Stigma of a Label: Educational Expectations for High School Students Labeled with a Learning Disability

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Do the costs of labeling outweigh the benefits?
BACKGROUND

• **Labeling theory**
  
  • Labels are socially constructed to some extent
  
  • Labels can be stigmatizing and legitimize stratification
  
  • Labeled person’s altered psyches results in the fulfillment of the label’s prophecies
BACKGROUND

• Adolescents’ educational expectations
  • Adolescents labeled with LD have lower educational expectations than adolescents not labeled with disability
  • Informed by the educational expectations of adults around them
BACKGROUND

• Teachers’ and parents’ educational expectations
  • Academic evidence
  • Class and race
  • Stigma related to the LD label
• **Differentiated stigma:** Interpretations of labels depend on status relative to the label
  
  • Teachers have higher status relative to LD label?
  
  • Lower class parents have lowest status?
Differentiated stigma: Interpretations of the LD label depend on contextual achievement norms
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• Do teachers and parents hold lower educational expectations for adolescents labeled with an LD than they do for otherwise similar adolescents not labeled with disability?

• Are labeled adolescents’ lower educational expectations at all attributable to their teachers’ and parents’ expectations for them?

• In what ways do status differences relative to the LD label influence interpretations of the label?
DATA AND METHODS

• Education Longitudinal Study of 2002

• 10,000 10th graders in 540 high schools

• Base year surveys of students (and FU1), parent, math and English teachers, and high school administrator

• Transcript and administrative data on students’ academic achievement and the characteristics of their high school
DATA AND METHODS

• Analytic plan
  • Multinominal logistic regression models
  • Predicted probabilities
  • Decomposition
DATA AND METHODS

• Teachers' and Parent's Perceptions of and Expectations for 10th Grader

  • Teachers report 10th grader disabled
  • Parent reports 10th grader has LD

  • Teachers' educational expectations
  • Parent's educational expectations
DATA AND METHODS

- **Sociodemographic & Academic Background**
  - Sex
  - Race
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Both biological parents in household
  - Type of high school
  - Ever in remedial English or math
  - Ever retained a grade
  - Age at 10th grade survey

- **9th Grade Coursework**
  - Coursework credits in:
    - Low level
    - Regular level
    - Advanced level
    - Non-core
  - Level of math
  - Level of science
DATA AND METHODS

• Early High School Achievement
  • Semesters of 9th grade core coursework failed
  • GPA in all 9th grade coursework
  • Score on 10th grade reading test

• Attitudes and Behaviors as a 10th Grader
  • Teacher and student reports on academic and social behaviors
  • Student's passivity
  • Student reports on attitudes toward learning, and math and English coursework
# RESULTS

## Predicted Probabilities of Educational Expectations for 10th Graders by LD Status, without Controls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BA or Higher</th>
<th>Some College</th>
<th>No College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher's</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not labeled with disability</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeled LD</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent's</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not labeled with disability</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeled LD</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Models with controls include controls for sociodemographic and academic background, 9th grade coursework, early high school achievement, attitudes and behaviors as a 10th grader. All differences by LD status are statistically significant (p<0.001).
Predicted Probabilities of Educational Expectations for 10th Graders by LD Status, with Controls

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<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.15</td>
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Note: Models with controls include controls for sociodemographic and academic background, 9th grade coursework, early high school achievement, attitudes and behaviors as a 10th grader. All differences by LD status are statistically significant (p<0.001).
## RESULTS

### Mediators between the LD Label and Teachers' and Parents' Educational Expectations for Adolescent as a 10th Grader

<table>
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<th>Parent's</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade Coursework</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early High School Achievement</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes and Behaviors as a 10th Grader</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers report 10th grader has disability</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent reports 10th grader has LD</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Teachers'</td>
<td>Parent's</td>
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RESULTS

Predicted Probabilities of Parent’s Educational Expectation that 10th Grader will Complete a BA or Higher by LD Status and SES

-2SD  -1SD  National Average  +1SD  +2SD

Note: Controls included for sociodemographic and academic background, 9th grade coursework, early high school achievement, attitudes and behaviors as a 10th grader. The interaction between the LD label and SES is statistically significant (p<0.05, based on marginal effects estimates).
RESULTS

Proportion of Parents Reporting their 10th Grader Has a Learning Disability by LD Status and SES

- Not labeled with disability
- Labeled LD

Note: Differences by SES in relationship between LD label and parent reports of LD are statistically significant (p<0.05).
RESULTS

Average 9th Grade GPA by LD Status and SES

- Not labeled with disability
- Labeled LD

Note: Class differences in relationship between LD label and GPA are statistically significant (p<0.05).
# RESULTS

## Mediators between the LD Label and Adolescents' Educational Expectations as 12th Graders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Percent of the Total Effect of the LD Label due to Confounding of Each Mediator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade Coursework</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early High School Achievement</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes and Behaviors as a 10th Grader</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers' Perceptions of and Expectations for 10th Grader</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's Perceptions of and Expectations for 10th Grader</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSIONS

• LD label is stigmatizing

• Stigma is more evident:
  • Among actors with higher status relative to the LD label
  • In contexts with higher achievement norms