

AFFECT OF PARENTAL REJECTION ON NEGATIVE ATTENTION-SEEKING CLASS ROOM BEHAVIORS

PETER O. PERETTI¹

DENISE CLARK¹

PAT JOHNSON¹

SUMMARY

Of concern to teachers are students displaying classroom behaviors which are disruptive in attaining pupil success in learning and teacher success in teaching. The present study was conducted to determine the effect of parental rejection on negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors. It was also conducted to find out what particular parent might be more rejecting toward the respondents, and, what specific negative attention-seeking behaviors might be overtly demonstrated in the classroom by sex of subject. Results indicated a significant influence of parental rejection on negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors, the father as a more rejecting parent, and differences in observed behaviors by sex of subject.

Psychologically, it is significantly important that the child feel loved, wanted, and accepted by his parents, as they are his main source of security. Parental rejection fosters a distorted and devaluated self-concept and self-image for the youngster. He may feel helpless, inferior, and insecure in his relations inside as well as outside the home (Anthony, 1970; Biller & Davids, 1973), as well as anxious and fearful (Kessen & Mandley, 1967; Siegelman, 1965).

The rejected child discovers that his interests and desires tend to be ignored and/or considered unimportant. Insofar as he endeavors to assert himself, he encounters arbitrary denials, coercion, and even physical punishment (Baldwin, *et al.*, 1945; Baldwin, 1967; Bossard and Boll, 1966).

Schulman *et al.*, (1962) found parents of children with conduct problems tended to be significantly more hostile and rejecting toward their children than were parents of children whose behaviour followed more normal patterns. Maternal rejection especially tended to increase the frequency of conduct and other negative problems (Seilburn and Orr, 1966, Rosenberg, 1963). Such parents offer the child

harsh, aggressive role models with whom he may well attempt to avoid contact. As one of the consequences, the child exhibits little overt aggressiveness in the home toward the threatening parents, but might displace it to others, such as classmates and teachers, outside the home where he is less fearful of retaliation (Peretti, 1980b).

Parentally rejected children feel neglected, isolated, and alone. They frequently attempt to gain acceptance and positive social relationships through a variety of attention-seeking behaviors. They will often go to extreme lengths to achieve these aims (Conway, 1966; Coopersmith, 1976; Mussen *et al.*, 1963).

Attention-seeking behaviors may be either positive or negative depending on motivational aspects and the nature of the desired goals (Gerwitz, 1956). Within a classroom setting, children might fight, kick, bite, or display other overt aggressive, and/or destructive attention-seeking behaviors which are disruptive in attaining pupil success in learning and teacher success in teaching (Dercon, 1962; Peretti, 1975; Peretti, 1980a). Teacher awareness of aetiological bases of such behaviors can lead to more approaches in resolving

¹Kennedy King College, 6300 South Wentworth Avenue, Chicago, Illinois-60621.

related problems and to more constructive ways of coping with them.

The present study was conducted to determine the affect of parental rejection on negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors. It was also conducted to find out what particular parent might be more rejecting toward the respondents, and, what specific negative attention-seeking behaviors might be overtly demonstrated in the classroom by sex of subject.

METHOD

Subjects : One-hundred twenty-three third-grade students attending the Dulles Elementary and Banneker Elementary Schools, Chicago, Illinois were used as subjects. These were composed of fifty-four males and sixty-nine females. By using the technique of stratified sampling, based on teacher evaluations, thirty males and thirty females most frequently observed as demonstrating negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors, were selected for the study.

Materials : A forced-choice questionnaire containing fifty questions which could be answered either "yes" or "no" was constructed of items dealing with parental rejection. When the item checked was "yes" or positive, the subjects were asked to check the space provided in the form for the most frequently rejecting parent for each such selection. The subjects did not have to respond to any question which was irrelevant to their relations with their parents.

An interview guide was used for the teachers to determine not only the frequency of negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors, but, the similarities and/or differences of their overt expression by sex of subject. The guide was also used in order that the teachers might determine what specific behaviors might be ranked and deemed as the most serious, troublesome, and negative to them in the classroom.

PROCEDURE

Each subject was given a questionnaire to complete in the classroom. Respondents did not have to write down their names, but, they did have to denote their sex. Each person was urged to respond either positively or negatively to those questions concerning parental rejection which were pertinent to him. No time limit was given for the completion of the instrument.

There were five teachers involved in evaluating the thirty males and thirty females most frequently demonstrating negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors. These teachers were individually interviewed to determine which particular behaviors were thought to be most disruptive in the classroom. They were also asked the relative frequency of occurrence of each phenomenon by sex of subject. Probe questions were used to attempt to get a better data bank of those attention-seeking behaviors that make classroom management difficult.

RESULTS

Table I indicates that there is a strong relationship ($\chi^2=234.54$, *d.f.*=1, $p<.001$) between parental rejection and subjects most frequently observed as demonstrating negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors. It also shows that males tend to receive more frequent parental rejection (1088 positive responses) as do the female subjects (540).

TABLE I

Parental Rejection	Subjects (N=60)	
	Males (N=30)	Females (N=30)
Positive	1088	540
Negative	160	384

$\chi^2=234.54$, *d.f.*=1, $p<.001$

The father was found to be the more rejecting parent toward the subjects regardless of sex of subject as indicated in Table 2. There was no significant difference ($\chi^2=1.01$, d.f.=1, $p>.05$) between the male and female subjects responses.

TABLE 2

Rejecting Parent	Subjects (N=60)	
	Males (N=30)	Females (N=30)
Father	976	912
Mother	340	288

$\chi^2=1.01$, N.S.

The six most frequently observed negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors of the male and female subjects as ranked by the teachers is shown in Table 3. For male subjects, in rank-order,

TABLE 3. *Most frequently observed Negative attention-seeking class room behaviors as ranked by Class Teacher*

Subjects (N=60)	
Males (N=30)	Females (N=30)
Rank	Rank
1. Boisterous	1. Whispering
2. Smartness	2. Quarrelsome
3. Talkative	3. Stubbornness
4. Restless	4. Temper Tantrums
5. Swearing	5. Pouting
6. Throwing Things	6. Crying

these included: boisterous, smartness, talkative, restless, swearing, and throwing things. For female subjects, they were: whispering, quarrelsome, stubbornness, temper tantrums, pouting, and crying. The expression of negative attention-seeking behaviors tends to differ by sex of subjects.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Rejecting parents tend to be cold, disapproving, and punitive. They neither seem to enjoy their children, nor do they seem sensitive to their needs. The rejection may be overt or covert; it may be characterized either by indifference and a general atmosphere of unconcern for the child's welfare, or by active dominance, excessive demands, and conspicuous hostility. Parental rejection jeopardizes the youngsters feelings of security, undermines their self-esteem, and induces feelings of being unloved, unwanted, and unaccepted.

Rejected children, such as the students in this study, will often display varied attention-seeking behaviors both inside and outside the home in order to try to gain acceptance and achieve lost feelings of security. In the school, the subjects may have generalized from their parents to their teachers, and viewed them as parental substitutes, continuing to behave toward them with overt negative behaviors directed toward the goal of acceptance. The negative attention-seeking behaviors might also function in displacement toward the teachers of aggressiveness and hostility actually directed toward the real parents.

Due to the larger number of parental rejections given by male subjects (1088) as compared to the female subjects (540), it might be concluded that males are more likely to receive parental rejection than females. Males more frequently than females may be used as scapegoats for parental hostilities. They might be treated with more rigorous discipline and more rules, which the subjects could interpret as rejection patterns. The treatment and handling of the subjects of both sexes, in the socialization process with their parents, might be somewhat different leading to perceived or actual parental rejection.

Regardless of sex of subject the father

was found to be the more rejecting parent. This might be due to the traditional role of the father as the dominant parent, potential punisher of wrong-doing, and source of household laws. In any of these instances, the possibility of punishment or rejection is increased. In households where the father is also seen as "boss" and/or head of the family, even when the rejection is given by the mother, it might be thought of by the child as having been "ordered" by father.

Boisterous was the most frequently observed negative attention-seeking classroom behavior of the male subjects. The boys would give noisy, crude, and gross remarks when talking to the teacher which were uncalled for in the context of the room. Smartness was displayed with sassy, sharp, and critical remarks. Frequent talking, chattering, and jabbering by male subjects were disruptive to both learning and teaching, as was the fourth ranked criterion of restlessness. In the latter behavior, the male subjects would sing, make sounds, bang books, tap the desk with their hands or floor with their feet, or leave their desk to walk to the desk of another student. It was not uncommon for the male subjects to swear or use profanity when speaking to the teacher or to others in the class. The last mentioned negative attention-seeking behavior for the male subjects was throwing things, in which the subjects would throw such items as erasers, pencils, pens, or even books while the class was in session.

Whispering was the most frequently observed negative attention-seeking behavior of the female subjects. These utterances usually contained gossip and/or rumor about the teacher or other classmates. The female subjects displayed quarrelsomeness and stubbornness within the classroom for no apparent reason. These could be displaced aggressive responses toward the teacher, but pertinent to parent-child home relations. Temper tantrums

of the female subjects consisted of outbursts of anger, resentment, irritability, and impatience. These were often followed by pouting or sullenness, and sometimes by crying. Such emotional manifestations suggest problems associated with individual emotional adjustment.

The negative attention-seeking classroom behaviors as well as their accompanying emotional manifestations need be understood and confronted by the classroom teacher. At least part of these responses are associated with parental rejection and its consequences. Using this as a criterion measure, the elimination of the destructive behaviors might only result from modifications of personality of the subjects involved. In this instance, the problem of personality adjustment could be approached from the standpoint of clinical treatment rather than classroom discipline. Goals of the treatment would best be reached with both parents and children actively involved in the therapeutic process.

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