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SEX DIFFERENCES IN INSTRUCTIONAL DISSENT[1]

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Summary.—This study examined sex differences in students' expression of instructional dissent and the role that an instructor's sex plays in spurring this dissent. Participants were 446 undergraduate students (M age = 20.1 yr., SD = 2.8; 148 men, 290 women, 8 unreported) who completed the Instructional Dissent Scale (IDS) and provided demographic information. Results indicated small effects for student sex and instructor sex on IDS scores. Female students reported communicating more expressive dissent than male students, whereas male students reported communicating more rhetorical dissent and vengeful dissent than female students. Students also directed vengeful dissent more towards male instructors than female instructors.

When students communicate instructional dissent, they "express their disagreements or complaints about class-related issues" (Goodboy, 2011b, p. 423). Research suggests that instructional dissent is the result of student perceptions of unfairness in the classroom (Horan, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010; Goodboy, 2011b), in addition to inferior teaching behaviors enacted by the instructor such as rudeness, laziness, not giving feedback, and violating the syllabus (Goodboy, 2011a). Students typically engage in three types of dissent, including expressive dissent (i.e., venting their class-related frustrations to others in an attempt to feel better; e.g., complaining to other classmates about a frustrating class they share), rhetorical dissent (i.e., attempting to persuade their instructor to correct a perceived wrongdoing, e.g., convincing a teacher to raise a test grade), and vengeful dissent (i.e., attempting to enact revenge on the instructor by getting him/her in trouble, e.g., telling other teachers about their bad colleague; Goodboy, 2011a, 2011b). Instructional dissent is primarily communicated to the instructor, classmates, friends, and family members (Goodboy, 2011a), depending on the type of dissent.

Although research has ascertained why students dissent, whom they dissent to, and how they dissent, this study sought to understand predictors of instructional dissent, that is, what characteristics make students more or less likely to engage in the different types of dissent. One of these predictors is the sex of students. Although sex differences in communication tend to produce small effect sizes (Canary & Hause, 1993), plenty of

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research suggests that male and female students communicate differently. For example, men tend to be more argumentative and verbally aggressive (Burgoon, Dillard, & Doran, 1983; Nicotera & Rancer, 1994; Jordan-Jackson, Lin, Rancer, & Infante, 2008), anticipate more benefits associated with acting aggressively (Marks, Hine, Manton, & Thorsteinsson, 2012), and endorse more antisocial messages for gaining compliance (Dallinger & Hample, 1994).

Considering that male students report disagreeing more with instructors (Nadler & Nadler, 1990) and female students experience more communication apprehension then male students (Jaasma, 1997), it is possible that men and women communicate dissent differently in the college classroom. Hypothesis 1: male and female students will differ in their communication of instructional dissent (i.e., expressive, rhetorical, vengeful).

Not only may the sex of a student be associated with undergraduate students' dissent behavior, but the sex of the instructor may also influence students' propensity to dissent. Research suggests that male instructors are perceived by students as more dominant and they interrupt students more (Nadler & Nadler, 1990). Other research suggests that male instructors lecture more and ask fewer questions (Brady & Eisler, 1999). Female instructors, however, are perceived as more supportive (Nadler & Nadler, 1990) and more sympathetic and helpful (Chamberlin & Hickey, 2001). Therefore, students tend to participate more with female instructors (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990) and much research suggests that female instructors receive higher student evaluations (Tatro, 1995; Heckert, Latier, Ringwald, & Silvey, 2006; Smith, Yoo, Farr, Salmon, & Miller, 2007). Given these student-generated perceptual differences of male and female instruction, it is possible that the sex of an instructor may yield differences in instructional dissent. Hypothesis 2: male instructors will receive more instructional dissent (i.e., expressive, rhetorical, vengeful) from students.

Method

Participants

Participants were 446 undergraduate students (148 men, 290 women, 8 sex unreported; *M* age = 20.1 yr., *SD* = 2.8, range 18–46) enrolled in numerous communication studies courses at a large northeastern university. Participants reported on 229 male and 213 female professors (4 unreported).

Procedure

Participants completed an anonymous survey in reference to the professor and class they had immediately prior to data collection to obtain a cross-section of classes (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986). This survey included the Instructional Dissent Scale (IDS) and demographic questions.

Measurement

Instructional Dissent Scale (Goodboy, 2011b).—This measure is a 22-item instrument that asks participants to report on how often they express their disagreements or complaints about class-related issues. This measure consists of three subscales that operationalize expressive dissent (10 items), rhetorical dissent (6 items), and vengeful dissent (6 items). Responses were solicited using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0: Never to 4: Very often. Previous internal consistency reliability coefficients for the subscales (Cronbach's alpha) have ranged from .83 to .96 (Goodboy, 2011b; Table 1).

TABLE 1
IDS Items, Subscale Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas

Expressive Dissent ($M = 18.5$, $SD = 11.0$, $\alpha = .96$)
1. I complain to others to express my frustrations with this course.
2. I express my disappointment about this course to other people because it helps me feel better.
3. I talk to other students to see if they also have complaints about this teacher.
4. I complain about my teacher and course because it makes me feel better.
5. I attempt to feel better about my frustrations in this class by communicating with other people.
6. I talk to other students when I am annoyed with my teacher in hopes that I am not the only one.
7. I try to feel better about this course by explaining my aggravations to others.
8. I complain about my teacher to get my frustrations off of my chest.
9. I criticize my teacher's practices to other students because I hope they share my criticism.
10. I talk to other students so we can discuss the problems we have in class.

Rhetorical Dissent ($M = 7.9$, $SD = 5.5$, $\alpha = .87$)
11. I tell my teacher when I disagree with him/her so I can do better in the course.
12. I voice my concerns to my teacher to make sure I get the best grade possible.
13. If want my teacher to remedy my concerns, I complain to him/her.
14. I voice my opinions to my teacher when there is a disagreement because I want to do better in the course.
15. I express my disagreements with my teacher because I want something to change in the course for the better.
16. I have no problem telling my teacher what I need him/her to do for me to succeed in the course.

Vengeful Dissent ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 4.1$, $\alpha = .90$)
17. I hope to ruin my teacher's reputation by exposing his/her bad practices to others.
18. I talk to other teachers and let them know my current teacher is inferior.
19. I hope one day my teacher gets fired as a result of my criticism of him/her.
20. I spread negative publicity about my teacher so that everyone knows how bad he/she is.
21. I make sure that everyone knows how awful my teacher is to get revenge for the bad semester I had.
22. I seek revenge on my teacher by trying to get him/her in trouble.

Note.—Response format ranging from 0: Never to 4: Very often.

Results

To address Hypothesis 1, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was computed to examine differences in scores of the IDS between male and female students. Participants who did not report their sex were removed from the analysis. The MANOVA yielded a statistically significant model for the sex differences (Wilks' $\lambda = .91$, $F_{3,422} = 13.3$, $p < .001$). Univariate sex difference effects were significant for expressive dissent ($F_{1,424} = 4.0$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$), rhetorical dissent ($F_{1,424} = 12.6$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$), and vengeful dissent ($F_{1,424} = 13.5$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). An examination of the mean scores revealed that women scored significantly higher on the expressive dissent subscale ($M = 19.4$, $SD = 11.3$) than men ($M = 17.1$, $SD = 10.3$). Men scored significantly higher on the rhetorical dissent subscale ($M = 9.1$, $SD = 5.5$) than women ($M = 7.2$, $SD = 5.4$). Men also scored significantly higher on the vengeful dissent subscale ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 4.9$) than women ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 3.5$). Although these mean differences were statistically significant, it should be noted that the effect sizes were small.

To address Hypothesis 2, a MANOVA was computed to examine differences in scores of the IDS reported on male and female instructors. Participants who did not report the sex of their instructor were removed from the analysis. The MANOVA yielded a statistically significant model for the sex differences (Wilks' $\lambda = .98$, $F_{3,418} = 2.6$, $p = .05$). The only significant univariate effect was for vengeful dissent ($F_{1,420} = 7.1$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$) with male instructors receiving more ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 4.1$) than female professors ($M = 1.7$, $SD = 3.5$). Again, this effect size was small. Scores for expressive and rhetorical dissent did not significantly differ by the sex of the instructor.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine students' differential use of instructional dissent dependent upon students' sex and the instructor's sex. Two significant findings were revealed. The first finding suggested that female students engaged in more expressive dissent, whereas male students engaged in more rhetorical dissent and vengeful dissent. For female students, expressive dissent may serve to aid women's self-disclosure needs. In a meta-analysis, Dindia and Allen (1992) found that women self-disclose more. Expressive dissent may be a therapeutic way for female students to communicate their frustrations with their coursework. This desire to self-disclose their frustrations may be a function of female students' stronger need to be emotionally expressive (Langer, 2010). In contrast, male students, who preferred more direct communication with their instructor about their class-related problem (i.e., rhetorical dissent), were also more likely to retaliate with negative comments in a vengeful

manner (i.e., vengeful dissent). These differences in dissent may be due to men's more direct and aggressive tendencies to communicate (Eagley & Steffan, 1986). Male students, who tend to be more argumentative than female students (Nicotera & Rancer, 1994; Jordan-Jackson, *et al.*, 2008), may view rhetorical dissent as an appropriate communicative strategy to resolve their classroom discrepancies directly.

Male students' desire to use vengeful dissent may be due to their tendency to be more vengeful in general. In a study on vengeance (Cota-McKinley, Woody, & Bell, 2001), which is defined as "the infliction of harm in return for perceived injury or insult or as simply getting back at another person" (p. 343), men were found to be more accepting of vengeful attitudes than women. Therefore, it was no surprise that the results of this study suggested that men tend to be more vengeful when they communicate dissent about their displeasure stemming from the classroom.

The second major finding was that male instructors receive more vengeful dissent than female instructors. Because men receive more aggression in general (Eagly & Steffan, 1986), and students perceive male instructors to be less supportive and helpful (Nadler & Nadler, 1990; Chamberlin & Hickey, 2001), students may perceive male instructors to be more deserving of their revenge for poor outcomes or experiences.

The main limitation of this study involved the small effect sizes obtained for both types of sex differences. As Canary and Hause (1993) noted, "sex differences in social interaction are small . . . about 1% of the variance is accounted for and these sex differences are moderated by other variables" (p. 140). Therefore, the variance accounted for in the current study was consistent with previous sex differences research in communication, but was small nonetheless. It is likely that gender differences explain far more variance than biological sex alone. Freeman (1994) found that gender role expectations are more important than instructor sex as students prefer instructors who are high in both masculinity and femininity. Future research should focus more on mediating and moderating influences of instructional dissent, knowing that students' and instructors' sex play a minimal role in students' communication of instructional dissent. Instructors should, however, realize that students' sex does explain some student differential use of instructional dissent.

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