Preschool Social Ratings: The Influence of Visibility and Negativity

Danika Maddocks
Department of Psychology, San Francisco State University, San Francisco CA
maddocks@mail.sfsu.edu

Introduction

- Researchers study preschool social dynamics because these dynamics can be an indication of later social challenges, including peer acceptance or rejection (Asher, Markell, & Hymel, 1981).
- Interventions must identify children who are at risk for peer rejection, but the methods for assessing this risk are of questionable reliability.
- Sociometric procedures measure children’s opinions of peers (Hymel, 1983), and observational methods that identify specific behaviors (Asher et al., 1981).
- In general, negative behavior decreases children’s acceptance while all other social behavior improves acceptance (Sebanc, Kearns, Hernandez, & Galvin, 2007; Vaughn, Vollenweider, Boal, Azria-Evans, & Snider, 2003).
- However, the link between ratings and behavior is not always clear (Masters & Furman, 2007; Vaughn, 2007).

Hypotheses

- Children who are more visible—those who engage in more social interactions—will receive higher average social ratings.
- Children who display more negativity in their interactions will receive lower average social ratings.
- There will be an interaction effect between visibility and negativity, with the highest ratings going to the most active and most positive children, and the lowest ratings going to the most active and most negative children.

Method

- **Participants**: Convenience sample of 20 preschool children from two preschool classes. 11 boys and 9 girls, ranging in age from 38 months to 59 months (M = 45.83, SD = 5.85).
- **Procedure**: Sociometric interview. Children rated each classmate in terms of how much they play with that classmate, placing colored photographs of each classmate on papers indicating “little or not at all,” “some,” and “a lot.”
- **Sociometric observations**: Running record of ten 3-min observations.

Results

- **Average social rating**: Categories from the sociometric interview were coded numerically, and each child’s scores were averaged, using procedures described in Asher, et al. (1979). Play with a lot = 3, Play with some of the time = 2, Play with little or not at all = 1.
- **Visibility**: Number of social behaviors the child engaged in during the 30-min observation. Social interactions involved verbal or nonverbal communication with other children, adults, or the self (e.g., private speech).
- **Negativity**: All social behaviors from the observation were coded as negative, positive, or neutral. Negativity is the proportion of negative social behaviors relative to the child’s total number of social behaviors. Negative behaviors included any aggressive or hurtful initiations, such as hitting or threatening, as well as any aggressive or negating responses, such as retaliation or telling another child to stop a behavior.
- **Negative children**: Those who are less socially active may not be identified as having social problems if their average social ratings don’t reflect their lack of positive social skills.

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References


Figure 1. Predicting average social rating from a child’s percentage of behaviors that were negative, moderated by visibility, the child’s total number of social interactions. Children high in visibility (+1SDs) showed the lowest average social ratings at high levels of negativity, r(16) = -.3489, p = .003, see Figure 1. Those low in visibility (-1SDs) showed no difference in average social ratings across negativity, r(16) = .205, p = .368.