

CORRELATES OF TEACHER APPRAISALS OF STUDENT BEHAVIORS

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The purpose of this study was to assess whether burnout and personality were linked to the perceived severity of 24 undesirable student behaviors among experienced and trainee teachers. Results indicated that teaching experience, student gender, and type of behavior were important determinants of their perceptions. Burnout had a significant effect on the severity ratings of antisocial and oppositional/defiant behaviors, suggesting that the more stressed teachers are, the less tolerant they become of such challenging and aversive behaviors. With regard to personality, severity ratings of students' undesirable behaviors were associated with high levels of conscientiousness and neuroticism. Findings indicate that burnout and personality provide a lens through which teachers appraise the severity of students' behaviors. © 2005 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Teachers are a primary mental health referral source for children with behavior problems. As a consequence, their attitudes and decision-making processes regarding children's behavior may have important implications for parents' and schools' decisions to seek professional help for behaviorally disturbed children. Recent research has indicated that teachers' attitudes about students' behavior problems affect their decision making in classroom behavior management (Prawat, 1992; Westerman, 1991). Among both expert and novice teachers, cognitions are assumed to drive behavior, which is in turn affected by prior knowledge and skills (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Kagan (1992) demonstrated that teachers' cognitions affect not only their own behavior but also students' actions and academic performance. In turn, undesirable student behaviors are more likely to evoke unfavorable impressions of the student and yield negative attitudes on the teacher's part. As teachers accumulate experience they may become better judges of the severity of students' problem behavior, but as they also become increasingly stressed by their job demands, they may be hindered in making accurate appraisals.

A multitude of factors have been found to affect teacher perceptions of students' undesirable behaviors. First, student characteristics such as gender, race, age, and economic background influence teacher views (Dulin, 2001; Hindman, 1999; Neese, 1998). For example, Borg (1998), Borg and Falzon (1993), and Langfeldt (1992) found that gender stereotypes were evident for disruptive and withdrawn behavior patterns. Second, characteristics of the behaviors themselves influence the way they are perceived. Molins (1999) found that teachers are primarily concerned by the behavior of children who demonstrate externalizing problems, particularly boys, and require to be sensitized with information before they notice internalizing behaviors as significant. In the United Kingdom, the Elton Report (DES and Welsh Office, 1989) suggested that teachers generally identify misbehavior in terms of outward active manifestations such as verbal interruption, distracting other students, inappropriate moving about, and physical aggression. Passive misbehavior, such as inattention and "daydreaming," is less likely to be noticed because it is less disruptive. Third,

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interactions between behavior attributes and teachers' demographic characteristics also may occur. For instance, accumulated exposure to externalizing behaviors due to increased teaching experience may modify appraisals. This was in fact evidenced in research by Kokkinos, Panayiotou, and Davazoglou (2004) with student teachers in primary education programs, which indicated that sensitivity to blatantly antisocial behaviors declines and sensitivity to internalizing behaviors increases as students take more teaching practice. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that inexperienced teachers may feel more helpless or anxious when confronted with aggressive or disruptive classroom behavior compared to experienced teachers who might see such behaviors as falling within the normal limits. Research by Borg & Falzon (1989) and by Borg (1998) with Maltese primary and secondary school teachers found evidence in support of this assertion. Specifically, experienced teachers were found to be more tolerant of student undesirable behaviors, a finding that as Borg (1998) suggested may be attributed to the fact that after the difficult initial years, teachers come to realize the relative mild nature of problem classroom behaviors and form their attitudes accordingly. Teaching experience also plays a prime role in teachers' decision for special education referrals, as Schwartz, Wolfe, and Cassar (1997) found that teacher personality predicted the decisions of preservice, but not in-service, teachers.

Finally, teachers' indigenous characteristics, such as level of current work stress and long-standing personality dispositions, may further color their appraisals of behavior. Several studies have repeatedly indicated that teaching is a stressful occupation and that teachers tend to be affected by burnout more than any other public-service professionals (e.g., Schamer & Jackson, 1996). Burnout has been defined as the more severe individual negative affective experience occurring as a result of chronic work stress (Chan & Hui, 1995). Teacher burnout is described by Maslach (1982) as a psychological syndrome made up of three dimensions, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and a depletion of one's emotional resources. Depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, and detached attitude towards those one works with (i.e., parents, clients, or students). Reduced personal accomplishment is assessed through a person's negative self-evaluation in relation to his or her job performance (Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993). As a consequence, they may develop negative attitudes toward students and lose their idealism, energy, and purpose (Schamer & Jackson, 1996).

A few studies describe findings regarding how teachers' stress or burnout (i.e., extreme work stress) affect appraisals of student behavior. Stress can make teachers ineffective and inefficient in their teaching roles (Eskridge & Coker, 1985; Farber, 1984), and negatively influence their students' physical and emotional well-being (Kyriacou, 1987). Beer and Beer (1992) found that burned-out teachers provide significantly less information, praise, and acceptance to their students, and interact with them less frequently. Stressed and burned-out teachers are more likely to refer children for discipline problems (Walker, 1991) whereas as burnout levels increase, teachers' perceptions of students' mental health decline (Cremerius, 1992). Thus, it can be hypothesized that teachers' appraisals of children's undesirable behaviors may be related to burnout. It can be predicted that burned-out teachers will perceive the same student problem behaviors as being more serious compared to their non-burned-out counterparts. This particular hypothesis has not been addressed in previous research and may prove to be important in understanding how teachers make decisions about ways of alleviating problem behaviors.

Regarding stable personality dispositions' effects on teachers' appraisals, the existing literature is fairly limited. Zager (1982), for example, found that shy, suspicious, tense, and anxious teachers perceived their students in more negative terms, and also were more vulnerable to burnout. Schwartz et al. (1997) found that among preservice teachers, both self-esteem and locus of control affected teachers' referral decisions. Many other personality characteristics that have not

been investigated to date could affect appraisals of problem behaviors. For instance, it can be postulated that traits such as neuroticism and anxiety may make aggressive and hard-to-control behaviors appear more threatening due to their high requirements for discipline. Anxious and depressed individuals (both aspects of neuroticism) are characterized by their perception that life events are difficult or impossible to control (Barlow, 1988), an attribute that also may hold for neurotic teachers regarding classroom behavior management. Similar effects may be observed for teachers high in social anxiety, also an aspect of neuroticism, who may feel more incompetent at managing student misbehavior. On the other hand, conscientious teachers may perceive even milder behaviors as serious in an effort to do their job well. Conscientious individuals, according to the Big Five model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992), are organized, purposeful, and achievement oriented. Teachers' level of tolerance of student behaviors may be affected by yet other personality characteristics, such as openness to experience (also a dimension of the Five Factor Model) since such individuals tend to be more willing to accept unconventionality and new social and ethical norms, and to experience both negative and positive feelings.

The present study addresses how teachers' indigenous characteristics, namely burnout and personality traits, as well as their demographics (gender and teaching experience) influence their appraisals of the severity of six clusters of undesirable behaviors: antisocial, oppositional/defiant, interpersonal sensitivity, inattention/restlessness, negative affectivity, and inattention/carelessness. These questions were examined within two different samples: experienced teachers and teacher trainees in university primary education programs. The effects of professional burnout on appraisals of behavior were examined among the experienced teachers (as it would be impossible to examine burnout during preservice) whereas the effects of personality were examined among the teacher trainees. Although this design precluded the examination of any interactions between burnout and personality, it may help decipher the role of personality without the superimposed effect of accumulated professional stress as a result of teaching experience. It may be possible that the daily hassles and frustrations of being an active teacher mask the underlying schemas teachers hold regarding student undesirable behaviors, which are solely affected by personality.

METHOD

Sample 1

Sample 1 consisted of 465 primary school teachers (245 males, 52.7%; 220 females, 47.3%). All participants attended an in-service training program at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Thrace, and come from the broader area of Thrace, Greece. The program is required for all non-bachelor holders who graduated from teacher training programs prior to 1986. Hence, the sample is representative of this generation and level of qualification. Teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. Fourteen percent (85) had up to 5 years of teaching experience, 17.8% (108) had 6 to 10 years, 31% (188) had 11 to 20 years, and 13.9% (84) had more than 20 years.

Sample 2

Sample 2 consisted of 141 undergraduate students attending the four-year primary education programs at the Universities of Thrace ($n = 93$) and Cyprus ($n = 48$). There were 124 women (88%) and 17 men (12%). Most of the students (101) were in their first year of studies (72%) whereas 40 (28%) were in their second year. First- and second-year students in these programs do not take any teaching practice. Participants completed the survey as a course assignment.

Procedure

For both samples, instruments were administered anonymously in small-group sessions by the first author, after verbal consent was provided. In all cases, the measure of students' undesirable behaviors preceded the presentation of the teacher-characteristics measures to obtain spontaneous judgments of the behaviors to the best possible degree.

Measuring Instruments

Students' undesirable behaviors. A brief measure was developed for the purposes of the study, the Pupils' Undesirable Behaviors Questionnaire (PUBQ), with behaviors selected from larger, similar rating scales by Borg and Falzon (1989) and Stuart (1994). The original instruments were not retained as such, as they contained items deemed culturally and age inappropriate on the basis of informal discussions with teachers who evaluated the items. The resulting questionnaire contained 24 behaviors, each corresponding to one item, representing broad categories of anti-social acts, defiant and socially provocative behavior, inattention/hyperactivity, and negative affectivity. The same questionnaire, with one additional item, was used in a previous study (Kokkinos et al., 2004).

Respondents rated each behavior twice, once as pertaining to a boy and once as pertaining to a girl. To avoid any response bias, the behaviors for boys and girls were presented in separate forms and in a different order. Subjects were required to complete the questionnaire by indicating their response on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all serious*) to 5 (*extremely serious*). Ratings concerned the question "How serious do you consider the following behaviors when they are exhibited by a school-aged boy (girl)?"

Teacher burnout. To assess different levels of burnout in teachers, the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI–ES; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) was used. The MBI–ES is a 22-item questionnaire that measures variables peculiar to the teaching profession. Teachers are asked to respond to each item on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). The scale identifies three components of burnout: Emotional Exhaustion (EE; nine items, e.g., "I feel emotionally drained from my work"), Depersonalization (DP; five items, e.g., "I feel I treat some students as they are impersonal objects") and Personal Accomplishment (PA; eight items, e.g., "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job"). According to Maslach et al. (1996), EE is a stress component, DP is an other-evaluation component, and PA is a self-evaluation component. Leiter (1993) proposed that emotional exhaustion occurs first and is linked sequentially to the rise of depersonalization, and that personal accomplishment develops separately from these two components. Consequently, each burnout component can be viewed as a reaction to different factors in the work environment, a finding that has received additional support by Byrne (1994). The MBI is widely used in research on teachers' burnout because of its psychometric qualities, also established in Greece by Kantas and Vassilaki (1997) in a sample of 220 teachers. Their study replicated the factor structure of the scale and reported high internal consistency: .81 for the EE scale, .60 for the DP scale, and .86 for the PA scale. In the present study, internal reliability coefficients for each subscale were: EE = .80, DP = .68, and PA = .90.

Personality. The "big five" personality traits were assessed by the Greek translation of the NEO–Five Factor Inventory (NEO–FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Panayiotou, Kokkinos, & Spanoudis, in press). The original English version is a widely used, 60-item instrument measuring five dimensions of the normal personality: Neuroticism (N), Extroversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C). These domains of personality reflect the degree to which an individual is emotionally stable versus maladjusted (N); assertive, active, and talkative versus reserved and independent (E); attentive to inner feelings, happy with variety,

intellectually curious, and independent in judgments versus conventional, conservative, and somewhat emotionally silent (O); altruistic and sympathetic to others versus inclined to protect one's own interests (A); and purposeful, strong-willed, and determined versus less driven to apply moral principles and more interested in pleasure (C). Respondents indicate their degree of agreement with each item on a Likert-type scale of 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The Greek instrument is a direct translation of the NEO-FFI, maintaining the same number of items and scoring procedures. The psychometric study conducted by Panayiotou et al. (2004) established that 20 items of the Greek translation failed to load on the anticipated factors. Hence, for the purposes of the present study, only the 40 items that best loaded on the appropriate factors were used to compute scale scores as follows: C = 11 items, N = 8 items, E = 7 items, A = 8 items, and O = 6 items. Cronbach's alphas for each scale's summed scores were: .81 for both C and N, .76 for E, .54 for A, and .63 for O.

Social anxiety. The six-item Social Anxiety scale of the Greek translation of the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS; Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975; Panayiotou & Kokkinos, 2003) was used to measure trainee teachers' social anxiety. The Greek SCS maintains the original scoring system, with each question rated on a 5-point scale anchored from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic*). Internal reliability for the Social Anxiety scale was .71.

Data Analysis

Initially, data from the PUBQ were reduced by means of a series of exploratory factor analyses so that the 24 student behaviors rated by teachers could be grouped into meaningful categories. Next, mean scores were computed for the emerging categories (factors) in two ways: (a) for the behavior category as pertaining to boys and girls separately and (b) for the behavior category regardless of gender (i.e., averaged across boys and girls).

Boys' and girls' mean category scores were used as the dependent variables in a repeated measures analysis of variance to test for the effects of teacher and student gender and teaching experience on severity ratings. Type I error was controlled for by using a stringent level of significance ($p = .05/\text{the number of pairwise comparisons}$) for all post hoc analyses used to break down the obtained interactions.

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to examine the effects of teacher burnout on severity ratings. For this purpose, teachers were assigned to burned-out and non-burned-out groups based on their MBI scores. Behavior category scores, averaged across boys and girls, were used as the dependent variables. Additionally, correlational analyses were used to examine the associations between burnout and severity ratings in the teachers' sample, and personality and severity ratings among teacher trainees.

RESULTS

Behavior Categories Emerging from the PUBQ

All 24 items were subjected to principal components analyses with varimax rotation, separately for boys and girls. Because the results indicated that the factors were somewhat different for each gender, a second analysis was run using the average rating of boys and girls for each item. The analysis yielded four factors that accounted for 66.60% of the variance ($K.M.O. = .93$). Items with factor loadings ≥ 0.4 were used to interpret the factors (see Table 1). To render the solution more interpretable, the first two factors were further subjected to factor analysis with constrained two-factor solutions, as they each appeared to include items that clustered theoretically into two meaningful subgroupings. The final six categories of behaviors emerging from the set of factor analysis were as follows: Antisocial (five items, e.g., "destroys school property"), Oppositional/

Table 1
Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of Teacher Ratings Collapsed Across Boys and Girls (loadings > .40 are shown)

PUBQ item	1	2	3	4
Is Cruel/Bullies Schoolmates	.85 ^a			
Steals	.83 ^a			
Is Truant	.79 ^a			
Destroys School Property	.79 ^a			
Is Rude/Impertinent	.74 ^b			
Uses Profane Language	.73 ^a			
Disobeys Teacher	.60 ^b			.48
Deceives or Makes Fun of Schoolmates	.58 ^b		.55	
Verbally or Physically Abuses Teacher	.57 ^b		.47	
Is Distrustful		.84 ^c		
Is Sensitive		.74 ^c		
Daydreams		.73 ^d		
Is Suspicious		.7 ^c		
Unnecessary Rummaging During Class		.61 ^d		.43
Is Frequently Inattentive		.58 ^d		.52
Is Often Restless		.54 ^d		
Is Fearful			.72 ^e	
Throws Temper Tantrums			.66 ^e	.40
Is Cowardly			.60 ^e	.44
Appears Sad or Unhappy	.44		.58 ^e	
Lies	.50 ^b		.51	
Chats During Class				.79 ^f
Careless and Untidy in Schoolwork				.61 ^f
Is Untidy in Personal Appearance			.45	.57 ^f

Note. Letters in superscript refer to the final factors used to define student behavior patterns; ^aantisocial behavior; ^boppositional/defiant behavior; ^cinterpersonal sensitivity; ^dinattention/restlessness; ^enegative affectivity; ^finattention/carelessness. PUBQ = the Pupils' Undesirable Behaviors Questionnaire.

Defiant (five items, e.g., “is rude/impertinent”), Inattention/Restlessness (four items, e.g., “unnecessary rummaging during class”), Interpersonal Sensitivity (three items, e.g., “is suspicious”), Negative Affectivity (four items, e.g., “appears sad or unhappy”), and Inattention/Carelessness (three items, e.g., “careless and untidy in school work”). Internal reliabilities, using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, were .90, .86, .81, .83, .81, and .76, respectively.

Differences in Teacher Ratings of Perceived Severity for Boys and Girls

The mean severity rating assigned to student behaviors by teachers indicated that more extreme forms of externalizing behavior (antisocial) are rated as more severe for boys whereas milder forms of externalizing (i.e., oppositional, inattention/carelessness) and all internalizing behaviors (i.e., interpersonal sensitivity, negative affectivity) were considered more severe for girls.

Effects of Teacher and Student Gender and Teaching Experience on Severity Ratings

A repeated measures analysis of variance testing for the effects of teacher gender, teaching experience, and student gender on the six behavior categories was computed, using a $6 \times 2 \times 2 \times 5$ (Behavior Categories \times Student Gender \times Teacher Gender \times Teaching Experience) factorial

design. Teacher gender and experience [five levels: 0 experience (i.e., teacher trainees), 1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–20 years, more than 20 years] served as the between-subjects factors while the six behavior categories and their respective ratings for boys and girls served as the within-subjects factors.

Results indicated a main effect of behavior category, $F(5,586) = 227.2, p < .0001$ (effect size = 0.66), showing that the different behaviors were given varying severity ratings by teachers. Specifically, antisocial and oppositional/defiant behaviors were rated higher than all other categories, but not differently from each other. Interpersonal sensitivity was rated as significantly less severe compared to the other categories. Inattention/restlessness received lower severity ratings than negative affectivity and inattention/carelessness.

There also was a significant main effect of student gender on severity ratings $F(1,590) = 77.81, p < .0001$ (effect size = 0.12), modified by a significant Behavior Category \times Student Gender interaction, $F(5,586) = 193.09, p < .0001$ (effect size = 0.62), indicating that antisocial behavior was considered more serious when occurring among boys whereas all other behaviors (except inattention/restlessness, for which there were no significant student gender effects) were rated as more serious for girls.

There also was a significant interaction between behavior category and teaching experience, $F(20,2356) = 16.68, p < .0001$ (effect size = 0.12), indicating that teacher trainees perceived antisocial behavior as more severe than all other teaching-experience groups. Similarly, the same group perceived negative affectivity and inattention/carelessness as less severe than all other groups. This was modified by a significant three-way interaction between behavior category, student gender, and teaching experience, $F(20,2356) = 8.61, p < 0.001$ (effect size = 0.07). Particularly for antisocial behavior, all experienced teachers, but not the teacher trainees, perceived this behavior pattern as being more severe when occurring among boys. Teacher trainees also viewed negative affectivity as more severe when occurring in boys whereas all other groups perceived the same behavior as more severe among girls. In all experience groups except the teacher trainees, inattention/carelessness was considered worse among girls than boys.

Levels of Burnout in the Teachers' Sample

Means and standard deviations were computed for each MBI subscale. According to Maslach et al. (1996), high scores in the EE and DP subscales and low scores in the PA subscale are indicative of burnout. Overall, the present sample appeared less burned out than the U.S. standardization sample of 4.163 teachers reported by Maslach et al. (1996). More specifically, whereas PA means were comparable to the U.S. sample (34.03 vs. 33.54), scores on the other two dimensions were lower for EE (17.45 vs. 21.25) and DP (3.38 vs. 11.00), suggesting that while the teachers in the present sample showed moderate physical and mental stress symptoms (e.g., EE), their attitudes toward students (DP) and their work (PA) were not seriously affected.

Based on the line of theorizing that emotional exhaustion appears to be a central or core symptom of burnout (e.g., Byrne, 1994; Koeske & Koeske, 1989; Leiter, 1993), it was decided that the dimensions of depersonalization and personal accomplishment would not be further considered. Therefore, comparisons were made on the basis of the emotional exhaustion scale level only. Burned-out teachers ($n = 72$) were defined as those who scored high on the EE subscale using the cutoff points provided by the scale authors.

Effect of Emotional Exhaustion on Teachers' Appraisals

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to study the effect of burnout on teachers' appraisals of student behavior, using burnout (two levels; burned-out vs. non-burned-out) as the between-subjects variable and the behavior categories serving as the dependent variables. There was no

overall significant main effect of burnout on teachers' severity ratings (Wilks' lambda = .98, $p > 0.1$). However, for two behavior categories, significant effects of burnout were obtained; specifically, for antisocial behavior, $F(1,460) = 4.27$, $p < 0.05$ (effect size = 0.009), and oppositional/defiant behavior, $F(1,460) = 4.03$, $p < 0.05$ (effect size = 0.009). In all other cases, burned-out teachers' ratings tended to be higher than their non-burned-out counterparts. Hence, the MANOVA results point to a tendency of emotional exhaustion to augment teachers' severity ratings of student externalizing behaviors.

Associations Between Personality Characteristics and Teacher Trainees' Appraisals

Table 2 shows the bivariate correlations between teacher trainees' personality characteristics, as measured by the Greek NEO-FFI and the SCS Social Anxiety Scale, and severity ratings of undesirable behaviors. There was a positive association between conscientiousness and severity ratings of antisocial, oppositional, and negative affectivity undesirable behavior categories. There also were positive correlations between neuroticism and interpersonal sensitivity, openness to experience and interpersonal sensitivity and inattention/restlessness, and a negative association between openness to experience and antisocial behavior. Because the associations between openness to experience and antisocial, interpersonal sensitivity, and inattention/restlessness were very small, whereas the correlation between openness and neuroticism was highly significant ($r = .27$, $p < .001$), partial correlations involving openness were computed controlling for neuroticism. The resulting correlations were not significant. Hence, it appears that conscientiousness and neuroticism are the two personality dimensions mostly associated with teacher trainees' appraisals of the severity of undesirable behaviors.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the correlates of the appraisals of students' undesirable behaviors within two samples of experienced and trainee teachers. It examined the effects of student and teacher gender and teaching experience as well as burnout (in the teachers' sample) and personality characteristics (in the teacher trainees' sample) on these appraisals. Overall, both samples' ratings indicated that explicitly antisocial behaviors were appraised as more serious whereas behaviors of a more internalizing and emotional nature were less serious. This is in support of previous findings which suggest that teachers in general perceive antisocial

Table 2
Bivariate Correlations Between Appraisals and Teacher Trainees' Personality Characteristics

	Antisocial Behavior	Oppositional/Defiant Behavior	Interpersonal Sensitivity	Inattention/Restlessness	Negative Affectivity	Inattention/Carelessness
C	.23**	.24**	.07	.1	.17*	.13
N	-.04	.02	.22**	.16	.16	.07
E	.08	.04	.04	.03	.08	.03
A	-.08	-.08	-.01	.08	.04	-.00
O	-.17*	-.14	.18*	.18*	-.01	.14
SA	-.00	.03	-.04	.04	.12	.02

Note. N = Neuroticism; E = Extroversion; O = Openness to Experience; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; SA = Social Anxiety.

behaviors as more serious (Borg, 1998; Stuart, 1994). This increased sensitivity for externalizing behaviors is already apparent among inexperienced trainee teachers (Kokkinos et al., 2004).

Some gender stereotypes may come into play in coloring teachers' appraisals. More extreme forms of externalizing behaviors were rated as more severe for boys whereas milder forms of externalizing (i.e., oppositional, carelessness) and all internalizing behaviors were considered more severe for girls mainly by experienced teachers. Teacher trainees showed the reverse pattern compared to the experienced teachers, perceiving gender nonstereotypic behaviors, such as negative affectivity among boys, as more severe. One possible explanation is that student teachers enter their training with a set of preconceptions regarding appropriate student behavior, which changes as they accumulate experiences with a range of diverse classroom behaviors.

Burnout was found to negatively inflate perceptions of antisocial and oppositional/defiant student behaviors, suggesting that the more stressed teachers are, the less tolerant they become of such challenging and probably aversive behaviors. Correlational results regarding the association between personality dimensions and severity ratings mostly supported our predictions. Severity ratings of student undesirable behaviors were associated with high levels of conscientiousness and neuroticism. More specifically, highly conscientious teacher trainees were more likely to perceive antisocial, oppositional, and negative affectivity dimensions of student behaviors as more severe. It is interesting that even a subtly disruptive behavior such as negative affectivity is perceived as serious with increasing conscientiousness. Hence, conscientiousness appears to be an important characteristic that helps teachers attend to both overtly disruptive and emotionally distressing student behaviors. According to Costa and McCrae (1992), individuals high in conscientiousness are scrupulous, punctual, reliable, and prone to occupational achievement. It may be possible that such individuals, even at the stage of training, take their teacher role with the utmost seriousness and consider that they are responsible to identify even minor deviations of behavior. Future research may find that these teachers also are more likely to refer such children for evaluation and treatment.

The hypothesis that socially anxious and neurotic teacher trainees would feel more threatened by aggressive and antisocial behaviors and thus rate them as more severe was not supported. The only significant finding in this direction was a positive association between neuroticism and severity ratings for interpersonal sensitivity behaviors. It may be that neurotic individuals feel more interpersonally challenged by children who are suspicious, distrustful, and sensitive than any other children, or may feel more empathy towards children whose characteristics match more closely their own tendency to worry.

The findings of the present study provide preliminary evidence regarding factors that affect the way teachers appraise the severity of students' undesirable behaviors. Although the scope of the findings may be limited to similar samples, they indicate that personality and stress should not be underestimated when studying the determinants of teachers' appraisals. In fact, these findings raise questions regarding the accuracy of teacher perceptions of their students given that these are filtered through a number of parameters that are indigenous or contextual to the teacher (Schwartz et al., 1997). Further research should address the interaction between teachers' stress and personality in the same sample, and replicate the findings in other cultural contexts. Research also should take into account other teacher variables such as coping, social support, and self-efficacy that may mediate the association between personality, stress, and appraisals.

The current findings also may have implications for initial and in-service teacher training: First, knowledge and experience during training with student behavior problems might help to increase awareness of a wider range of student difficulties and to enhance teacher efficacy in handling challenging and disruptive behavior. Molins (1999), for example, suggested that teachers showed increased awareness of children's internalizing problems after they had read educational material about childhood depression. In addition, Hagen, Gutkin, Wilson, and Oats (1998) found

that teacher self-efficacy in handling disruptive behavior can be increased through vicarious exposure to such behaviors and their effective management. This knowledge, in turn, may make them more conscientious and therefore, as our findings show, more likely to attend to a wider range of students' undesirable behaviors. Second, given the likely impact of burnout on teacher appraisals of student undesirable behaviors and the influence that this may have on their decisions for referral, there is a strong case for incorporating training components on classroom management techniques and stress coping skills that can ease the tension involved in teaching.

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