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ABSTRACT

Although the importance of social skill to interactions with others has long been recognized for clinical individuals, such skills are also of benefit to non-clinical populations. To investigate the potential relationships between social skill and interpersonal conflict resolution tactics, 287 college students (140 males and 147 females) completed a measure of general social skill, the Social Performance Survey Schedule (SPSS), and a measure of tactics used during conflict situations, the Conflict-Tactics Scale (CTS). The SPSS is a 5-point rating scale of 100 items, resulting in a full-measure score of total social skill. The CTS is also a 5-point scale which has been factor-analyzed to produce subscale scores in Reasoning, Verbal Aggression, and Physical Violence. An analysis of the results revealed a high correlation between social skill and the use of verbal reasoning in the resolution of conflicts, thus implying social skill involves the use of non-aversive behaviors. Social skill was correlated negatively with verbal aggression and physical violence. Social skill was also found to influence the behavior of others, i.e., high social skills elicited reasoning, and reduced verbal aggression and violence in others. Socially skilled males used less verbal aggression and physical violence than unskilled males. Additional research should address causal relationships between social skill and specific behaviors in interactional contexts. (BL)

Relationship Between Social Skill and Conflict Resolution Tactics

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Relationship Between Social Skill and Conflict Resolution Tactics

Social skills assessment and therapy represents an expanding area within psychology. While differences exist between authors regarding the proper conceptualization of social skill (see for example, Curran, 1979; McFall, 1982), most would agree that social skill influences social interaction. That is, persons with different interactional skills should behave differently and elicit different responses from others because of their behavior.

The importance of social skill to interactions with others has been recognized particularly for individuals who express discomfort in these interactions. However, research regarding the consequences of social skill is somewhat limited, particularly when referring to "normal" (e.g., non-clinical) groups. For example, numerous authors have addressed social skill and related concerns as they pertain to a variety of persons, such as those who are under-assertive (Hersen, Eisler, & Miller, 1973), anxious in heterosexual dating situations (Curran, 1975), and shy (Twentyman & McFall, 1975). However, relatively little attention has been given the impact of social skill for those persons who do not experience therapeutic intervention.

The position here proposed is that social skill can be as influential for "non-clinical" populations as it is for "clinical" groups. While most of the research regarding social skill is concerned with its assessment and application to interactional difficulties, social skill as a measurable construct may also be applied to those who report no serious

problems in interactions with others. In its most basic sense, this research is concerned with relationships between an individual's general level of social skill and his/her behavior in specific social exchanges. In this study, the influence of social skill on the resolution of interpersonal conflicts was examined.

This research was intended as a preliminary investigation of potential relationships between social skill and interpersonal conflict resolution tactics. Prior to data collection, several hypotheses were advanced. First, it was anticipated that social skill level would be positively correlated with the reported use by subjects of non-violent tactics in conflicts and negatively correlated with expressions of hostility and physical violence. Presumably, a major component of social skill involves behavior which is non-aversive to others. Second, it was hypothesized that an individual's level of social skill would influence the behavior of others. If social skill results in response consequences, others should respond to the subjects' skill or skill deficit with positive or aversive behaviors, respectively. Consequently, persons expression of their social skill through their behavior should be reciprocated by the behavior of others. Third, and related to the second hypothesis, it was anticipated that a strong behavioral reciprocity norm would be identified for both aversive and non-aversive behavior during conflict resolution. Numerous authors (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Dengerink & Bertilson, 1974) have noted that interactions can be governed by a norm of reciprocity. Finally, it was expected that an aggressive reciprocity

norm would be more evident for males than for females: Aggressive behavior for a male subject would more likely result in consequent aversive behavior than would the aggressive behavior of a female subject.

To evaluate the above hypotheses, undergraduate subjects completed two measures, a measure of general social skill and a measure of tactics used during conflict situations by both subjects and by others responding to the subjects. The relationship between these measures was examined through inter-correlation matrices.

METHOD

Subjects: Subjects in this study were 287 (140 males and 147 females) students enrolled in Introductory Psychology courses. These subjects completed questionnaires and prescreening measures during evening mass-administration sessions. Subjects received course credit for their participation in these sessions.

Measures of Social Skill and Conflict Resolution Tactics: All subjects were requested to complete, in addition to a brief respondent background information questionniare, the following measures. These measures were presented in counter-balanced order and adopted from their original format to allow subjects to answer the items using a computer-scored answer sheet.

a. Social Performance Survey Schedule (SPSS: Lowe & Cautela (1978)): The SPSS is a one-hundred item measure of general social skill. This measure returns two subscale scores SPSS-Pos and SPSS-Neg which correspond to the demonstration

of socially acceptable (e.g., "I have eye-contact when speaking") and unacceptable behaviors (e.g., "I hurt him/her when teasing him/her"), respectively. Subjects completed the SPSS by indicating for each of the 100 statements describing behavior how frequently they engaged in each behavior using a 5-point rating scale (1="not at all" to 5="very much"). The SPSS also can be scored to return a full-measure score of social skill obtained by reversing the scoring procedure of SPSS-Neg items so that high scores on this subscale represent low frequencies of aversive behavior. Then, this modified scale is added to the score for positive items which results in an estimate of total social skill (SPSS-Tot).

b. Conflict-Tactics Scale (CTS: Straus, 1979): The CTS is a 14-item measure of tactics used in the resolution or attempted resolution of conflicts with others. Stimulus items ranged from "attempted to reason with this person" to "hit (or tried to hit) the other person with an object". Subjects rated their frequency of using each of the 14 behaviors during the past 12 months with a 5-point scale similar to the above.

The CTS has been factor-analyzed (Straus, 1979) and the results of this analysis used to separate the scale into three subscales titled "Reasoning" (use of verbal reasoning to resolve conflicts) "Verbal Aggression" (use of shouting and threats of violence) and "Physical Violence" (threatened or actual use of

physical aggression). In this research, the CTS scales were administered twice. During the first administration, subjects were requested to describe their own use of these tactics. In the second administration, subjects described the use of these tactics by others when in conflict with the subjects. The dual administration of the CTS resulted in descriptions of the subjects' behavior and the behavior of others towards the subjects (CTS-you and CTS-others, respectively).

Procedure: When subjects arrived at the scheduled location, they were given a brief oral presentation regarding their rights as subjects. They then completed the measures without further instructions by the session administrator.

RESULTS

Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficients were calculated between the various scales. These correlations are represented in intercorrelational matrices and are presented for all subjects, males and females, in Tables 1, 2, & 3, respectively.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Insert Table 2 About Here

Insert Table 3 About Here

As can be seen in each of these tables, significant correlations were obtained between a variety of subscales. Examining the correlations for all subjects, significant relationships were observed between socially acceptable behaviors and the use of reasoning (r=.18), as well as the elicitation of reasoning from others (r=.15). In addition, substantial correlations (r's=.56 to .62) between similar tactics used by subjects and by others. Further, negative correlations were observed between total social skill and the use of and elicitation of verbal aggression and physical violence (r=-.19 and -.11, respectively).

When subjects are separated by gender, some relationships change. For example, strong negative correlations between the display of positive behaviors and displaying violence (r=-.30) and eliciting violence from others (r=-.24) are found for male subjects but not for female subjects. Also, for male subjects total social skill is negatively correlated with the use of verbal aggression and physical violence as well as its display by others. For females, however, total social skill is negatively correlated only with the use of verbal aggression by female subjects.

It should be noted that strong positive correlations were found between conflict tactics used by the subjects and those used by others in conflict with the subjects. Further, these correlations were found for both males and females. The size of the correlations for females is smaller than that for males.

DISCUSSION

The results represented by the three correlational matrices provide some degree of support for the hypothesis of the study. A high correlation between social skill and verbal reasoning used in resolution of conflict situations is taken to mean that social skill does involve the use of non-aversive behaviors. In addition, the negative correlations between social skill and verbal aggression and physical violence indicate the low rate of aversive behavior for socially skilled persons. Social skill also has some influence on the behavior of others. For example, a positive correlation was observed between an individual's level of socially acceptable behaviors and their tendency to elicit reasoning from others. In addition, total social skill was negatively correlated with the use by others of verbal aggression and violence in the resolution of conflicts with the subjects. Thus, a person's social skill does influence the behavior of others.

While some degree of significance is lost when correlations are computed for male and female subjects separately, some support for the hypothesis is apparent. For example, the correlations between social skill

and verbal aggression and physical violence are taken to indicate that socially skilled males use less verbal aggression and physical violence than do non-skilled males.

The relationships between a subject's social skill, frequency of positive and aversive behavior is weakest for females. For example, the only relationship between a skill variable (frequency of negative behavior) and a behavior of others occurred for verbal aggression of others. No relationships were observed between social skill and the aversive behavior of subjects in conflict resolution or of others resolving conflicts with the subjects for females. Perhaps others in interaction with female subjects were less likely to respond to aversive behavior of the subjects with aversive behavior.

Several applications of these results are possible. First, the results show that social skill can be related to different types of behavior. That is, subjects with different skill levels behave differently. Social skill as a measurable construct may be important to social psychological attempts to categorize and predict behavior. Moreover, others respond differently to subjects with varying levels of social skill. Strong support was found for a reciprocity norm: Subjects either responded to the behavior of others in a similar fashion to their behavior or others in similar fashion to the behavior of the subjects.

As is always the case with correlational research, more questions are asked than answered. This project was viewed as a preliminary exploration. Additional research in this area should address causal relationships between social skill and the specific behaviors in interactional contexts.

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TABLE 1: CORRELATION MATRIX FOR ALL SUBJECTS (N = 287)

	SPSS			CTS: SUBJECT			CTS: OTHERS		
	POS	NEG	TOT	REAS	VERB.	VIOL	REAS	VERB.	VIOL.
SPSS									
POS	1.00	-.21	.83	.18	-.12	-.20	.15	NS	NS
NEG		1.00	-.72	NS	.34	.22	.10	.28	.13
TOT			1.00	NS	-.28	-.21	NS	-.19	-.11
CTS: SUBJECT									
REASONING				1.00	.19	-.12	.62	.33	.19
VERBAL AGG.					1.00	.50	.23	.60	.41
VIOLENCE						1.00	NS	.34	.56
CTS: OTHERS									
REASONING							1.00	.30	.13
VERBAL AGG.								1.00	.56

ALL CORRELATIONS SHOWN SIGNIFICANT A $P < .05$ OR BETTER

TABLE 2: CORRELATIONAL MATRIX FOR MALES (N = 140)

	SPSS			CTS: SUBJECT			CTS: OTHERS		
	POS	NEG	TOT	REAS	VERB	VIOL	REAS	VERB	VIOL
SPSS:									
POS	1.00	-.21	.80	.23	NS	-.30	NS	NS	-.24
NEG		1.00	-.75	NS	.40	.24	.16	.39	NS
TOT			1.00	NS	-.33	-.35	NS	-.30	-.25
CTS: SUBJECT									
REAS				1.00	.17	.18	.65	.24	NS
VERBAL AGG.					1.00	.54	.25	.64	.48
VIOLENCE						1.00	NS	.42	.68
CTS: OTHERS									
REAS							1.00	.26	NS
VERBAL AGG.								1.00	.51

ALL CORRELATIONS SHOWN SIGNIFICANT A $P \leq .05$ OR BETTER

TABLE 3: CORRELATIONAL MATRIX FOR FEMALE (N = 147)

	SPSS			CTS: SUBJECTS			CTS: OTHERS		
	POS	NEG	TOT	REAS	VERB	VIOL	REAS	VERB	VIOL
SPSS									
POS	1.00	-.13	.84	NS	-.14	NS	NS	NS	NS
NEG		1.00	-.64	NS	.35	NS	NS	.16	NS
TOT			1.00	NS	-.30	NS	NS	NS	NS
CTS: SUBJECT									
REASONING				1.00	.21	NS	.57	.42	.31
VERBAL AGG.					1.00	.52	.21	.59	.38
VIOLENCE						1.00	NS	.26	.43
CTS: OTHERS									
REASONING							1.00	.32	.22
VERBAL AGG.								1.00	.61

ALL CORRELATIONS SHOWN SIGNIFICANT AT P .05 OR BETTER