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ABSTRACT

Student evaluation of professors is increasingly accepted as a normal part of higher education. To examine whether students' involvements and participation in an instructional setting would be positively correlated with their evaluations of faculty performance, 66 college students were given a Likert type rating scale to rate their own behaviors in an instructional setting and to evaluate faculty performance. Eight dimensions of the instructor's performance were rated: (1) knowledge of subject matter; (2) ability to answer student questions; (3) ability to explain, demonstrate, and present material clearly; (4) ability to stimulate student interest; (5) willingness to talk with students outside of class; (6) clarity of course requirements; (7) clarity of grading criteria; and (8) knowledge gained by student in class. Correlations among student behaviors and faculty performance ratings were examined. The results showed that students' self-reported behaviors in an instructional setting were significantly correlated with their faculty evaluations. Further, 33 out of 36 intercorrelations among the eight dimensions of the instructor's performance reached significance, suggesting a strong halo effect in students' evaluations. The present results supported the notion that ratings may give a better indication of a rater's schemata than they do a ratee's actual level of performance. (NB)

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A Correlational Study of Students' Evaluations of Faculty Performance  
and Their Self-Ratings in an Instructional Setting

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Running head: STUDENT EVALUATIONS

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A Correlational Study of Students' Evaluation of Faculty Performance  
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The annual exercise of documenting performance appraisals is generally practiced by virtually all modern organizations. In a survey of current practices of performance appraisal, Locher and Teel (1977) found that over 90% of organizations reported the use of appraisal, the majority also reported dissatisfaction with the process. In most organizations, the major objectives of performance appraisal are to provide feedback to workers about performance against certain established goals, to coach the employees to improve and modify undesirable behaviors, to determine training and development needs related to promotion or improved job performance, and to provide a basis for compensation treatment (Gehrman, 1984).

Student evaluation of professors is increasingly accepted as a normal part of higher education. Many studies in the literature examined different rating forms used in instructor evaluation (e.g., Bending, 1954; Field, Simpkins, Browne, & Rich, 1971; Harari & Zedeck, 1973; Ryans, 1963; Smalzreid & Remmers, 1943). Other studies focused on rating errors (e.g., Bernardin, 1978), students' satisfaction with their course work (e.g., Finaly & Neumann, 1985; Neumann & Neumann, 1980), and course improvement (e.g., Barham & Prosser, 1985). The major purpose of the present study was to examine students' evaluation of faculty performance and their self-ratings in a learning setting.

In a study of attitude similarity and liking for a supervisor, Good and Good (1974) found that a supervisor who is attitudinally similar to oneself will be evaluated more positively than an attitudinally dissimilar one for fairness in evaluating employees, understanding of people, open-mindedness, judgement in a work situation, personal attractiveness, and desirability as a supervisor. It was argued that performance evaluations can be significantly influenced by the degree to which

an evaluator is attitudinally similar to the stimulus person (Good & Good, 1974).

Bernardin and Beatty (1984) also suggested that a general problem impeding the accuracy of appraisal has to do with a rater's liking for the ratee. Dobbins (1982) found that liking may affect subsequent ratings through the process of both perception and memory. Moreover, Cardy (1982) also found that the most inaccurate ratings are given when the ratees are likable. Following this line of reasoning, the present authors reasoned students' liking of their instructor as a person and as a teacher would be positively correlated with students' evaluations of faculty performance.

Further, individuals' self-concept also has a major influence on how they perceive others (Zalkind & Costello, 1962). That is, people will be able to perceive others accurately, when they understand themselves (Norman, 1953). Further, as Steers (1984) stated that "when we accept ourselves (i.e., have a positive self-image), we are more likely to see favorable characteristics in others" (p. 90). Following this line of reasoning, it was plausible that students' involvements and participation in an instructional setting would be positively correlated with their evaluations of faculty performance.

#### Method

##### Subjects

Subjects were 66 undergraduate and graduate students from three different classes of an introductory organizational behavior course of a regional state university of about 10,000 students. All these three classes were taught by the same instructor in the Summer and Fall of 1985. Students were informed that their participation in this research project was completely voluntary and the results of this study would be used for research purposes only. All students were encouraged to participate and their anonymity was assured. All students in these classes

volunteered for the study.

### Procedure

All students were given a 7-point, Likert type rating scale to rate their own behavior in an instructional setting, with disagree strongly (very low) (1), neutral (4), and agree strongly (very high) (7) as anchor points. Eight items were used to measure the instructor's performance: (1) his knowledge of the subject matter, (2) his ability to answer students' questions, (3) his ability to explain, demonstrate, and present material clearly and understandably, (4) his ability to stimulate students' interest in the subject matter, (5) his willingness to talk with students outside of class, (6) clarity of course requirements, (7) clarity of grading criteria, and (8) knowledge you gained in this class. These eight items were also used by the university for the instructor evaluation. The same 7-point, Likert type rating scale was used. There were 29 items on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to students in the 12th week (or equivalent) of the semester. Therefore, it was believed that the students in these classes would have enough time to know their instructor and thus would give a more accurate evaluation of their instructor in the later part of the semester.

### Results and Discussion

The means, standard deviations, and the items on the questionnaire are presented in Table 1. Table 2 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients between students' self-ratings and their evaluations of faculty performance. The results of Table 2 showed that all eight items of teaching evaluations were positively correlated with students' liking of the professor as a teacher. All of the students' evaluations of faculty performance (except clarity of course requirements) were also significantly correlated with their liking of the professor as a person and students' interests in the subject matter at the time of the

evaluation. Students' interests in the subject matter before they took the course was only significantly related to one faculty performance variable: knowledge gained in the class. There was a significant level of increase in terms of students' interests in the subject matter before ( $\bar{M} = 4.75$ ) and after ( $\bar{M} = 5.33$ ) they took the course,  $t(65) = 3.59$ ,  $p = .001$ . Therefore, it appears that students' evaluations of faculty performance are highly related to students' liking of the instructor as a person, liking of the instructor as a teacher, and their interests in the course (or the subject matter) at the time of the evaluation.

Students' perception of the fairness of tests given by the instructor was also significantly correlated with their evaluations of the instructor's ability to explain, demonstrate, and present material clearly and understandably, the instructor's ability to stimulate students' interest in the subject matter, his willingness to talk with students outside of class, clarity of course requirements, clarity of grading criteria, and knowledge gained in this class. Students' perception of the fairness of grades given by the instructor was also related to the last four factors of faculty performance. These results suggested that students' evaluations of faculty performance were highly affected by the halo effect.

Students' self-reported behaviors in an instructional setting were also examined together with students' evaluations of faculty performance. The present study showed that reading the textbook before coming to the class was positively associated with their ratings of the instructor's knowledge of the subject matter and students' knowledge gained in this class. Participation in classroom discussions was significantly related to the students' ratings of the professor's ability to stimulate students' interest in the subject matter, willingness to talk with students outside of class, and knowledge gained in this class. Reading textbook after the class was associated with students' ratings of the instructor's clarity of grading

criteria and knowledge gained in this class. Asking questions in the class was positively correlated with the ratings of instructor's ability to explain material clearly and understandably, willingness to talk with students outside of class, and knowledge gained in this class. On the other hand, students' self-reported sleepiness in the class was negatively correlated with the ratings of instructor's ability to explain material clearly and understandably. These correlational data do not offer any cause-and-effect relationship, yet, it appears that students' self-reported activities in a learning setting, i.e., their level of participation and involvements in a classroom setting, are associated with students' rating of faculty performance. The results of the present study can be used to support the notion that performance ratings may give a better indication of a rater's schemata than they do of a ratee's actual level of performance (cf. Bernardin & Beatty, 1984).

Moreover, the rating of the instructor's clarity of course requirement was negatively correlated with students' (self-reported) reading the textbook before and after the class, and doing homework. It was probably caused by the fact that some students were very much concerned about their tests/quizzes and the items covered in tests. If they were not given sample questions, possible items on the test, and information concerning what will be covered in a test, they might have felt that the instructor did not give them a clear instruction for the course requirement. This was true especially for those students who had studied the textbook, had done their homework and were concerned about their grades in the class.

The present study further examined the intercorrelations among students' self-reported behaviors and found that proper test preparation was positively correlated with the extent students would read the textbook before the class ( $r = .34$ ,  $p = .002$ ), come to the class regularly ( $r = .34$ ,  $p = .003$ ), and do homework



regularly ( $\underline{r} = .32$ ,  $\underline{p} = .005$ ), and was negatively correlated with being tired ( $\underline{r} = -.25$ ,  $\underline{p} = .02$ ) and being sleepy in class ( $\underline{r} = .23$ ,  $\underline{p} = .03$ ). Students' proper test preparation was also positively associated with their perception of the fairness of tests given by the instructor ( $\underline{r} = .22$ ,  $\underline{p} = .034$ ), the fairness of grades given by the instructor ( $\underline{r} = .32$ ,  $\underline{p} = .004$ ), liking of the instructor as a person ( $\underline{r} = .27$ ,  $\underline{p} = .013$ ), and their rating of knowledge gained in the class ( $\underline{r} = .27$ ,  $\underline{p} = .015$ ).

The extent to which students asked questions in the class was positively correlated with their interests in the subject matter before they took the course ( $\underline{r} = .39$ ,  $\underline{p} = .001$ ), after they took the course ( $\underline{r} = .44$ ,  $\underline{p} = .000$ ), the extent they participated in classroom discussions ( $\underline{r} = .65$ ,  $\underline{p} = .000$ ), students' proper test preparation ( $\underline{r} = .29$ ,  $\underline{p} = .009$ ), interests in case studies ( $\underline{r} = .29$ ,  $\underline{p} = .01$ ), and was negatively correlated with being sleepy in class ( $\underline{r} = -.24$ ,  $\underline{p} = .025$ ), and wanting to watch more movies in class ( $\underline{r} = -.24$ ,  $\underline{p} = .027$ ). It appears that when students' self-reported behaviors in a learning setting are examined, several of those desirable behaviors tend to occur together, whereas some undesirable behaviors (e.g., being sleepy and tired in class) do not seem to occur together with those desirable behaviors.

When students' evaluations of faculty performance were further examined, the results of the intercorrelations among the eight dimensions of the instructor's performance showed significant results. In fact, out of 36 intercorrelations, 33 of them have reached significance at the .05 level. These results further supported the halo effect in students' evaluations. A halo effect is a tendency to allow knowledge of one trait to influence impressions of an individual's other traits. Therefore, the halo effect might have inhibited students from actually seeing the trait being judged.

Locher and Teel (1977) found that over 50% of the organizations they surveyed

provided no training for managers on how to appraise subordinates' efforts. The students in the present study were studying organizational behavior. Although the major purpose of the course was not to reduce the halo effect in performance appraisal, yet several topics such as perceptual processes, attributions, rating errors, and perceptual differences between superiors and subordinates were discussed in the earlier part of the semester. It is plausible that students' retention of these related material in this course might have lasted less than one semester. Further, for students who have no formal training in perceptual processes, rating errors, and performance appraisal, the validity of their evaluations of faculty performance is questionable at best. More research is needed in this area.

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Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Major Variables

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. My interests in this course (topic) before I actually took this course	4.75	1.54
2. My interests in this course (topic) at the present time	5.33	1.21
3. The overall quality of the textbook	5.29	.91
4. The content of the textbook	5.38	.87
5. The presentation and readability of the textbook	5.52	1.01
6. I always read the book before I come to the class.	3.42	1.41
7. I come to this class regularly.	5.77	1.26
8. I do my homework regularly.	5.26	1.33
9. I participate in classroom discussions regularly.	4.85	1.50
10. I feel tired in classroom very often.	3.71	1.75
11. I feel sleepy in classroom very often.	3.45	1.61
12. I read my textbook after the class.	4.64	1.46
13. I ask questions in class if I do not understand the point that the professor makes.	4.58	1.70
14. I prepare for the test properly.	5.23	1.06
15. My professor gives us a fair test.	5.86	1.09
16. My professor gives me a fair grade.	6.27	1.03
17. I would like to have more case studies for classroom discussions.	4.56	1.53
18. I would like to have more discussions on theories.	3.98	1.42
19. I would like to have more movies/video presentations.	4.98	1.20
20. How do you like your professor as a person?	6.39	.80
21. How do you like your professor as a teacher?	5.80	1.13

Table 1

Continued.

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Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Student Evaluation of Faculty Performance:		
22. His knowledge of the subject matter	6.55	.53
23. His ability to answer students' questions	5.98	.99
24. His ability to explain, demonstrate, and present material clearly and understandably	5.70	1.11
25. His ability to stimulate students' interest in the subject matter	5.20	1.13
26. His willingness to talk with students outside of class	6.32	.77
27. Clarity of course requirements	6.30	.76
28. Clarity of grading criteria	6.24	.91
29. Knowledge you gained in this class	5.65	.98

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Note. N = 66.

Table 2

Correlations of Major Variables

Variable	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
1. Before	09	05	11	18	03	-17	-01	35**
2. After	41***	40***	43***	46***	32**	04	27*	57***
3. Overall Book	18	06	18	32**	-02	09	38***	34**
4. Content	24*	20	33**	38***	07	19	21*	41***
5. Presentation	27*	13	05	27*	10	03	20	14
6. Read Before	28*	03	18	17	-01	-21*	19	30**
7. Come to Class	07	01	09	01	06	-04	04	01
8. Do Homework	10	-01	07	13	13	-26*	04	29**
9. Discussion	11	-00	18	21*	39***	-13	04	48***
10. Feel Tired	-01	-04	-17	03	-17	-16	02	-01
11. Feel Sleepy	-06	-08	-23*	-02	-14	-13	-01	-05
12. Read After	12	-12	-01	02	-05	-24*	24*	27*
13. Ask Questions	06	06	27*	19	29**	-08	01	47***
14. Prepare Test	-00	-10	09	12	06	03	15	27*
15. Fair Test	21	20	21*	27*	25*	34**	28*	30**
16. Fair Grade	12	17	15	18	26*	34**	24*	22*
17. Case Studies	13	26*	29**	19	09	01	-07	09
18. Theories	15	05	12	08	05	-18	01	06
19. Moive/Video	11	14	-06	-02	-01	16	12	01
20. Person	43***	37***	29**	41***	52***	15	27*	49***
21. Teacher	57***	68***	76***	76***	45***	27*	27*	49***

Note. Refer to Table 1 for a complete description of variables.  $N = 66$ .  
 \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .