

## **The Teacher's Pet Phenomenon as Perceived by Students<sup>1</sup>**

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The present study investigated the teacher's pet phenomenon from the perspective of students. Participants read scenarios depicting "deserving" and "undeserving" male and female teacher's pets and then answered questions about how bothered they thought a typical student would be by each of the scenarios. Results showed an interaction between the sex of the teacher's pet and whether they were deserving of the special attention or not. Specifically, participants were least bothered by deserving pets who were female and most bothered by females who were undeserving of extra attention. This finding did not vary with the sex of the participants. A possible reason for this outcome is discussed.

### **Introduction**

The present study reflects our attempt to better understand how typical students perceive deserving and undeserving preferential treatment from teachers.

Babad (1995) found that when a classroom contains a pet who is perceived as being unpopular or undeserving, students react negatively, demonstrate lower morale, and maintain a less positive classroom climate.

Based on Babad (1995), we hypothesized that "deserving" teacher's pets would be tolerated more and would produce less negative affect in students.

Also, because data from Good and Brophy (1979) suggest students feel that teachers favor girls, the difference between sex of participants and sex of teacher's pet was examined.

The format used was first developed by Weinstein (1985; 1989). Weinstein replaced observations in the classroom with a focus on students' perceptions and their own interpretations of teacher behavior.

By asking students how they feel about a given situation, responses are less ambiguous than when experimenters speculate on feelings based solely on observable behaviors.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Subjects were 101 RMU students (54 males and 47 females). Ages ranged between 18 – 24 years old. Students received extra credit for volunteering.

#### **Design**

The present study used a 2x2x2 mixed factorial design in which: Sex of participant (male/female) was manipulated between subjects; Perception (deserving/undeserving) was manipulated within subjects; and Sex of teacher's pet (male/female) was manipulated within subjects.

#### **Materials & Procedure**

A questionnaire was created to measure students' perceptions of hypothetical situations depicting preferential treatment from teachers.

The questionnaire contained scenarios that portrayed characteristics common of teacher's pets and asked participants to rate how bothered a typical student would be by the scenario. Ratings were based on a 5-point scale in which 5 meant very bothered and 1 meant not bothered at all.

#### **Sample Survey Items**

Sally always participates in class. The teacher gives her more responsibilities, such as watching

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the class or taking notes to the office. [*Deserving - Female*]

Joey has a 4.0 and perfect attendance. The teacher lets him leave early on Fridays. [*Deserving - Male*]

Sara blends into the classroom and only does what is required of her. The teacher gives her extra bathroom breaks and hall passes. [*Undeserving - Female*]

Mark is an average student. He seldom participates unless called upon. He gets away with more during class, like being disruptive. [*Undeserving - Male*]

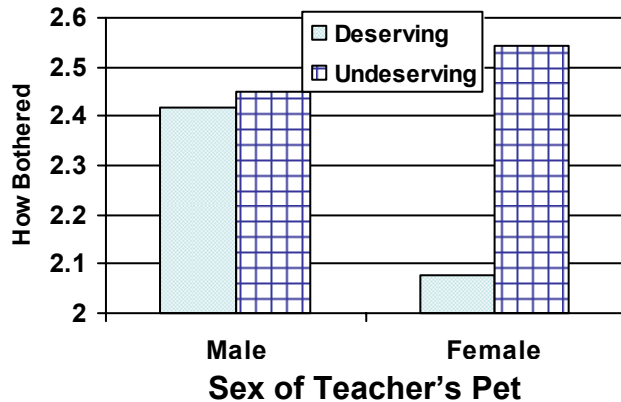
**Results**

A 2 (participant) x 2 (pet) x 2 (deservedness) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on mean bother ratings.

The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Sex of teacher’s pet,  $F(1, 99) = 6.49, p < .05$ , in which male pets (2.29) were perceived as less bothersome than female pets (2.48).

Also obtained was an interaction between sex of teacher’s pet and deservedness,  $F(1,99) = 13.65, p < .05$ , which is depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** QPI accuracy by familiarity.



**Conclusions**

Our findings indicate that students are bothered by preferential treatment from teachers

except when preference is given to deserving females. Students are particularly bothered by observing preferential treatment to undeserving females.

The present outcome is supported by research done by Good and Brophy (1979). Their study examined why students perceive preferential treatment even when teachers provide identical learning environments for both sexes.

The authors claimed that boys received more criticism from teachers due to their frequently disruptive behavior. This led to the impression of boys being less deserving, and therefore less tolerated when they possessed positive pet attributes. In other words, students generate an expectancy about stereotypic classroom behavior.

The present study has helped to narrow down the differences between perceptions of male and female teachers’ pets. Consistent with Good and Brophy (1979), males are viewed as undeserving of preferential treatment regardless of how deserving they may be.

Females, on the other hand, are viewed as deserving of preferential treatment probably because they are viewed as more scholarly than males. However, preferential treatment is much more bothersome if females violate scholarly expectations compared with when males violate scholarly expectations.

**References**

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