



# Student temperament and motives as predictors of instructional dissent



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine if students' Big Five personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) and their motives for communicating with an instructor (i.e., relational, functional, participatory, excuse-making, sycophancy) were significant predictors of instructional dissent (i.e., expressive, rhetorical, vengeful) in the college classroom. Student participants ( $N = 240$ ) completed a questionnaire using self-reports of their own personality traits, motives, and frequency of communicating instructional dissent in reference to a target course. Results of hierarchical regression analyses revealed that (a) expressive dissent was predicted by students' neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness, (b) rhetorical dissent was predicted by students' extraversion and agreeableness, and (c) vengeful dissent was predicted by students' openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. After controlling for the Big 5 traits, (d) the excuse-making, sycophancy, and functional motives predicted additional variance in instructional dissent.

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## 1. Introduction

The college classroom provides a context in which disagreements between instructors and students can occur recurrently. Instructors may irritate students with their class-related behavior, such as engaging in unfair testing and grading (Goodboy, 2011a,b; Kearney, Plax, Hays & Ivey, 1991) which in turn, may spur these disagreements. On the other hand, students may disagree with instructors because they have unrealistic and entitled beliefs about their education and learning (Goodboy & Frisby, 2014). Although some students keep their disagreements to themselves and withhold complaints concerning their coursework (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013), other students address their discontentment by engaging in instructional dissent. Instructional dissent “occurs when students express their disagreements or complaints about class-related issues” (Goodboy, 2011b, p. 423) and can take one of three forms including expressive dissent, rhetorical dissent, or vengeful dissent (Goodboy, 2011a). *Expressive dissent* occurs when students turn to outside parties to vent their frustrations about class to gain sympathy and/or empathy (e.g., complaining to another student about a difficult midterm exam). *Rhetorical dissent* occurs when students communicate directly with an instructor to persuade him/her to rectify a perceived problem in class (e.g., talking to an instructor during office hours about a bad grade in hopes of doing better in the course). *Vengeful dissent* is designed to “get even” with an instructor by tarnishing an instructor's reputation by spreading negative endorsement (e.g., trying to get an instructor in trouble with his/her colleagues). Instructional dissent is an important response to study because it is associated with self-

reported student learning and state motivation in the classroom (Goodboy, 2011b).

### 1.1. Instructional dissent

Research on instructional dissent suggests that most students perceive their instructor to be the sole cause of dissent by creating classroom conditions that are undesirable to students (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013; Goodboy, 2011a,b; Horan, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010), and in response, feel the need to communicate their displeasure. Research suggests that instructional dissent frequently occurs as a response to student perceptions of ineffective teaching comprised of instructor misbehaviors and unjust classroom decisions (Goodboy, 2011a,b). In contrast though, when instructors engage in perceived effective teaching behavior, such as being clear and immediate, instructional dissent is deterred (LaBelle, Martin, & Weber, 2013). Beyond unfair testing and grading, many students cite that their instructor's inferior teaching style leads them to dissent about their coursework (Goodboy, 2011a).

Although research suggests that student perceptions of ineffective teaching are the main triggering agent behind instructional dissent, research has begun to examine distal factors that influence student dissent expression, despite perceived instructor inadequacies. Some preliminary evidence suggests that students may be more or less likely to dissent in general despite the course or instructor. First, Goodboy (2012) revealed that female students report using more expressive dissent, whereas male students communicate more rhetorical and vengeful dissent. Second, Goodboy and Myers (2012) found that students high in trait verbal aggressiveness communicate more rhetorical and vengeful dissent, and students high in trait argumentativeness communicate more rhetorical dissent. Third, Goodboy and Bolkan (2013) found

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that students who have a dominating conflict style report using all three types of dissent more frequently. Given the role that distal factors play in fostering instructional dissent, Goodboy and Myers (2012) concluded, “it is possible, then, that even effective instructors may receive dissent” (p. 456).

Despite several calls for instructional communication researchers to determine the extent to which student personality traits play a role in encouraging classroom dissent (Goodboy, 2011a,b; LaBelle et al., 2013), extant research has focused primarily on how instructor communication behaviors spur dissent instead (e.g., Goodboy, 2011b; LaBelle et al., 2013). It is likely however, that instructional dissent is better explained as a student reaction to classroom dissatisfaction that is encouraged or discouraged by different students' personalities, because some students approach or avoid disagreements in class based on their general preferences for communicating (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013; Goodboy & Myers, 2012). Likewise, research suggests that student personality traits and communication traits influence how students interpret and process feedback from their instructors (Malachowski, Martin, & Vallade, 2013). Research also suggests that personality traits are important predictors of complaining behavior, which is similar to dissent (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011; Harris & Mowen, 2001; Huang & Chang, 2008).

Recognizing that instructional dissent is influenced in part by student traits, Goodboy (2011b) urged researchers to “examine students' personality or communication traits that influence their propensity to use instructional dissent” (p. 436). Goodboy (2011a) also noted that “research on students' individual differences will yield a more complete picture of instructional dissent expression” (p. 309). Therefore, this study examined students' individual differences in personality and communication by including students' Big Five traits and their motives for communicating as predictors of instructional dissent.

### 1.2. Five factor model of personality (Big Five)

The five-factor model of personality (FFM), otherwise known as the Big Five Trait Taxonomy (John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & John, 1992), identifies five broad personality dimensions as individual differences. As McCrae and Costa (1999) noted, “much of what psychologists mean by the term *personality* is summarized by the five factor model” (p. 139) as this taxonomy provides an overarching and general framework for systematically studying major individual differences of people and “can be generalized across a wide range of personality constructs” (Costa & McCrae, 2009, p. 307) and cultures (McCrae, Terracciano, & 78 Members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005). The Big Five traits include neuroticism, extraversion, openness (to experience), agreeableness, and conscientiousness. *Neuroticism*, which is sometimes referred to as emotional instability, refers to “an enduring tendency or disposition to experience negative emotional states” (Widiger, 2009, p. 129), including feelings such as anxiety, anger, and guilt. *Extraversion*, which is the polar opposite of introversion, refers to a tendency to be outgoing, talkative, and sociable (Wilt & Revelle, 2009). *Openness*, which is sometimes referred to as intellect, refers to an appreciation for intellectual curiosity and variety in experiences and ideas (McCrae & Sutin, 2009). *Agreeableness* refers to a tendency of being “likeable, pleasant, and harmonious in relations with others” (Graziano & Tobin, 2009, p. 46). *Conscientiousness* refers to the tendency to be goal directed and possess impulse control in delaying gratification by following norms and rules (Roberts, Jackson, Fayard, Edmonds, & Meints, 2009).

Meta-analyses suggest that the Big 5 traits are predictive of actual behavior (e.g., Fleeson & Gallagher, 2009). Much research suggests that students' academic performance, grades, and behavior in class are predicted by their individual differences in students' Big Five traits (Furnham, Chamorro-Premuzic, & McDougall, 2003). For instance, many studies have revealed that students' grade point averages, exam grades, and overall academic performance are positively predicted by

conscientiousness and openness (Bidjerano & Dai, 2007; Conrad & Patry, 2012; De Feyter, Caers, Vigna, & Berings, 2012; Furnham, Mosen, & Ahmetoglu, 2009; Grehan, Flanagan, & Malgady, 2011; Komaraju, Karau, Schmeck, & Avdic, 2011; Nofle & Robins, 2007; Trapmann, Hell, Hirn, & Schuler, 2007; Zeidner & Shani-Zinovich, 2011). Students' desire to achieve their academic goals and perform well is positively predicted by extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness (Ntaliansis, 2010). Further, overcommitted students, who work harder than necessary to succeed in class, are higher in neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness, but lower in agreeableness (Hetland, Saksvik, Albertsen, Berntsen, & Henriksen, 2012).

Other research suggests that students' Big Five traits are related to a variety of academic outcomes including motivation to learn (Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006), academic self-concept (Jonkmann, Becker, Marsh, Ludtke, & Trautwein, 2012), depth of learning (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2009), academic stress (Penley & Tomaka, 2002), absenteeism (Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gibson, 2004), educational aspirations (Gasser, Larson, & Borgen, 2004), educational attainment and earnings (O'Connell & Sheikh, 2011), and intention to withdraw from college (Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Gibson, 2004). In a study profiling the personality of the successful college student, Barthelemy and Lounsbury (2009) found that students who earned high grades were also high in agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness. Houser and Frymier (2009) reported that students who are more grade oriented are higher in extraversion.

Clearly then, students' Big Five traits play a substantial role in their academic performance and success in school. Therefore, it is likely that student dissent is dependent on this performance (or lack thereof) because much of student dissent is an expression of student dissatisfaction with class-related issues such as grades and testing (Goodboy, 2011a). Similarly, Burke (2004) projected that high maintenance students, or “those students who complain and whine, beyond reasonable limits” (p. 743), would be influenced by their Big 5 traits. Given these findings linking Big Five traits to academic success and considering that much of instructional dissent involves complaints about student performance, the first research question is offered:

**RQ1.** To what extent do students' Big 5 personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) predict their use of instructional dissent (i.e., expressive, rhetorical, vengeful) in a college course?

### 1.3. Student motives for communicating

Although students' personality traits are important variables to consider in instructional dissent, why students communicate with their instructors in the first place may explain their dissent as well. Why students communicate with their instructors is based on student characteristics (e.g., communication apprehension), instructor characteristics (e.g., instructor credibility), and environmental characteristics (e.g., time) (Martin & Myers, 2010; Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 2002; Myers, Martin, & Mottet, 2002b). It is important to study students' motives for communicating because why and how students communicate in the classroom are related to their learning and feelings of stress, satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Goodboy, Martin, & Bolkan, 2009; Martin, Cayanus, Weber, & Goodboy, 2006; Martin, Mottet, & Myers, 2000; Weber, Martin, & Cayanus, 2005). Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) identified five primary motives students reported for communicating with their instructors. The most common motive is *functional*, to learn more about the course material and the assignment. Students also communicate to *participate*, to show involvement in the course. When students communicate with their instructors in order to have an interpersonal relationship, students possess the *relational* motive. Many students at one time or another have the motive of *excuse-making*, to explain why work is late or class was missed. The final motive is

*sycophancy*, or communicating in order to flatter or impress the instructor. Since 1999, studies have explored how instructors impact students' motives for communicating, how students' communication traits are related to their motives, and how students' motives for communicating with their instructors are related to their communication with their instructors.

Basically, when instructors are viewed as more approachable, students are more likely to report communicating with those instructors (Mottet, Martin, & Myers, 2004). Instructors that self-disclose more have students who report communicating more with their instructors (Cayanus & Martin, 2004; Cayanus, Martin, & Goodboy, 2009). If instructors are verbally aggressive or are perceived as misbehaving, students are less likely to communicate with their instructors (Goodboy, Myers, & Bolkan, 2010; Mansson, Myers, & Martin, 2011). Myers (2006) found that students who feel like part of the in-group with an instructor are more likely to communicate for all of the motives except excuse-making. Instructors that are perceived as socially and task attractive and who use prosocial power strategies have students who communicate more for the relational, participatory, and functional motives (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011; Weiss & Houser, 2007). Clearly, how students communicate with their instructors is based in part on how those instructors communicate with their students.

Martin, Myers, and et al. (2002), Martin, Valencic, and et al. (2002) argued that a primary influence on students' motives is their personalities. Students who are assertive and responsive are more likely to communicate with their instructors (Myers, Martin, & Mottet, 2002a). If students are high in communication apprehension, they are less likely to communicate for the motives of relational, functional, and participatory (Martin et al., 2002). Students with a higher need for control are more likely to make excuses (Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 2006; Martin et al., 1999; Martin et al., 2006). Students who are more animated and contentious are more likely to participate in class (Myers, Mottet, & Martin, 2000).

Building on past studies that have examined at the relationship between students' personalities and their motives, we were interested in the relationships between students' Big 5 traits, their motives, and their instructional dissent. Considering that research suggests that academic-related variables such as school pressure, worry, anxiety, and student interest are empirically linked to students' motives (Martin et al., 2006), it is likely that these motives may serve as precursors to student dissent episodes. However, given our first research question, we were interested in controlling for students' Big Five traits because they are relatively stable dispositions that do not change much despite the class and instructor. However, student motives vary from class to class depending on the instructional environment and behavior of individual instructors (Mottet et al., 2004). Since student temperament is a global influence and student motives are influenced by their personality traits (Myers, Martin, & Mottet, 2002a), we were interested in demonstrating whether or not student motives for communicating provided a unique contribution to instructional dissent, or if dissent is mostly a manifestation of students' personality. Based on these premises, the second research question is offered:

**RQ2.** After controlling for students' Big 5 traits, to what extent do student motives for communicating with their instructor (i.e., relational, functional, participatory, excuse-making, sycophancy) predict additional variance in their use of instructional dissent (i.e., expressive, rhetorical, vengeful) in a college course?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sample and procedure

Participants were 240 undergraduate students (127 men, 104 women, 9 participants' sex were unreported) whose ages ranged from

18 to 30 years ( $M = 21.10$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ). Participants were recruited from a large Northeastern university in the United States. One hundred fourteen ( $n = 114$ ) students reported on a class with a male instructor whereas 122 students reported on a class with a female instructor (4 unreported). Approximately 55% ( $n = 133$ ) of the student sample reported on a class required for their major. Class sizes varied with 75 students reporting on a class consisting of 30 students or less, 59 students reporting on a class with 31 to 100 students, 71 students reporting on a class with 101 to 200 students, and 34 students (1 unreported) reporting on a class with over 200 students enrolled. The participants completed a survey in reference to the required class they attended immediately prior to the data collection (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986) to ensure a variety of courses and instructors. The questionnaire included the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992), Student Motives for Communicating Scale (Martin et al., 2000), and Instructional Dissent Scale (Goodboy, 2011b), along with demographic items.

### 2.2. Measures

1. *Big 5*: The NEO-FFI has 60 items and measures temperament according to the five factor model of personality, including the traits of extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness. Each personality trait is measured using a 12-item subscale. Responses are solicited using a 5-point Likert response format ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Previous alpha reliability coefficients for the subscales have ranged from .75 to .84 (Greengross & Miller, 2009).
2. *Student motives*: The SMC Scale has 30 items and measures the reasons why students communicate with their instructors. Responses are solicited using a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from *not at all like me* (1) to *exactly like me* (5). This scale consists of five subscales (6 items each) that assess the following motives: relational, functional, participatory, excuse-making, and sycophancy. Previous alpha reliability coefficients for the subscales have ranged from .88 to .91 (Goodboy & Myers, 2008).
3. *Instructional dissent*: The Instructional Dissent Scale has 22 items and assesses how frequently students express their disagreements or complaints about class-related issues in a particular class. This scale consists of three subscales that measure expressive dissent (10 items), rhetorical dissent (6 items), and vengeful dissent (6 items). Responses are solicited using a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from *never* (0) to *very often* (4). Previous alpha reliability coefficients for the subscales have ranged from .87 to .96 (Goodboy, 2012).

## 3. Results

Intercorrelations among variables, along with composite means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas for each measure are presented in Table 1.

Research questions one and two were examined using three separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses predicting each type of dissent (i.e., expressive, rhetorical, vengeful). Students' Big Five personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) were entered into the first block, and student motives for communicating with their instructor (i.e., relational, functional, participatory, excuse-making, sycophancy) were entered into the second block, to control for variance explained by students' personality traits. Significant predictors, beta weights, and variance accounted for in each model are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

A significant model was obtained for *expressive dissent* ( $F(10, 228) = 6.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .23$ ), which revealed that students' neuroticism ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ), extraversion ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and agreeableness ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significant predictors in block one ( $R^2 = .13$ ). In block two ( $\Delta R^2 = .10$ ,  $R^2 = .23$ ), neuroticism ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and agreeableness ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ )

**Table 1**  
Correlations between variables, composite means and SDs, and Cronbach's alphas.

Variables	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>Big 5 traits</i>															
1. Neuroticism	32.07	7.40	.79												
2. Extraversion	43.26	6.47	.79	-.33 <sup>†</sup>											
3. Openness	39.34	5.77	.64	.04	.05										
4. Agreeableness	42.53	6.37	.75	-.22 <sup>†</sup>	.28 <sup>†</sup>	.15 <sup>*</sup>									
5. Conscientiousness	42.65	6.91	.82	-.30 <sup>†</sup>	.26 <sup>†</sup>	.05	.22 <sup>†</sup>								
<i>Student motives</i>															
6. Relational	14.64	5.62	.92	.13 <sup>*</sup>	.16 <sup>*</sup>	.19 <sup>**</sup>	.07	.03							
7. Functional	25.28	5.03	.87	-.08	.25 <sup>†</sup>	.22 <sup>†</sup>	.11	.35 <sup>†</sup>	.22 <sup>†</sup>						
8. Participatory	16.52	5.69	.89	.08	.11	.22 <sup>†</sup>	-.05	.12	.45 <sup>†</sup>	.39 <sup>†</sup>					
9. Excuse-making	14.94	5.89	.87	.17 <sup>**</sup>	.10	-.09	-.13 <sup>*</sup>	-.04	.25 <sup>†</sup>	.29 <sup>†</sup>	.40 <sup>†</sup>				
10. Sycophancy	14.77	5.60	.87	.07	.12	.03	-.13 <sup>*</sup>	-.01	.40 <sup>†</sup>	.31 <sup>†</sup>	.59 <sup>†</sup>	.44 <sup>†</sup>			
<i>Instructional dissent</i>															
11. Expressive	15.55	9.94	.94	.20 <sup>**</sup>	.02	-.14 <sup>*</sup>	-.26 <sup>†</sup>	-.19 <sup>**</sup>	-.02	.04	.14 <sup>*</sup>	.32 <sup>†</sup>	.28 <sup>†</sup>		
12. Rhetorical	8.46	5.59	.87	.12	.05	-.07	-.28 <sup>†</sup>	.00	.26 <sup>†</sup>	.17 <sup>**</sup>	.35 <sup>†</sup>	.40 <sup>†</sup>	.35 <sup>†</sup>	.53 <sup>†</sup>	
13. Vengeful	3.70	5.60	.95	.08	-.08	-.29 <sup>†</sup>	-.28 <sup>†</sup>	-.19 <sup>**</sup>	.00	-.18 <sup>**</sup>	.06	.19 <sup>**</sup>	.16 <sup>*</sup>	.39 <sup>†</sup>	.49 <sup>†</sup>

\*  $p < .05$ .  
\*\*  $p < .01$ .  
†  $p < .001$ .

remained significant predictors, and the relational ( $\beta = -.17, p < .05$ ), excuse-making ( $\beta = .19, p < .01$ ), and sycophancy motives ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ) were significant predictors, after controlling for the variance explained by the Big Five predictors in block one.

A significant model was obtained for *rhetorical dissent* ( $F(10, 228) = 9.13, p < .001, R^2 = .29$ ), which revealed that students' extraversion ( $\beta = .15, p < .05$ ) and agreeableness ( $\beta = -.31, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors in block one ( $R^2 = .11$ ). In block two ( $\Delta R^2 = .18, R^2 = .29$ ), agreeableness ( $\beta = -.25, p < .001$ ) remained a significant predictor; the excuse-making motive ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ) was also a significant predictor after controlling for the variance explained by the Big 5 predictors in block one.

A significant model was obtained for *vengeful dissent* ( $F(10, 228) = 6.80, p < .001, R^2 = .20$ ), which revealed that students' openness ( $\beta = -.25, p < .001$ ), agreeableness ( $\beta = -.21, p < .001$ ), and conscientiousness ( $\beta = -.14, p < .05$ ) were significant predictors in block one ( $R^2 = .15$ ). In block two ( $\Delta R^2 = .05, R^2 = .20$ ), openness ( $\beta = -.23, p < .001$ ) and agreeableness ( $\beta = -.18, p < .01$ )

remained significant predictors; the functional motive ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ) was also a significant predictor after controlling for the variance explained by the Big Five predictors in block one.

**4. Discussion and conclusions**

Communication scholars have investigated the relationships between individuals' personality (Big Three or Big Five) and their communication traits, including their assertiveness and responsiveness (Cole & McCroskey, 2000), their willingness to communicate and innovativeness (McCroskey, Richmond, Heisel, & Hayhurst, 2004), their interpersonal motives (Paulsel & Mottet, 2004), and their argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, competence, communication apprehension, and shyness (Heisel, La France, & Beatty, 2003; McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001). The purpose of this study was to determine if students' personality (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) and motives for communicating with an instructor (i.e., relational, functional, participatory, excuse-making, sycophancy)

**Table 2**  
Hierarchical regression analyses predicting expressive dissent.

Expressive dissent	B	SEB	β
<i>Block 1</i>			
Neuroticism	.24	.09	.18 <sup>**</sup>
Extraversion	.26	.10	.17 <sup>*</sup>
Openness	-.20	.11	-.11
Agreeableness	-.35	.10	-.22 <sup>***</sup>
Conscientiousness	-.18	.09	-.12
			$R^2 = .13$
<i>Block 2</i>			
Neuroticism	.20	.09	.15 <sup>*</sup>
Extraversion	.18	.10	.12
Openness	-.15	.11	-.09
Agreeableness	-.24	.10	-.15 <sup>*</sup>
Conscientiousness	-.18	.10	-.13
Relational motive	-.29	.12	-.17 <sup>*</sup>
Functional motive	.03	.14	.01
Participatory motive	.02	.14	.01
Excuse-making motive	.32	.12	.19 <sup>**</sup>
Sycophancy motive	.37	.14	.21 <sup>**</sup>
			$F(10, 228) = 6.80, p < .001$ $R^2 = .23; \Delta R^2 = .10$

\*  $p < .05$ .  
\*\*  $p < .01$ .  
\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 3**  
Hierarchical regression analyses predicting rhetorical dissent.

Rhetorical dissent	B	SEB	β
<i>Block 1</i>			
Neuroticism	.09	.05	.12
Extraversion	.13	.06	.15 <sup>*</sup>
Openness	-.04	.06	-.04
Agreeableness	-.27	.06	-.31 <sup>***</sup>
Conscientiousness	.05	.05	.07
			$R^2 = .11$
<i>Block 2</i>			
Neuroticism	.02	.05	.02
Extraversion	.03	.06	.04
Openness	-.08	.06	-.08
Agreeableness	-.22	.05	-.25 <sup>***</sup>
Conscientiousness	.03	.05	.04
Relational motive	.12	.07	.12
Functional motive	.02	.08	.02
Participatory motive	.14	.08	.15
Excuse-making motive	.22	.06	.23 <sup>***</sup>
Sycophancy motive	.08	.08	.08 <sup>**</sup>
			$F(10, 228) = 9.13, p < .001$ $R^2 = .29; \Delta R^2 = .18$

\*  $p < .05$ .  
\*\*  $p < .01$ .  
\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



**Table 4**  
Hierarchical regression analyses predicting vengeful dissent.

Vengeful dissent	B	SEB	$\beta$
<i>Block 1</i>			
Neuroticism	.01	.05	.01
Extraversion	.03	.06	.03
Openness	-.24	.06	-.25***
Agreeableness	-.19	.06	-.21***
Conscientiousness	-.11	.05	-.14*
	$R^2 = .15$		
<i>Block 2</i>			
Neuroticism	-.02	.05	-.02
Extraversion	.01	.06	.01
Openness	-.22	.06	-.23***
Agreeableness	-.15	.06	-.18**
Conscientiousness	-.07	.06	-.09
Relational motive	.00	.07	.00
Functional motive	-.20	.08	-.18*
Participatory motive	.07	.08	.07
Excuse-making motive	.11	.07	.12
Sycophancy motive	.11	.08	.11
	$F(10, 228) = 5.81, p < .001$ $R^2 = .20; \Delta R^2 = .05$		

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

served as predictors of instructional dissent (i.e., expressive, rhetorical, vengeful). Two main sets of findings were discovered. The first set of findings revealed that all of the Big Five traits were significant predictors of instructional dissent. Specifically, agreeableness served as a negative predictor for all three types of dissent; openness served as negative predictor for vengeful dissent; neuroticism served as a positive predictor of expressive dissent; extraversion served as a positive predictor of expressive and rhetorical dissent; and conscientiousness served as a negative predictor of vengeful dissent.

The findings from this study reveal a personality profile of dissenting students. So based on personality traits alone, what types of students are likely to dissent? Not students who are high in agreeableness. These likeable and pleasant students are least likely to communicate dissent to anyone. Additionally, students higher in openness and conscientiousness are less likely to express vengeful dissent; these are students who tend to have a higher tolerance for disagreement while also believing in following social norms. Attempting to hurt their instructors indirectly would not be a behavior these students would demonstrate. When students are high in extraversion, they are likely to address their instructors directly (i.e., rhetorical dissent). Students who are high in extraversion and neuroticism are more likely to practice expressive dissent. Their drive may be from anxiety or from a need for interaction, but these students are more likely to talk to their friends and family members about their concerns of their instructors and courses. Overall, the collective results suggest that of the three types of instructional dissent, vengeful dissent is affected by several of students' Big Five traits; as students who are not open to experiences, not agreeable, and not conscientious in their decision making tend to retaliate against instructors in spiteful ways. From the collective regression findings across all types of dissent, the personality profile of a dissenting student consists of the following trait classifications: higher in neuroticism, higher in extraversion, lower in openness, lower in agreeableness, and lower in conscientiousness. Agreeableness however, predicted the most variance across all three types of dissent. From a Big Five perspective, it may be that agreeable students get along better with people in general, including their instructors, which makes them less prone to complain given their easy-going disposition with others (Graziano & Tobin, 2009).

The second set of findings revealed that after controlling for the Big Five traits as predictors, the relational, functional, excuse-making, and

sycophancy motives predicted additional variance in student dissent. Specifically, the relational motive was a negative predictor of expressive dissent; the functional motive was a negative predictor of vengeful dissent; the excuse-making motive was a positive predictor of expressive and rhetorical dissent; and the sycophancy motive was a positive predictor of expressive dissent.

Students who are more likely to communicate with their instructors when they missed class or an assignment are the same students who are willing to directly confront their instructors with their dissent (i.e., rhetorical dissent). These same students are likely to express their dissent by venting to other parties. On the other hand, students who communicate with their instructors for relational reasons would be less likely to vent their frustrations to outside parties (e.g., friends, classmates, family members). Students who report communicating for the functional motive are not likely to express vengeful dissent. This means that those students who avoid communicating with their instructor about the course (e.g., they do not ask for clarifications about assignments, they do not ask questions when content is confusing) are likely to express vengeful dissent. It is possible that those students, who have particularly negative experiences with an instructor, do not feel comfortable approaching the instructor for functional reasons, and instead, lash out in a vengeful manner outside of class. Research would support this contention as Bolkan and Goodboy (2013) found that students withhold rhetorical dissent because they perceive their instructors to be unapproachable and are afraid that their instructors may retaliate to a complaint by letting it affect their grade or by treating the students differently. Perhaps vengeful dissent is an adverse reaction from students who do not feel comfortable communicating with their instructor directly. If students could be trained to communicate with their instructors more directly and assertively (e.g., Rancer, Whitecap, Kosberg, & Avtgis, 1997), possibly their use of vengeful dissent would decrease. Training students to be more argumentative and provide rhetorical dissent to instructors when they have complaints, might provide them with a productive way to address their concerns instead of resorting to expressive and vengeful dissent (Goodboy & Myers, 2012). Importantly, research suggests that such training efforts work and students who receive argumentative training tend to perform better in school (Infante, 1982). Overall, from the collective regression findings across all types of dissent, the profile of a dissenting student consists of a student who communicates with an instructor primarily for excuse-making and sycophantic motives, despite his/her varying Big Five personality traits.

While the results here support the value of studying students' personalities and motives when studying their dissent, there are several limitations of this study to acknowledge. Care should be taken not to overgeneralize; our students ( $N = 240$ ) came from one public, four-year land-grant institution in the Northeast that is predominantly Caucasian. This study only examined student traits and motives, and research suggests that instructors and situational features of a class play a significant role in students' dissent (Goodboy, 2011a,b). Additionally, the internal reliability of the openness measure failed to reach .70. While our reliabilities are consistent with other research using Big Five measures, this issue involving the openness measure needs to be recognized.

Future research should consider investigating an instructor's perspective on student dissent practices. It may prove useful to determine how instructional dissent impacts instructors' careers and teaching experiences by examining variables such as burnout and teaching efficacy. Indeed, when students dissent, especially in class in front of other students, this act is likely face threatening for instructors. Research that uses a face-threatening framework may be warranted because it is possible that too much instructional dissent may result in face-saving behavior from instructors who desire to appear competent to students (Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). Moreover, too much instructional dissent witnessed by instructors may disrupt effective teaching and learning experiences by creating distressful perceptions and responses for the instructor and may foster a defensive classroom culture. Other future

research endeavors might consider how instructional dissent is communicated differently across cultures, how instructors' use of power mitigates student dissent reactions, and how some students may cognitively use more intrapersonal forms of dissent. Because many students withhold their desire to dissent and keep complaints to themselves (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013), it is likely that some students use imagined interactions to cope with their dissatisfying classroom experiences (Berkos, Allen, Kearney, & Plax, 2001; Honeycutt, 2010).

In conclusion, students tend not to believe that they play a predominant role in triggering the dissent process — instead, they believe their instructors' failures to be an effective and appropriate educator is a primary, if not sole reason for their dissent (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013; Goodboy, 2011a). The results of this study indicate that students' Big Five personality traits and their motives for communicating with their instructors were significant predictors of their instructional dissent, supporting Goodboy's (2011b) claim that students' expression of dissent is related to their personality and communication traits. This study provides additional support to the value and importance of studying traits in the instructional context, specifically when considering student dissent. Moreover, this study suggests that despite the features of a particular class, some students are more prone to dissent because of stable individual differences that encourage their desire to complain.

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