

# Perceptions of 6-12 Teachers' Roles in Schoolmate Conflicts

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## Purpose

- Initiatives to decrease student conflicts, increase respect are on the rise (e.g., Bierman, 2004; Killen & Rutland, 2011)
- Largely ignored factor for success or failure is fairness of supervisory staff
- We examined perceived teacher fairness and likely reasons for bias in their knowledge and actions in addressing schoolmate conflicts in grades 6-12

## Methodology

- Participants: 126 college students (50 M, 76 F, mean age 19.51 yrs., mostly white, middle class) at public, upper Midwestern universities; most had attended public middle and high schools of varied size and geography
- Materials: self-developed survey of perceived (a) extent & effectiveness of social development programs and (b) fairness of teachers in addressing conflicts; 7-pt. scales, 1=low; 7=high
- Procedure: survey link voluntarily accessed from psychology department's online recruitment vehicle (Qualtrics) as option for meeting research requirement in General Psychology course
- Data Analysis: descriptive statistics were calculated for this exploratory investigation

## Results: Grades 6-8

- 79% (n=99) had social development programs  
-mean extensiveness: 4.47 (SD 1.74)  
-mean effectiveness: 4.53 (SD 1.561)

- 30% (n=38) involved in social conflict  
- 26% (n=13) of males, 33% (n=25) of females
- 55% (n=21) reported teachers most often or always fair in supervision

## Students' roles in one or more conflicts: wrongdoers (wd) and targets (tg) 6-8

- 38% (n=5) males were wrongdoers
- 38% (n=5) males were targets
- 32% (n=6) females were wrongdoers
- 68% (n=17) females were targets

## Teacher knowledge of conflicts -- "Why no teachers knew about it" likely reasons ratings: means and SDs 6-8

Mean	SD	Reason
4.82	1.753	well hidden by wd
4.71	1.999	unreported to teachers
3.89	1.914	didn't want to know
3.86	1.974	lacked evidence
3.74	2.114	didn't believe it

## Perceived intentionally unfair teacher action in response to schoolmate social conflicts (observed and/or experienced) 6-8

Yes: 38% (n=48)  
-34% of males (n=17)  
-41% of females (n=31)

## Teacher acted unfairly due to wrongdoer favoritism: likelihood of reason means and SDs 6-8

Mean	SD	Reason
4.96	1.719	wd was sports athlete
4.31	1.417	tchr liked wd
4.31	1.371	wd rep as well behaved
4.28	1.570	wd earned high grades
3.87	1.752	wd highly popular
3.66	1.619	tchr/wd family friends
3.58	1.661	wd child of scl employee
3.57	1.741	wd's gender
3.53	1.558	wd's parents' high status
3.42	1.541	wd's parent scl bd mbr

## Results: Grades 6-8 (continued)

3.33	1.492	wd fam relation to tchr
3.23	1.645	wd's extracurricular active
3.17	1.494	wd's parnt emp sd office
3.17	1.685	wd had cog disability
3.02	1.635	wd physically attractive
2.85	1.642	wd had physical disablt
2.68	1.603	wd's race/ethnicity
2.53	1.195	wd had low popularity
2.51	1.381	wd younger than target
2.40	1.346	wd smaller than target
2.22	1.134	wd physically unattractiv
2.13	1.258	wd's religious affiliation

## Teacher acted unfairly due to target disfavor: likelihood of reason means and SDs 6-8

Mean	SD	Reason
4.31	1.665	tg reput as troublemaker
3.88	1.746	tg sib reput as troublemakr
3.65	1.609	teacher disliked target
3.54	1.650	tg had low grades
3.17	1.872	tg's gender
3.15	1.487	bad relnshp w/tg's family
3.12	1.758	tchr knew wd but not tg
3.02	1.480	tg's family low status
2.76	1.433	tg athlete & tchr resented
2.65	1.296	tg high pop & tchr resntd
2.62	1.606	tg's involmt in extracurric.
2.56	1.382	tg had low popularity
2.56	1.413	tchr bad prof. rel w tg's fm
2.52	1.220	tg's prnts hi stat & tchr res
2.44	1.413	tg physically unattractive
2.35	1.422	tg hi grades & tchr resntd
2.29	1.501	tg had cognitive disability
2.27	1.364	tg's prcvd sexual orientn
2.27	1.581	tg's race/ethnicity
2.23	1.220	tg physically attr & tchr res
2.19	1.313	tg younger than wd
2.19	1.262	tg smaller than wd
2.17	1.356	tg had physical disability
2.12	1.347	tg's religious affiliation

## Results: Grades 9-12

- 68% (n=78; 11 missing) had social development programs  
-mean extensiveness: 4.63 (SD 2.008)  
-mean effectiveness: 4.46 (SD 1.871)
- 23% (n=29) involved in social conflict  
- 28% (n=14) of males, 20% (n=15) of females  
- 66% (n=19) reported teachers most often or always fair in supervision

## Students' roles in one or more conflicts: wrongdoers (wd) and targets (tg) 9-12

- - 64% (n=9) males were wrongdoers
- - 64% (n=9) males were targets
- - 20% (n=3) females were wrongdoers
- - 74% (n=11) females were targets

## Teacher knowledge of conflicts-- "Why no teachers knew about it" likelihood reasons ratings: means and SDs 9-12

Mean	SD	Reason
4.38	1.72	well hidden by wd
4.34	2.023	unreported to teachers
3.86	1.827	lacked evidence
3.66	1.838	didn't want to know
3.21	1.612	didn't believe it

## "Teachers knew, responded by" likely action ratings: means and SDs 9-12

Mean	SD	Reason
4.48	1.805	reported it to admin
4.28	1.645	successfully addressed
4.03	1.936	chose to do nothing
3.72	1.556	attempted to help but unfair
3.66	1.610	offered help, tg refused
3.41	1.659	naively blamed tg
3.00	1.793	purposely blamed tg

## Perceived intentionally unfair teacher action in response to personally experienced schoolmate social conflicts 9-12\*

Yes: 41% (n=12)  
- 43% of males (n=6)  
- 40% of females (n=6)

\*does not include observed conflicts

## Results: Grades 9-12 (continued)

### Teachers acted unfairly due to wrongdoer favoritism: likelihood of reason means and SDs 9-12

Mean	SD	Reason
4.75	1.712	wd was sports athlete
4.25	1.288	wd child of scl employee
4.17	1.586	teacher liked wd
4.17	1.586	wd rep as well behaved
4.09	1.300	wd's parent scl bd mbr
4.98	1.621	wd highly popular
3.92	1.505	tchr/wd family friends
3.75	1.422	wd's parents high status
3.75	1.545	wd earned high grades
3.67	1.826	wd's gender
3.58	1.379	wd's parnt emp sd office
3.25	1.485	wd's extracurricular active
3.17	1.267	wd had cog disability
3.08	1.564	wd fam relation to tchr
3.00	1.044	wd had physical disability2.92
2.92	1.240	wd had low popularity
2.92	1.782	wd physically unattractive
2.83	1.267	wd younger than target
2.45	1.128	wd smaller than target
2.45	1.635	wd's race, ethnicity
2.42	1.379	wd's religious affiliation
2.33	1.231	wd physically unattractive

### Teacher acted unfairly due to target disfavor: likelihood of reason means and SDs 9-12

Mean	SD	Reason
3.61	1.449	tg reput as troublemaker
3.41	1.803	tg's family low status
3.34	1.471	tg sib rep as troublemkr
3.28	1.771	tchr knew wd but not tg
3.25	1.456	tg had low grades
3.22	1.502	tchr bad pers rl w tg's fm
3.10	1.235	teacher disliked target
3.00	1.581	tchr bad pro rel w tg fm
2.72	1.279	tg high pop & tch resntd
2.62	1.522	tg's involmt in extracurric
2.62	1.613	tg athlete & tchr resented
2.61	1.343	tg's gender
2.52	1.153	tg had low popularity
2.48	1.379	tg hi grades & tchr resntd
2.41	1.376	tg's prnts hi stat & tr rsntd
2.36	1.283	tg's prcvd sexual orientn
2.34	1.261	tg physically attr & tchr res
2.18	1.517	tg had cognitive disability
2.17	1.167	tg was physically unattrtrve
2.17	1.284	tg younger than wd
2.17	1.391	tg's race/ethnicity
2.14	1.217	tg smaller than wd
2.03	1.349	tg had physical disability
1.90	1.145	tg's religious affiliation

## Discussion

- Social development programs were widely implemented in grades 6-12, school wide and in the classroom
- Both anti-bullying and respect were emphasized
- Programs were perceived as moderately extensive and effective
- The majority of teachers were perceived as fair in their schoolmate social conflict intervention
- Areas of concern with respect to favoritism toward specific groups of students and disfavor toward other groups were identified
- Training and accountability for fairness by all teachers are both warranted, in order to maximize the effectiveness of social development programs in reducing bullying and increasing respect among students

## References

Bierman, K.L. (2004). *Peer Rejection: Developmental processes and intervention strategies*. New York: The Guilford Press.  
Killen, M. & Rutland, A. (2011). *Children and Social Exclusion: Morality, prejudice, and group identity*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.  
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