps commitments s/he makes.
99. The student talks about interesting topics.

DISCUSSION

The first question asked in this study was: Are there differences in teachers' perceptions of social behavior in LD and SN populations? The answer to this question as indicated by the results of this study appear to be yes. The results of the MANOVA found highly significant differences between the two groups on the social behavior variables used for this study.

The second question in this study was: Will the social behavior perceived to be different vary by sex? The results of this study indicate that perceived social behavior does vary by sex between the LD and SN populations.

The effect found for category indicated that significant differences exist for both the positive and negative subscales by category ($p < .000$). This difference is reflected in the mean scores which indicate that SN subjects scored lower (better) than LD subjects in all combinations of scale with sex by category. The effect by sex found a significant difference for the positive subscale only ($p < .000$). This difference is reflected in the mean scores on the positive subscale which indicate lower (better) scores for female subjects in both the LD and SN groups. On the negative subscale, the SN females had lower (better) scores than males, while the LD females had higher (worse) scores than males. Thus, the differences by sex, for all practical purposes, canceled one another out, which was probably why the effect by sex on the negative subscale failed to reach significance. The interaction effect found for sex by category on the negative scale only ($p < .01$) is reflected in the mean scores for LD and SN subjects by sex on this subscale. While SN subjects scored lower (better) than LD subjects for either sex, the most noteworthy differences are the lower scores for males on the negative subscale in the LD category relative to females in the LD category, and the much higher (worse) score for LD females relative to SN females. This latter finding probably accounts for the significant interaction of sex and category on the negative subscale.

This latter finding represents the only result that differs from expectations. What, in effect, this finding appears to be saying is that teachers perceive negative or antisocial behaviors to be equally bad for LD males and females or, perhaps, worse in LD females than in LD males. This is further supported by the total number of negative items found to differ significantly by sex, i.e., 20 items (males) versus 35 items (females).

This finding cannot be explained empirically. However, two possible explanations can be suggested. It may be that the severity of teachers' ratings is influenced by their differential expectations for males and females. If the teachers' culturally based expectations about levels of antisocial behaviors are lower for males than for females, it may be that their tolerance for these behaviors in females is not as great as it is for males. Thus, violations

Table 4
Negative Items on the *Social Performance Survey Schedule*

2. The student reacts with more anger than a situation calls for.
3. The student seeks others out too often.
6. The student is aggressive when s/he takes issue with someone.
9. The student puts him/herself down.
10. The student takes advantage of others.
11. The student is pessimistic.
13. The student interrupts others.
15. The student gives the impression that s/he is an expert on everything.
16. The student seems impatient for others to finish their remarks.
18. The student says little in conversations s/he has.
20. The student talks negatively about others when they are not present.
23. The student insults others.
26. The student threatens others verbally or physically.
28. The student makes others feel s/he is competing with them.
29. The student rejects or criticizes other people before knowing much about them.
31. The student hurts other people while striving to reach his/her goals.
32. The student talks repeatedly about his/her problems and worries.
35. The student gets into arguments.
37. The student is a sore loser.
41. The student gives unsolicited advice.
43. The student directs rather than requests people to do something.
44. The student makes embarrassing comments.
46. The student stays with others too long (overstays his/her welcome).
47. The student makes fun of others.
48. The student takes or uses things that aren't his/hers without permission.
50. The student blames others for his/her problems.
53. The student hurts others when teasing them.
56. The student speaks in a monotone.
58. The student dominates conversations s/he has.
59. The student is sarcastic.
62. The student tells people what s/he thinks they want to hear.
64. The student refuses to change his/her opinions or beliefs.
66. The student criticizes people when s/he talks to them.
69. The student complains.
70. The student perceives insults or criticism when none were intended.
72. The student reacts to injustices with a desire for revenge.
73. The student makes facial gestures (e.g., shaking his/her head) or sounds (e.g., sighs) which indicate disapproval of others.
74. The student easily becomes angry.
76. The student tries to manipulate others to do what s/he wants.
77. The student allows others to do things for him/her without reciprocating in some way.
80. The student acts like s/he's superior to other people.
82. The student does not reveal his/her feelings.
83. The student focuses conversation on his/her accomplishments and abilities.
85. The student seems bored when interacting with others.
87. The student gloats when s/he wins.
90. The student talks too much about him/herself.
92. The student explains things in too much detail.
94. The student makes sounds (e.g., burping, sniffling) that disturb others.
97. The student criticizes behaviors or practices of other people which s/he engages in him/herself.
100. The student deceives others for personal gain.

of these expectations by females may be viewed as more serious and judged more harshly. Further, these expectations may also have influenced the greater number of negative behaviors rated harshly by the teachers. That is, a level of antisocial behavior that would not be a violation of expectations for males would be perceived as a violation in females. Therefore, teachers appear to be more disposed to view antisocial behavior in females as deviant and to judge that behavior more severely, particularly if the female has already been labeled as deviant, i.e., LD. If this explanation is correct, there may not be any *actual* difference in behavior, or the *actual* behavior of females may be less negative than the behavior of males, but teachers are quicker to judge and to be more harsh in their judgement of antisocial behavior in females. Evidence that this harsher judgement of females for behavior deviating from expectations can be found in data provided by Arnold and Brungardt (1983). These writers report that females, on the whole, are dealt with more harshly by juvenile courts than are males.

Further evidence that may lend support to the above hypothesis can be found in data concerning juvenile delinquency. There is one indication that the level of antisocial behavior among females is increasing. Clarizio and McCoy (1983) report that female arrests for delinquency during the period 1968–1977 were up 38%, which was more than three times the increase for males. During this same period, the arrests for sexual misbehavior (a traditional female violation) in females decreased by 60%. These writers suggest that these figures are, at least, partially attributable to changing social roles for females in our society. This changing sex role allows for greater assertiveness and independence in females.

While no data was collected concerning teacher age in this study, it is very likely that many, if not most, of the teachers rating students were old enough to have been socialized, concerning appropriate female behavior, prior to the social changes in our culture which appear to be producing changes in female behavior toward greater assertiveness and perhaps also aggressiveness. This would, probably, also be true of juvenile court judges who appear to be harsher in their judgement of female behavioral deviance.

Another possible explanation is that the level of antisocial behavior in LD females may actually be the same or worse than in LD males. Why this might be is difficult to explain. However, one possibility might be that there is a greater bias, for misclassification, toward females than males. That is, in many cases, females who should probably be classified as emotionally disturbed are classified as learning disabled due to the greater acceptability of the LD label. This possibility has been recognized by others (Chalfant, 1985) concerned with the increasing placement of students in LD programs, although not specifically in regard to females. If this placement bias exists, this study would suggest that it may be more operative for females than males. There also exists the possibility for this hypothesized misclassification bias to be influ-

enced by sex–related cultural influences such as protectiveness, i.e., hesitancy about placing an ED female in a category that is predominantly male and noted for a high level of aggressive behavior.

This study indicates that teachers perceive differences in social behavior between LD and SN students in favor of SN students for both positive and negative behavior. They also perceive differences in males and females for both LD and SN students. The differences are in favor of LD and SN female students for positive behavior and in favor of only SN female students for negative behavior. These perceptions, regardless of whether or not they are real or based on culturally biased expectations, could affect student/teacher interactions (Brophy & Good, 1970), referrals, and programming decisions. In this last regard, it would appear that teachers would see the major programming emphasis needed relative to social behavior to be the development of social skills in LD students of both sexes. They would also appear to see a need for interventions to reduce negative social behavior in females but not necessarily in males.

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