

## **Teachers' Perceptions of Distress and Disturbance Regarding Students' Behavior in an Elementary School Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

Substantial empirical data indicates that elementary school teachers are disturbed by student behavior problems in a classroom. A study was conducted in order to determine which behaviors teachers report to be most disturbing and whether there are any teachers gender differences in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school classroom. The participants consisted of 149 elementary school teachers from 5 all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary schools in the New York Metropolitan area. Two instruments were used, a modified version of Algozzine's Disturbing Behavior Checklist as well as a questionnaire for teachers, which includes a modified version of the Elliot and Dweck questionnaire which surveys teacher attitude and behavior interventions. Heads of schools were contacted for agreement to distribute the surveys to the teaching staff. Analyses indicate that teachers in all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school find externalizing behaviors to be most disturbing, and female teachers were found to be more disturbed by internalizing behaviors than male teachers. Implications of this study emphasize the importance of effective management and early ascertainment of problem behaviors.

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## **Student Behavior and Teacher Tolerance in a Classroom**

Students demonstrate negative behaviors in the classroom on a regular basis, as affirmed by Waguespack and Moore (1993), "That children exhibit problems in the classroom is a fact of day-to-day school existence" (p. 153). The number of studies that have addressed this issue is large (Algozzine, Christian, Marr, McClanahan, & White, 2008; Algozzine & Curran, 1979; Coleman & Gilliam, 1983; Herr, Algozzine, & Eaves, 1976; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Landon & Mesinger, 1989; Lewin, Nelson, & Tollefson, 1983; Rescorla et al., 2007; Ritter, 1989; Safran & Safran, 1984, 1985, 1987; Stuart, 1994). Research on student behaviors and the role of teachers in dealing with student behaviors, makes it evident that while one behavior may be acceptable and encouraged in one classroom, it may be looked upon negatively in another (Algozzine, 1980; Algozzine & Curran, 1979; Ritter, 1989; Safran & Safran, 1985). Appropriate behaviors and inappropriate behaviors are very much context-based. According to Algozzine (1980) "Behavioral disturbance is a function of the interaction of the child within an ecosystem" (p. 112). Therefore, student behavior and teacher tolerance are critical factors for understanding appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in a classroom.

Student behaviors in a classroom have been observed and reported by researchers and teachers for decades. Over the past 25 years, Gallup polls have indicated that behavioral problems are of the top challenges schools face (Sugai, 2009). To organize and examine these behaviors, checklists of behaviors are available (Algozzine, 2003) which list the most common problem behaviors seen in a classroom by teachers. These behaviors include anxiety, isolation, disobedience, disruptiveness, and destructiveness.

Behavioral issues in classrooms are more than research issues. Such behaviors engage teachers for an inordinate amount of time, most certainly impacting instruction (Safran, Safran, & Barcikowski, 1985). Safran and Safran (1984) report that teachers spend 60% to 90% more of their time with students who have behavior problems than with other students in the class. Johnson and Fullwood (2006) similarly state that teachers spend up to 90% more time dealing with these students than with the rest of the class.

## **Teacher Role and Teacher Tolerance**

The tolerance level of a teacher, in addition to other factors, leads to student referrals or student evaluation. Teachers are responsive to student behavior in a classroom, and based on the teacher's response, he or she is in control of a child's experience (Algozzine, 1980; Lewin et al., 1983). To further describe this occurrence, "The classroom teacher represents the primary agent for carrying out the social functions of the schools" (Algozzine, 1980, p. 112). The teacher will evaluate a child's behavior and if he or she deems it necessary, will take his or her opinions about the child to the next level, whether suggesting the child have a form of behavioral intervention, consultation, or referral. This premise is confirmed by Christenson, Ysseldyke, Wang, and Algozzine (1983) in the opening statement of their study, "One of the most important decisions a classroom teacher makes is to refer a student for an ... evaluation" (p. 174).

The decision of teachers to make a referral is often reflective of their tolerance levels for student behaviors. The referral and evaluation are critical in that they set the course for intervention measures. This is the case for a variety of circumstances, such as, whether necessary or not, whether the issue lies with the teachers' misperceptions or with the students' real presenting behavior, or whether it is ultimately positive and constructive for the student, or unfortunately, negative and destructive for the students' progress and learning. The teachers' tolerance and resulting actions have the power to directly maintain, enhance, or impede a student's educational and behavioral progress. It is critical, then, to understand the dynamics involved in teacher attitudes and perceptions, and to examine how a teacher views and tolerates students and problem behaviors.

## **Teacher Gender**

Teacher and student gender have been examined in regard to potential differences for teacher tolerance of behavior based on the gender of the teacher. Because students are placed in classrooms with both male and female teachers, it is important to recognize the inherent differences and understand the impact that teacher gender may have on educating and managing students in a classroom. Teacher gender, teacher attitude, and the reporting of behavior problems have been found to be related (Ritter, 1989; Stake & Katz, 1982), and certainly it is essential to examine these variables as they have the potential to affect the placement and education of students.

Student behavior and teacher tolerance have a reciprocal relationship, in that student behavior impacts teacher tolerance levels for behaviors, teacher attitude and perception of the student, and the contagion effect of the behavior on other students in the class, leading to the academic attainment of the students. In addition, a school has the challenge of weighing the needs of an individual with the needs of the many. In a classroom, if a teacher spends a significant amount of classroom time dealing with the behavior problems of a very small percentage of students, what is the cost to the majority?

## **Literature Review**

### **Reports of Student Behaviors**

A common way of organizing behaviors is the distinction of internalizing versus externalizing behaviors. Internalizing behaviors are those that mainly affect the student demonstrating the behavior, such as anxiety, shyness, or inattentiveness. Externalizing behaviors are outer-directed or disruptive behaviors, such as fighting, aggression, and disobedience.

Externalizing and internalizing behaviors are different in their manifestation in a classroom. In their study, Poulou and Norwich (2000) offer scenarios of externalizing and internalizing behaviors. The following is an example they present for externalizing student behaviors.

George never seems to finish an assignment. He is easily distracted soon after he starts working. At the slightest opportunity he hinders his classmates, while there are times when he becomes physically aggressive towards them. You constantly plead with him to behave and be more cooperative, but he does not comply with your demands (p. 573).

Examples of internalizing, student behaviors are evident in the subsequent situation. Betty does not want to volunteer to participate in class and when you call on her directly, she often does not respond. When she does, she usually speaks quietly, keeping her eyes lowered. In situations when she cannot answer a question, she blushes and becomes clearly upset (p. 573).

In studies by Algozzine (1980, 2003) surveying public school teachers, supervisors, psychologists, and university students, results indicate that behaviors that are externalizing, such as disruptiveness and disobedience, are less tolerable than internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety and lack of self-confidence.

Safran and Safran (1984) similarly asked elementary public school teachers to complete a questionnaire on teacher tolerance listing behaviors that are observable. The findings support previous research that externalizing behaviors, including aggression, are least tolerated by teachers.

Safran, Safran, and Barcikowski (1985) confirmed these results again. In a study of general and special elementary education teachers, answers to questionnaires found that teachers report externalizing behaviors to be least tolerable. Landon and Mesinger's (1989) study support the idea that teachers report that they are less tolerant of behaviors that are socially defiant than behaviors that are more internalizing. In a study by Stuart (1994), secondary teachers rated externalizing behaviors, such as rudeness and disobedience, more disturbing than internalizing behaviors.

More recently, Johnson and Fullwood (2006) conducted a study of the tolerance level of secondary teachers who found that externalizing behaviors are least tolerable to teachers. Confirming this finding, Liljequist and Renk (2007) surveyed elementary school teachers who reported that they are less tolerant of externalizing behaviors than internalizing ones.

Using data from teacher office referrals, Algozzine, Christian, Marr, McClanahan, and White (2008) found that externalizing behavior, including disruption, disrespect, and fighting, was the number one reason for a teacher to remove a student from the classroom.

It seems clear, from studies emerging since the 1970s up until the present (Algozzine, 1979, 1980, 2003; Algozzine et al., 2008; Coleman & Gilliam, 1983; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Landon & Mesinger, 1989; Liljequist & Renk, 2007; Mooney & Algozzine, 1978; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Safran & Safran, 1984; Safran et al., 1985; Stuart, 1994), that teacher tolerance varies in proportion to the presenting behaviors of students. Most point to similar conclusions. The overwhelming results concur that teachers are less tolerant of externalizing behaviors and more tolerant of internalizing behaviors. The findings almost unanimously remain the same for various types of studies, whether using the self report methodology of a checklist or using an analogue design that involves viewing or reading vignettes.

## **Teacher Factors**

There are numerous factors that influence a teacher's reporting of student behaviors. McIntyre (1988) stressed the importance of examining teacher variables that may influence student referral. Teacher variables, such as gender, experience, age, and discipline, have been analyzed in studies. In addition, there is literature that examines student gender as it relates to teacher gender, though this is not addressed in the current study due to it occurring in an exclusively male student setting. How the gender of the teacher may impact tolerance level and reporting of student problem behaviors is discussed.

## **Gender Differences in Teacher Tolerance Level and Reporting**

A study conducted by Stake and Katz (1982) looked at teacher attitudes as they relate to teacher gender. Eleven female and ten male teachers from suburban elementary schools were observed teaching in a classroom over the course of four to five hours, with at least four classroom visits. The observers completed checklists for teacher and student behavior, with a focus on the gender of both the teachers and students. After the observations, the teachers were asked to describe, on the whole, their male students and separately, their female students, using given student-behavior descriptions. Results of the checklists and descriptions indicate that male teachers were less positive towards their students than female teachers. The authors cite a cultural factor as a possible reason for this finding. They state that female teachers and all females in general, are socialized and raised to be more nurturing than males. Independent of the cultural factor, the study found differences in teacher attitude based on teacher gender and no evident bias toward male or female students. This study attests to the differences inherent in teachers in accordance with their gender.

In a study by McIntyre (1988), 92 male and female elementary school teachers in Oregon, McIntyre found that female teachers were two times more likely to refer a student who exhibited high levels of behavior problems than a male teacher. Ritter (1989) explored the issue of teacher gender as it relates to teacher rating of behavior problems. Teachers were asked to complete a behavior checklist and a report on a recently added student in their class who was identified as emotionally disturbed. Teacher gender and ratings of problem behavior were reported to have a significant relationship. Female teachers were more concerned about externalizing behaviors than male teachers.

In a study examining whether teachers' perceptions of behavior were impacted by teacher gender, Taylor, Gunter, and Slate (2001) found that male teachers reported more student behavior problems than female teachers. In contrast to previous studies, male teachers found behaviors to be of more concern than female teachers, indicating that in this study, male teachers may be less tolerant than female teachers of certain student misbehaviors. The authors admit, however, that the results may be limited due to the small sample size of each group used for gender and race combinations.

Female teachers are perceived as more nurturing than male teachers and more concerned with problem behaviors (Masling & Stern, 1963). Thijs and Verkuyten (2009), Eagly (1995), and Feingold (1994) posit that women are more sensitive and responsive than men in social situations. Evans and Tribble (1986) found female teachers to possess more self-efficacy and commitment to teaching than their male counterparts. Similarly, Duffy, Warren, and Walsh (2001), Hopf and Hatzichristou (1999), and Meece in 1987 (as cited in Duffy et al., 2001) also found female teachers to be more sensitive and supportive than males. In addition, Hopf and Hatzichristou (1999) found female teachers to give more warnings to their students about their behavior problems than male teachers.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This study explored the degree of teacher tolerance for various types of misbehaviors in all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary schools. The specific objective includes determining which behavioral difficulties are of most concern to teachers, and if prior research demonstrating that externalizing behaviors are least tolerated by teachers holds true in this setting. Additionally, the impact of teacher gender on behavioral tolerance was explored.

The first research question asks which behaviors are least tolerable to a teacher in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school, as measured by Algozzine's Disturbing Behavior Checklist. The hypothesis is that the least tolerable behaviors that will be exhibited by students in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school will be externalizing behaviors, such as fighting, disruptiveness, and disobedience as measured by Algozzine's Disturbing Behavior Checklist. Teachers will find internalizing behaviors as measured by social immaturity, such as anxiousness, shyness, and passivity, to be less disturbing than the externalizing behaviors.

The second research question asks, what are the differences, if any, between male teachers and female teachers in their reports of their tolerance levels for student

behavior in a classroom. Do they differ in the behaviors they most and least tolerate as measured by Algozzine's Disturbing Behavior Checklist? The hypothesis is that male teachers will be more tolerant of disruptive behavior than female teachers, and there will be a difference in male and female teachers' tolerance levels for various types of behavior.

### **Methodology**

In order to collect data to test the above mentioned hypotheses, this study contacted 298 teachers from 5 schools to participate in the study. Heads of schools were contacted for agreement to distribute the surveys to the teaching staff for participation in this study. The study uses the conventional survey method. The teachers each received one survey, which is a compilation of the Disturbing Behavior Checklist I (DBC I) and a questionnaire which surveys teacher attitude and behavior interventions.

### **Population**

The subjects for this study include the teachers, teacher assistants, and specialty teachers of schools identified as all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary schools in the New York Metropolitan area from a selection of schools. The schools chosen represent similar student and parent religious background and mission statements. The schools range in size from 200 students to 700 students in grades one through eight, with an average of 20-25 students per class. The principal, or head, of each school was contacted for participation in this study. Teacher checklists and questionnaires were distributed by the researcher either to the principals or to their secretaries, depending on the arrangement agreed upon. A total of 298 surveys were distributed to 5 schools. 149 teachers returned completed surveys, ranging from a return rate of 36% to 76% in the different schools. Forty-seven percent of the teachers who completed the surveys are male, and 52.3% are female. 35.4% teach Judaic studies, 50.4% percent teach only secular studies. 10.2% teach both Judaic and secular studies, while 4.1% are specialty teachers. Only 8.2% of those who responded were assistant teachers.

### **Demographic Information**

One hundred forty-nine teachers from five different schools participated in this study. Almost half (47.7%) were male. Just about half of the teachers (49.0%) were between 31-50 years old, 22.4% were under 31, and the remaining 28.6% were above 50. Teachers of grades 1-3 comprised 42.3% of the group, 22.8 % taught in

grades 4-5, 26.8% taught in grades 6-8, 2.7 % taught both in grades 1-3 and 4-5, and 5.4% taught both in grades 4-5 and 6-8. Class size ranged from 2-31 with an average of 21.70 and a standard deviation of 5.15. Teaching experience of the teachers who responded was assessed based on the number of years the teacher had been teaching. Twenty point eight percent were veteran teachers teaching for more than 25 years, another 21.5% had been teaching between 15-24 years, 18.8% had been teaching between 10-14 years, 21.5% had been teaching 4-9 years, and the remaining 17.4% had only been teaching between 1-3 years.

### **Instruments**

Two separate instruments were combined into one survey for use in this study. The first instrument is the Disturbing Behavior Checklist I (DBC I) created by Algozzine originally in 1979 (2003). This checklist has been utilized in numerous studies over the past 30 years (Algozzine, 1980, 2003; Algozzine & Curran, 1979; Herr et al., 1976; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Landon & Mesinger, 1989). Algozzine (2003) created the DBC I for use in evaluating teacher tolerance of student behaviors. The behaviors included fall into four categories, socially immature, socially defiant, physically disturbing, and socially delinquent. For the purposes of this paper and research, only the behaviors in the category of socially immature and socially defiant were examined. Socially immature behaviors, also described as internalizing behaviors, include anxiety, lack of self-confidence, shyness, and tension. Socially defiant behaviors, also described as externalizing behaviors, are comprised of disobedience, impertinence, fighting, destructiveness, and disruptiveness.

The present study utilized this checklist with some alterations. Some behaviors were deleted, shortening the survey, as they were irrelevant in a yeshiva setting, such as “stays out late at night.” The modified checklist consists of 37 behaviors, 22 externalizing behaviors and 15 internalizing behaviors. Appendix A lists each of the 37 behaviors categorized as externalizing or internalizing. Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, not very disturbing to 5, very disturbing. Each line is a separate behavior. The behaviors are grouped into two categories, internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors. The score for each category is computed by taking the average of the behaviors in each.

A series of investigations were conducted by the original author, Algozzine, to establish the construct validity for the use of the DBC I in determining an individual’s attitude towards student behaviors. Additionally, according to Algozzine, “disturbing behavior has received construct validation support within the framework suggested by Cronbach” (1971, as cited in Algozzine, 2003). The results of

Algozzine's analyses confirm that the use of the DBC I has validity in that it did indicate the level of tolerance for certain student behaviors that teachers expressed they have. Reliability was measured through Chronbach's alpha for the current sample and found externalizing behaviors to be .86 and internalizing behaviors to be .94, both of which are sufficiently reliable. The results found that the DBC I was effective in discriminating between externalizing and internalizing behaviors, all of which measured what it was intending to measure in a significant way. Factor analysis and item analysis were conducted and indicated that the scale and subscales are relatively reliable. Factor analysis revealed that all of the loadings were greater than .40 and also divided the data into four dimensions: socially immature, socially defiant, physically disturbing, and socialized delinquent. Internal consistency (KR20) was measured and found to be .93, .90, .62, and .77 respectively for the above subscales. The overall internal consistency measure was found to be .93.

In addition, questionnaires for teachers, specifically designed for this study, were completed. The questionnaire is a modified version of the Elliot and Dweck questionnaire (2005) which surveys teacher attitude and behavior interventions that are not covered in the DBC I form. Questions specifically prepared for this study are interspersed throughout the survey about teacher attitudes to students with problem behaviors and how easy or difficult it is for teachers to change their attitude for a student initially recognized as having a behavior problem who indeed does improve in his behavior. Experts in the field of education were consulted to review the questions. Their feedback and recommendations were incorporated to ensure that the questions are valid. The scale corresponds to the 5-point Likert-type scale of the DBC I, ranging from 1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree.

### **Psychometric Properties**

In the current study, reliability and validity were measured as well. Content validity was acquired by distributing the survey to a panel of experts in the field and asking for their feedback/input to make sure the questions measured what they were supposed to measure. Three experts were contacted to review the surveys before distribution. Two of the experts were school social workers and one was an assistant principal in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school. After their review, the questionnaire was modified to reflect their suggested changes. Reliability, as measured by alpha, for the DBC 1 checklist that was used in this study was found to be .93 overall, so there is sufficient evidence for reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

### **Data Collection/Procedure**

After initial phone contact with the heads of the schools, the surveys were personally brought to each head of school to distribute to the school staff to be completed by hand within a three-week time frame. The schools chosen have an all-male student population in the New York Metropolitan area. Clear, written instructions were given to the school principal and teaching staff guiding them in how to complete the forms. All parties were made to understand that this was a voluntary survey and that confidentiality would be maintained. Anonymity of the responses was stressed to the subjects participating in the survey. Upon principal approval, the surveys were completed by the participants and collected in a large envelope by a designated individual in the main office of the school. The surveys were picked up directly from the main office, and the data was entered. No distinction was made between schools.

### **Power Analysis**

In order to determine the optimal sample size for this study, power analysis was conducted based on the design, methodology, and research questions of this study. Cohen (1988) suggests that the desired power level should be a minimum of .80. Further, Cohen's *d* (effect size) is anticipated to be medium at .5. The alpha level of significance is set to be .05 to claim statistical significance. The optimal sample size *N* was found to be a minimum of 128, with 64 for each gender of teacher. Therefore at least 128 participants were recruited for this study.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the data, the responses were divided based on externalizing and internalizing behaviors and those that cause a contagion effect. In addition, males and females were analyzed separately. To answer the first research question the percentages for each behavior and/or attitude were analyzed and compared. To answer the second research question, each group was examined separately and *t*-tests were conducted to compare the groups.

### **Results**

The first research question asks which behaviors are least tolerable to a teacher in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school, as measured by

Algozzine's Disturbing Behavior Checklist. The hypothesis is that the least tolerable behaviors will be externalizing behaviors, such as fighting, disruptiveness, and disobedience. Teachers will find internalizing behaviors as measured by social immaturity, such as anxiousness, shyness, and passivity, to be less disturbing than the externalizing behaviors.

The results indicate that the top five least tolerable behaviors to teachers in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school are fighting, temper tantrums, disobedience, negativism, and destructiveness. Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations in descending order. A higher mean implies that the behaviors are more disturbing to the teacher. The behaviors listed first are least tolerable by teachers. Each mean was analyzed by comparing the mean of each behavior to the overall mean. The overall mean for behaviors is 3.08, and each individual behavior mean was compared to see if it was more or less than the 3.08 average for all behaviors. Those behaviors which are significantly greater (less tolerable) and lower (more tolerable) from the average are noted in Table 1 in the significance column (p).

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the tolerance level for externalizing behaviors as a whole compared to internalizing behaviors overall. The scores for internalizing and externalizing behaviors were computed by averaging the scores of all the behaviors that fall into each category. There is a significant difference,  $t(147) = 21.88$ ,  $p < .001$ . Externalizing behaviors ( $M=3.87$ ,  $SD=.55$ ) were found to be much less tolerable than internalizing behaviors ( $M=2.54$ ,  $SD=.74$ ).

An additional exploration was made for the variable of teacher age to see if there was relevance for teacher tolerance. Age was not significant for individual behaviors or for overall internalizing versus externalizing behaviors.

The next research question asked what the differences are between male teachers and female teachers in reports of their tolerance levels for student behavior in a classroom, and if they differ in the behaviors they most and least tolerate.

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to determine whether or not there were gender differences between the reports of disturbing behavior in the classroom. The model was not significant, Wilk's  $\Lambda=.48$ ,  $F(74, 172) = 1.05$ ,  $ns$ . There were no differences on any of the individual behaviors between male and female teachers.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for the disturbing behaviors in descending order

Behavior	Mean	SD	N	p
Fighting	4.59	.69	148	.001
Temper tantrums	4.39	.83	148	.001
Disobedience; difficulty in disciplinary control	4.37	.88	147	.001
Negativism; tendency to do the opposite of what is requested	4.30	.81	146	.001
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Destructiveness in regard to his own and/or others' property	4.27	.92	147	.001
Disruptiveness, tendency to annoy and bother others	4.24	.89	147	.001
Irritability, hot tempered; easily aroused to anger	4.10	1.21	147	.001
Boisterousness, rowdiness	3.98	1.01	147	.001
Impertinence; sauciness	3.86	1.06	137	.001
Uncooperativeness in group situations	3.82	.94	147	.001
Irresponsibility; undependability	3.32	1.07	147	.01
Laziness in school and in performance of other tasks	3.31	1.14	148	.05
Distractibility	3.18	1.10	147	ns
Attention seeking, showing off	3.15	1.05	149	Ns
Inattentiveness to what others say	3.13	1.07	146	ns
Nervousness, jitteriness, jumpiness, easily startled	3.03	1.21	147	ns
Tension; Inability to relax	3.01	1.01	147	ns
Depression: chronic sadness	2.95	1.32	147	ns
Anxiety; chronic general fearfulness	2.89	1.24	146	ns
Hypersensitivity; feelings easily hurt	2.88	1.18	148	.05
Often has physical complaints (eg headaches, stomachaches)	2.85	1.01	148	.05
Incoherent Speech	2.85	1.08	146	.05
Feelings of Inferiority	2.65	1.22	147	.001
Passivity; suggestibility; easily led by others	2.59	1.07	146	.001
Easily flustered and confused	2.58	1.02	146	.001
Preoccupation: "in a world of his own"	2.51	1.09	148	.001
Repetitive Speech	2.50	1.02	144	.001
Sluggishness, lethargy	2.49	1.12	146	.001
Fixed expression, lack of emotional reactivity	2.45	1.19	148	.001
Drowsiness	2.44	1.04	147	.001
Aloofness, social reserve	2.38	1.03	147	.001
Lack of self-confidence	2.35	1.09	148	.001
Clumsiness awkwardness; poor muscular coordination	2.23	1.09	147	.001
Social Withdrawal: preference for solitary activities	2.20	1.12	148	.001
Doesn't know how to have fun	2.13	1.11	147	.001
Self-Consciousness, easily embarrassed	2.11	1.07	148	.001
Shyness, bashfulness	1.76	.84	148	.001

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not there were gender differences overall for externalizing behaviors or internalizing behaviors. There were no differences for externalizing behaviors. However, for internalizing behaviors, there was a difference,  $t(146) = -1.99, p < .05$ . Female teachers found internalizing behaviors to be more disturbing ( $M=2.65, SD=.74$ ) than male teachers ( $M=2.41, SD=.71$ ).

The sample was then narrowed down to look at male teachers only depending on the subject they taught. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether or not there were differences depending on subject taught, Judaic Studies, General Studies or both, and how disturbing internalizing vs. externalizing behaviors were found to be. There were no differences amongst the male teachers. Although no difference was found for the tolerance of individual behaviors by male and female teachers, the hypothesis that there would be a difference in the behaviors tolerated least is supported by the finding that female teachers are less tolerant than male teachers of internalizing problem behaviors.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to determine which behaviors teachers find least tolerable and whether there are any teacher gender differences in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school classroom. The first research questions analyzed teachers' tolerance level for various classroom behaviors. The hypothesis was that teachers would find externalizing behaviors such as fighting, disruptiveness, and disobedience to be least tolerable, and internalizing behaviors such as anxiousness, shyness, and passivity to be less disturbing. The findings demonstrate that teachers in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school classroom find externalizing behaviors, specifically fighting, having temper tantrums, disobedience, negativism, and destructiveness, to be least tolerable.

These findings are consistent with the overwhelming majority of studies on teacher tolerance of behaviors (Algozzine, 1980, 2003; Algozzine et al., 2008; Coleman & Gilliam, 1983; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Landon & Mesinger, 1989; Liljequist & Renk, 2007; Mooney & Algozzine, 1978; Safran & Safran, 1984; Safran et al., 1985; Stuart, 1994). Teachers are least tolerant of externalizing problem behaviors. The results from the current study also supported the findings that teachers find internalizing behaviors, specifically clumsiness, social withdrawal, doesn't know how to have fun, self-consciousness, and shyness to be most tolerable. When looking at internalizing behaviors versus externalizing behaviors as a whole, externalizing

behaviors as a whole were found to be significantly much less tolerable than internalizing behaviors.

A religious education encompasses more than academics. Students are expected to behave appropriately, which includes an aspect of ethical and moral values in behavior. Perhaps this is the reason that teachers in the current study, all working in a yeshiva setting where moral values are stressed, have a relatively lower tolerance for behaviors that violate this ethic, such as fighting and destructiveness. To the extent that the nature of the schools in this study is to offer both religious and secular education to an all-male population, the results may be projected onto comparable educational settings.

The second research question looked at the differences between male and female teachers' reports of their tolerance level for specific behaviors. The findings indicate no significant difference in teachers' tolerance level for any of the individual behaviors based on their gender. However, when looking at externalizing versus internalizing behaviors, female teachers were more disturbed by internalizing behaviors than male teachers. This finding confirms studies (Eagly, 1995; Feingold, 1994; Masling & Stern, 1963; Thijs and Verkuyten, 2009) indicating that female teachers are more nurturing which would indicate that they would find internalizing behaviors to be more disturbing than their male counterparts. Eagly (1995) explains that because females are more nurturing than males, they "adopt a care perspective" (p. 150). This perspective of females could account for the female teachers' concern for, or disturbance of, internalizing behaviors, more than that of male teachers, as indicated in the results of the current study. This would follow prior research which found differences for gender (Duffy et al., 2001; Eagly, 1995; Evans & Tribble, 1986; Feingold, 1994; Hopf & Hatzichristou, 1999; Masling & Stern, 1963; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2009).

Further explanation for this finding may be offered by Sadler-Smith (2010), who explored the topic of intuitive style. One factor was that of gender. He cites numerous studies that attest to the fact that women are more in tune to the subtleties and observations of "nonverbal cues" (pp. 265-266) than men. He states that in regard to social intuition, additional research is needed to address this unresolved area of female intuition. Perhaps because women are more in tune than men to internal emotions, they are more likely to notice and be more mindful of internalizing behavior problems in students.

Early detection and intervention of behavior problems are critical. As Breitenstein, Hill, and Gross (2009) state, there is "considerable benefit in identifying

and treating problems early while behavior may be more responsive to treatment” (p. 7). Hirshfeld-Becker et al. (2002) posit that of great significance is the fact that early ascertainment of problem behaviors in children may be preventative of more serious problems. Studies have demonstrated that the earlier the diagnosis of childhood depression and anxiety, the better the prognosis. Reinherz, Paradis, Giaconia, Stashwick, and Fitzmaurice (2003) posit that it is “vital to identify childhood and adolescent predictors” of depression, to effectively treat and prevent a chronic manifestation of the depression (p. 2141). Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, and Buka (2003) concur that early prevention is needed to diminish the effects of long-term depression. Specifically, as related to the results of this study, that female teachers are more intuitive to social and internalizing problems, the researchers state that “behavioral inhibition increases the risk for anxiety disorders, particularly anxiety” (Hirshfeld-Becker et al., 2002, p. 563). The value of training male teachers to be more in tune to internalizing behaviors in children is of great import for students to grow into healthy, functioning adults.

### **Implications**

“Teacher preference for students is closely related to student behavior” (Lewin et al., p. 188, 1983). In addition, and of great significance, a teacher’s perception is a main determinant for student referrals for interventions, whether behavioral or academic (Waguespack and Moore, 1993). The relationship of teacher tolerance and attitude and student behavior is significant. As such, it is incumbent on educators to not only find ways to improve student behavior, but to train teachers to view and manage behaviors while maintaining a positive attitude towards the student. Studies demonstrate that teacher training helps teachers manage student behaviors. Teachers, indeed, are in favor of training and support in dealing with disturbing student behaviors. In their study, Lane, Mahdavo, and Borthwick-Duffy (2003) found that the majority of teachers expected and wanted support in applying behavioral strategies. Kelly, Bullock, and Dykes (1977) concur. However, teacher training without a system of school-wide support and policies is insufficient in improving teacher management of student behaviors (Tillery et al., 2010). This would indicate that school administrators should provide teacher training sessions alongside a set of policies for the on-going maintenance of teacher efficacy in approaching behavior problems.

More pointedly, concerning the current findings that teachers in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school find externalizing behaviors to be least tolerable, school administrators should set in place training and support for their staff, both proactive and active, with the goal of creating a culture that supports appropriate

behaviors as well as managing behavior problems. Being that boys' behavior has been found to be significantly more problematic than girls' behavior, compounded with the additional challenge of a longer school day, a dual curriculum, and teachers with varied backgrounds and expertise, this study indicates the necessity for implementation of behavioral intervention training and support in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school. Effective support for teachers includes teacher training, school policies, and school-wide support to instill and maintain appropriate, positive behavior.

Although the findings indicate no difference for teacher tolerance of individual behaviors based on gender, teachers differ in their tolerance of internalizing and externalizing behaviors when these behaviors are viewed separately. Female teachers are more disturbed by internalizing behaviors than male teachers, and prior studies would attest to the nurturing quality of females as the contributing factor for their low tolerance level. Even though male teachers are more tolerant of internalizing behaviors than female teachers, this may not necessarily imply that the behaviors do not bother the teachers. Rather, it may infer that the behaviors are not being dealt with strategically.

In a study by Demetriou, Wilson, and Winterbottom (2009), the authors explained that female teachers tended to be more concerned about student behavior, both externalizing and internalizing, than male teachers and would exert more effort towards finding the right strategy to manage the behavior. They also found that male teachers were more negative, and not as quick to ask for help in dealing with behavior problems, than their female counterparts. Hansen and Mulholland (2005) suggested that male teachers need not be as nurturing as female teachers, but rather, approach the care of students in a relational manner, promoting the "ethic of care" approach to students (p. 130). Studies indicate that early ascertainment of behavior problems may prevent later exacerbated problems (Breitenstein, Hill, & Gross, 2009; Hirshfeld-Becker et al., 2002). It is incumbent, therefore, on administrators of male teachers, who comprise the majority of the teacher profile in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school, to implement staff training with on-going support geared to their understanding of internalizing behaviors. The goal would be not only for the improvement of classroom behavior, but to guide male teachers to select an effective strategy when dealing with these behaviors in students. Female teachers would benefit from this training as well, as they would become more cognizant of the importance of effective detection and approaches for problem behaviors. The teachers would be educated in the correct method to prevent these problems from becoming

more difficult to effectively deal with and to prevent their growth into major adult problems, which include anxiety and depression.

### **Limitations and Future Studies**

Effective behavior interventions are key to controlling behavior challenges in a classroom. Implementation of a systematic behavior intervention plan may increase a teacher's tolerance for misbehavior as he or she would have the necessary tools to address the behavior. Further research is needed to hone in on interventions that are measurably successful for externalizing behaviors, which were found to be most disturbing in the current study, and to train teachers to implement those interventions into behavioral practice in a classroom.

One clear limitation in this study is that the results gleaned are not generalizable to the general public but only to all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school in the New York Metropolitan area. Also, this study addresses student behaviors and teacher tolerance in an all-male yeshiva setting. It may be informative and interesting to note differences found in an all-female setting.

This study utilizes teacher self-reports as a means of measuring teacher tolerance level towards a child. One clear limitation is the factor of self-reporting by the teachers. Future studies should include an observational component to contribute to more accurate analyses.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides significant information about how teachers in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva elementary school view behaviors. The data affords educators the insight of the destructive cycle of negative teacher perception and problem behaviors. Student behavior constitutes a substantial segment of a teacher's responsibility. Teacher perception and attitude of student behavior are crucial in determining a student's school experience. This study offers data regarding the types of behaviors teachers find least tolerable and discusses interventions for managing the behaviors.

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## Appendix A: Behaviors Categorized as Externalizing or Internalizing

### 22 Internalizing Behaviors

Doesn't know how to have fun  
 Self-consciousness; easily embarrassed  
 Fixed expression; lack of emotional reactivity  
 Feelings of inferiority  
 Preoccupation; "in a world of his own"  
 Shyness, bashfulness  
 Social withdrawal; preference for solitary activities  
 Repetitive speech  
 Lack of self-confidence  
 Easily flustered and confused  
 Incoherent speech  
 Hypersensitivity; feelings easily hurt  
 Anxiety; chronic general fearfulness  
 Tension; inability to relax  
 Depression, chronic sadness  
 Passivity, suggestibility; easily led by others  
 Aloofness, social reserve  
 Clumsiness, awkwardness; poor muscular coordination  
 Sluggishness, lethargy  
 Drowsiness  
 Nervousness, jitteriness, jumpiness; easily startled  
 Often has physical complaints, e.g., headaches, stomachaches

### 15 Externalizing Behaviors

Attention-seeking, "showing off"  
 Disruptiveness; tendency to annoy and bother others  
 Boisterousness, rowdiness  
 Inattentiveness to what others say  
 Fighting  
 Temper tantrums  
 Laziness in school and in performance of other tasks  
 Irresponsibility; undependability  
 Disobedience; difficulty in disciplinary control  
 Uncooperativeness in group situations  
 Distractibility  
 Destructiveness in regard to his own and/or others' property  
 Negativism; tendency to do the opposite of what is requested  
 Impertinence; sauciness  
 Irritability, hot tempered; easily aroused to anger