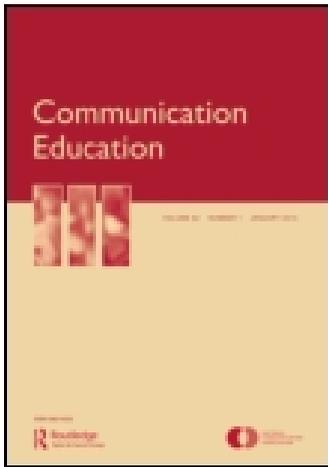


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Making Students Feel Better: Examining the Relationships between Teacher Confirmation and College Students' Emotional Outcomes

Zachary W. Goldman and Alan K. Goodboy¹

Guided by broaden-and-build theory and emotional response theory, we examined college students' emotional outcomes in the classroom (i.e., emotional interest, emotional support, emotion work, emotional valence) as a function of teacher confirmation (i.e., responding to questions, demonstrating interest, teaching style). Participants were 159 undergraduate students who completed self-report questionnaires. A series of multiple regressions revealed that when instructors used confirming behaviors in the classroom, students reported higher levels of emotional interest, greater emotional support, and a more positive emotional valence about the class. Additionally, when instructors demonstrated interest in students' learning, students reported engaging in less emotion work for the class.

Keywords: Broaden-and-Build Theory; Classroom Emotions; Emotional Response Theory; Teacher Confirmation

Over the last decade, scholars from multiple disciplines have demonstrated interest in positive psychology research and the effects of positive emotions on human behavior (Titsworth, McKenna, Mazer, & Quinlan, 2013; Wright, 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). Instructional communication scholars have narrowed this interest to the college classroom, focusing on how students' emotional experiences are shaped by instructors' communication behaviors such as immediacy (Titsworth et al., 2013), clarity (Mazer 2013a, 2013b), power usage (Horan, Martin, & Weber, 2012), and communication competence (Titsworth, Quinlan, & Mazer, 2010). In short, these

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investigations have demonstrated the potentially large influence that college instructors may have over students' emotional experiences in the classroom. Yet, as Titsworth et al. (2010) noted, "Work remains to fully understand the processes through which educational experiences translate into specific emotions" (p. 448). Moreover, scholars have recognized the significance of determining effective teaching practices that enhance students' positive emotions in the classroom (e.g., arousal), largely because these emotions mediate the influence of instruction on student learning outcomes (Mottet, Frymier, & Beebe, 2006). One instructional behavior that is known to enhance student learning outcomes and likely influences students' emotional experiences in the classroom is teacher confirmation, or the communicative attempts used by instructors to endorse students as valuable contributors to the classroom experience (Ellis, 2000, 2004). To investigate the extent to which teacher confirmation behaviors influence college students' emotional outcomes in the classroom, we drew upon two theoretical perspectives: broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998) and emotional response theory (ERT; Mottet et al., 2006).

Theoretical Background

As Zhang and Zhang (2013) noted, broaden-and-build theory and ERT are appropriate complementary perspectives for understanding classroom emotions because "they both underscore the central role emotions play in influencing behavior" (p. 398). Yet, separately, each framework offers its own unique perspective to help understand the importance of emotions in the classroom. Fredrickson's (1998) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions emphasizes the unique and constructive functions of positive emotions on individuals' short-term and long-term cognitive abilities. Specifically, the theory asserts that "positive emotions appear to *broaden* people's momentary thought-action repertoires and *build* their enduring personal resources" (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1369). Broaden-and-build theory argues that positive emotions extend the scope of individuals' cognitive behavior, prompting them to pursue a wider range of thoughts than they are normally accustomed to experiencing (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Contrary to negative emotions that impede individuals' thought-action processes, positive emotions encourage elaborate and creative cognition, which in turn allows individuals to build intellectual, psychological, and social resources (Fredrickson, 2001; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). Furthermore, when individuals experience positive emotions, they are often prompted to engage with their surrounding environment (e.g., classroom) and actively participate in activities related to that environment (Fredrickson, 2004).

Although broaden-and-build theory has received little empirical use in the educational context (Reschly, Huebner, Appleton, & Antaramian, 2008; Zhang & Zhang, 2013), the theory offers important implications for understanding classroom emotions. Put simply, broaden-and-build theory provides an empirically supported explanation for *why* students' emotions are an important aspect of the classroom and *how* these emotions lead to greater learning capabilities (Reschly et al., 2008). In other

words, due to the documented effects that positive emotional experiences can have on individuals' cognitive functioning (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), instructors now have a rationale for why they should attempt to foster positive emotions in the classroom. To accomplish this, however, instructors must understand the contextual and interactional factors that contribute to students experiencing positive emotional states. As Reschly et al. (2008) noted, "The experience of frequent positive emotions in students is likely malleable and responsive to changes in the instructional and interpersonal environments" (p. 429). Put differently, the extent to which students experience positive emotions is dependent upon a myriad of factors that include classroom performance, interaction with peers and teachers, and instructors' communication behaviors (Titsworth et al., 2013). One perspective that was designed specifically to explain this complexity and the relationship between teachers' communication behaviors and students' emotional and behavioral responses is ERT (Mottet et al., 2006).

Influenced heavily by the work of Mehrabian (1981), ERT asserts that emotional reactions function as "an accurate predictor of whether an individual approaches or avoids a person, place, idea, or thing, including whether someone approaches or avoids learning" (Mottet et al., 2006, p. 261). At its core, ERT is comprised of three components: instructors' communication behaviors, students' emotional responses, and students' approach-avoidance behaviors toward learning (Horan et al., 2012). Using these components, ERT predicts students' emotional responses mediate the influence of instructors' communication behaviors (e.g., immediacy) on student learning outcomes (Mottet & Beebe, 2002; Mottet et al., 2006). Specifically, ERT asserts when instructors engage in behaviors that elicit feelings of pleasure (e.g., happiness), arousal (e.g., stimulation), and dominance (e.g., influencing), students will in turn respond with approach behaviors (e.g., studying) that help to advance their learning in the classroom. Recently, however, Titsworth et al. (2010, 2013) suggested that students' emotional responses likely encompass more than these three rudimentary reactions, and thus urged scholars to determine further the multitude of students' emotional responses in the classroom and the contextual factors that influence them.

Collectively, previous researchers using ERT have continued to demonstrate the effects of instructors' communication behaviors on students' emotional responses in the classroom (Horan et al., 2012; Mottet & Beebe, 2002; Titsworth et al., 2010, 2013). Yet, overall, the majority of these studies have focused on many of the same documented teaching behaviors (e.g., immediacy, clarity), leaving the influence of other effective teaching practices on students emotions unknown. Therefore, in this study, we elected to focus on one instructor behavior that has yet to be examined within the student emotion literature, but is likely to have noticeably positive effects on students' emotional experiences: teacher confirmation.

Teacher Confirmation

Originating in the interpersonal context (Laing, 1961; Sieburg, 1985), confirmation is one of the most important communicative behaviors for the development of human identity (Buber, 1957). Broadly speaking, confirmation has been defined as a process through which humans are recognized for their achievements through varying degrees and qualities of communicative messages (Laing, 1961). Scholars have often noted that confirming communication is invaluable for interpersonal relationships, as it allows others to feel endorsed, recognized, and acknowledged for their behaviors (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981; Sieburg, 1985), and is one of the most essential ways in which individuals help others to feel unique and appreciated (Dailey, 2010). Furthermore, some scholars have even argued that confirmation is the “greatest single factor ensuring mental development and stability” (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967, p. 84). Undoubtedly, then, this aspect of communication has effects across numerous contexts and interactions (Ellis, 2002); one context in which confirmation has shown to be a particularly valuable communicative behavior is in the college classroom (Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Schrodt, Turman, & Soliz, 2006).

In the instructional communication literature, Ellis (2000) defined teacher confirmation as the “transactional process by which teachers communicate to students that they are endorsed, recognized, and acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals” (p. 266). After inductively assessing student perceptions of instructor confirmation behaviors, Ellis (2000) proposed that teacher confirmation is best understood across three dimensions: (a) responding to student questions and/or comments, (b) demonstrating interest in the student learning process, and (c) employing an interactive teaching style in the classroom. When instructors respond to students’ questions in a timely and thorough manner, they communicate to students that they are willing to help them succeed in the classroom while alleviating uncertainty about the course content (Ellis, 2004). Similarly, behaviors that demonstrate teachers’ interest in the learning process confirm students by acknowledging their importance in the classroom and expressing genuine concern about their personal growth and development (Ellis, 2000). When instructors incorporate an interactive teaching style in the classroom, they communicate to students a willingness to adapt their teaching practices around students’ needs in order to facilitate the most effective learning environment (Ellis, 2004).

Overall, when instructors are confirming in the classroom, students report higher levels of cognitive learning, affective learning, and motivation (Ellis, 2000). In a live in-class experiment, Goodboy and Myers (2008) discovered that students not only recognized confirming attempts by an instructor, but also acknowledged that these attempts significantly influenced their ability to learn and stay motivated in the class. In addition to the ability to enhance student learning outcomes, teacher confirmation has been related positively to students’ relational, functional, and participatory motives for communicating with their instructor (Goodboy & Myers, 2008), willingness to talk in class (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010), classroom satisfaction (Goodboy & Myers, 2008), student effort and interest (Campbell,

Eichhorn, Basch, & Wolf, 2009), communication satisfaction (Goodboy, Martin, & Bolkan, 2009), and predicted outcome value for the course (Horan, Houser, Goodboy, & Frymier, 2011). Furthermore, Ellis (2004) asserted that the confirmation–learning relationship is mediated by students' receiver apprehension, or the anxiety students feel when receiving and interpreting messages (Wheless, 1975). Similarly, other scholars have suggested that the relationship between confirmation and student outcomes is mediated by students' perceived understanding (Schrodt et al., 2006) and perceived instructor credibility (Schrodt et al., 2009).

In sum, teacher confirmation behaviors acknowledge students as valuable contributors in the classroom and have been determined to enhance students' cognitive and affective learning, their motivation to study and engage in course content, and their communicative responses and behaviors in class (Ellis, 2000, 2004; Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Confirmation is considered a desirable and necessary interpersonal behavior that highlights the most significant feature of human interaction (Buber, 1957). Furthermore, confirmation functions to denote individuals' uniqueness and importance in a given context while helping to establish and maintain their identities as human beings (Laing, 1961). Therefore, the importance of confirmation within the educational context appears undisputable, largely because of its ability to promote students' self-efficacy, internal feelings of self-worth, and learning outcomes in the classroom (Ellis, 2004).

Based upon this evidence, teacher confirmation aligns with key principles from both broaden-and-build theory and ERT. First, according to broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998), students' cognitive abilities are improved by experiencing positive emotions. Similarly, the relationship between teacher confirmation and cognitive functioning (as operationalized by cognitive learning outcomes) is well established in previous literature (see Goodboy & Myers, 2008). However, this relationship appears to be strongly influenced by the degree to which receiving confirmation enhances students' affect and feelings toward the instructor and classroom (Ellis, 2000). In other words, the effectiveness of confirmation may be partially attributable to the enhancement of students' positive emotions, which then helps to explain the strong positive relationship between teacher confirmation behaviors and students' learning outcomes (Ellis, 2000). Second, previous research has shown that teacher confirmation is highly correlated with nonverbal immediacy (Ellis, 2000), which is an integral part of ERT and a well-established predictor of students' emotional responses in the classroom according to the theory (Mottet et al., 2006). As Mottet et al. noted, immediacy and other relationally oriented teaching behaviors are highly influential on students' experiences of pleasure, arousal, and dominance, and therefore lead students to engage in approach behaviors toward learning. It is likely, then, that due to the strong correlation between immediacy and confirmation, the two behaviors operate similarly in the classroom by evoking students' positive emotional responses.

Emotions in the Classroom

Biggers and Rankis (1983) suggested that emotions account for nearly 40% of the variance in all human behavior. Knowing this, instructional scholars have begun to recognize the importance of studying emotions within the communication and educational contexts (Horan et al., 2012; Mazer, 2013b; Titsworth et al., 2013; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). As Titsworth et al. (2010) noted, “Emotion and communication are inherently intertwined as communicators symbolically experience, construct, and express feelings toward others and their environment” (p. 432). Indeed, reviews of emotion and communication literature (see Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Burleson, 2009) suggest that the two phenomena are often inseparable, as both are ingrained in each other and within the human experience. Although a complex and dynamic relationship exists between emotion and communication, scholarly debate tends to arise when the relationship between emotion, logic, and learning is brought into question. For decades, many scholars suggested that emotion and logic were nearly dichotomous, each creating opposing and conflicting goals that are incompatible with the other (see Angie, Connelly, Waples, & Kligyte, 2011 for a review). However, more recently, researchers have suggested that emotion and reason may coincide with each other to improve or hinder the learning process simultaneously (Doan, 2010). Put differently, Titsworth et al. (2013) noted, “Emotions are viewed as essential resources that both enable and constrain the learning experiences of students and teachers” (p. 193). However, compared to other disciplines such as social and educational psychology (e.g., Doan, 2010; Grant & Dweck, 2003), instructional communication research examining the relationship between emotion, communication, and learning is lacking (Mazer, 2012; Titsworth et al., 2010, 2013). Therefore, to contribute to this line of research, as well as the growing literature on teacher confirmation, four emotional outcomes were selected to encompass a wide range of students’ emotional experiences in the classroom: emotional interest, perceived emotional support, emotion work, and emotional valence.

Emotional interest refers to the psychological arousal generated by enjoyment in which individuals feel toward a particular behavior or construct (Harp & Mayer, 1997). Although generally related, emotional interest is conceptually and operationally distinct from cognitive interest (Kintsch, 1980; Mazer, 2012). In the classroom, students who experience emotional interest gravitate toward a particular content area because they are excited and energized by the material (Mazer, 2012). Mazer (2013b, 2013c) has revealed that emotional interest is positively related with students’ affective and cognitive learning, student engagement behaviors, learner empowerment, and state motivation in the classroom. Furthermore, it appears that students’ emotional interest can be influenced by effective teaching practices (Mazer, 2012), including teacher immediacy behaviors and clarity cues (Mazer, 2013a).

In addition to emotional interest, Titsworth et al. (2010) have recently suggested that college students experience multiple emotional responses that occur through perceived emotional support, required emotion work, and the overall positive/negative valence that is assigned to the class. *Emotional support* refers to “the extent

to which students perceive that their instructor is available and able to provide emotional support about topics that are directly and indirectly related to school” (Titsworth et al., 2010, p. 438). In general, the reception of supportive communication promotes a multitude of positive outcomes including decreased emotional distress, improved personal relationships, and enhanced coping skills to manage problems (Burlison, 2009). Similarly, in the classroom, students perceive they have emotional support when they receive messages that improve their emotional health, decrease their emotional stress, and enhance their interpersonal relationships with their instructor and/or classmates (Titsworth et al., 2013). The effects of perceived emotional support are noticeably positive for students and their learning experiences, as Titsworth et al. (2010) observed positive relationships between emotional support, students’ motivation, and self-reported learning outcomes.

Emotion work refers to “the extent to which students must expend emotional energy and perform emotional labor (i.e., faking or feigning emotions) in the classroom” (Titsworth et al., 2010, p. 438). In particular contexts (e.g., workplace, school), individuals often feel compelled to suppress authentic emotions and display socially acceptable yet forged emotional expressions (Miller, Considine, & Garner, 2007; Tracy, 2005). Similar to emotional labor in the organization, which Morris and Feldman (1996) referred to as “the effort, planning, and control needed to express desired emotions during interpersonal transactions” (p. 987), emotion work requires students to devote a significant amount of emotional and cognitive energy toward concealing undesirable expressions (e.g., anger, frustration, boredom) in the classroom. Although purposeful and strategic, the energy spent managing and forging socially acceptable expressions detracts from the cognitive resources that individuals have available for other purposes (Zapf, 2002); for students, these purposes may include studying or contemplating course material. It is unsurprising, then, that emotion work has been related negatively to students’ motivation, affective learning, and perceived cognitive learning (Titsworth et al., 2010). Fortunately, previous research has shown that teachers’ effective communication behaviors such as immediacy and clarity are capable of reducing students’ need to engage in emotion work while in the classroom (Titsworth et al., 2013). Thus, it is possible that other effective communication behaviors such as teacher confirmation may also have similar effects causing students to engage in less emotion work and devote more effort toward constructive classroom behaviors.

Emotional valence refers to “the extent to which students view their target classes as generally positive or negative” (Titsworth et al., 2010, p. 439). Influenced heavily by Andersen and Guerrero’s (1998) cognitive valence theory of emotions, previous research has noted that college students frequently observe and assess emotional triggers in the classroom and assign subsequent emotional values (ranging from positive to negative), which in turn influence their beliefs and behaviors toward the class (Titsworth et al., 2013). Similarly, this notion reflects a key principle from Mottet et al.’s (2006) ERT in that students develop positive or negative emotions about their teacher, peers, and course content that dictate whether they will approach or avoid learning experiences. Previous research has supported the benefits of

students assigning a positive emotional valence toward the classroom (see Mottet & Beebe, 2002; Titsworth et al., 2013). For example, when students assign a more positive emotional valence toward a class, they also tend to report higher levels of affective learning, perceived cognitive learning, and motivation (Titsworth et al., 2010).

Rationale

According to Ellis (2004), college is often a time where students strive “to find out who they are, where they fit in, whether they should major in the particular discipline, and even whether they can succeed in college in general” (p. 16). During this time, it is unsurprising that many students experience a host of emotions that follow them into the classroom (Titsworth et al., 2010). According to broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998), these emotions, if negative, could restrict students’ cognitive ability and in turn limit their success in the classroom (Reschly et al., 2008). However, according to ERT, instructors have the ability to limit these negative effects and enhance students’ positive emotions by using effective communication behaviors (Mottet et al., 2006). This notion has spawned a line of investigations by instructional communication scholars examining the effects of teacher behaviors on students’ emotions (Horan et al., 2012; Mazer, 2013a, 2013b; Mottet & Beebe, 2002; Titsworth et al., 2010, 2013). Although these studies have provided a valuable framework on which communication scholars can continue to build, holistic comprehension of the complex relationship between classroom communication, emotional responses, and learning requires that researchers investigate a multitude of dynamic teaching behaviors employed in the college classroom (Mottet et al., 2006). As Meyer and Turner (2006) explained, emotions “evolve through interactions and serve as important indicators of participants’ motivations and cognitions, communicating what has been experienced, is being experienced, as well as was anticipated” (p. 378). In other words, emotions experienced by students are often the by-product of the interaction that occurs with members inside the classroom, as well as the overall classroom climate that is established and maintained by the instructor and students through communication (Meyer & Turner, 2002). One way in which instructors interact with students and develop a positive learning environment is by using teacher confirmation behaviors (Ellis, 2000).

As previously mentioned, research on teacher confirmation has shown a host of positive outcomes occur as a result of this effective teaching behavior (Ellis, 2004; Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Schrodte et al., 2009; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Taken together, these findings suggest an underlying theme from the confirmation literature; that is, teacher confirmation helps students to *feel better* about their classroom experiences and the learning process (Ellis, 2000). Building from this theme and guided by the general assumptions of broaden-and-build theory and ERT (i.e., students’ emotions are fundamental in the learning process, and instructors can foster these emotions through effective communication behaviors), it is probable that teacher confirmation would positively predict students’ classroom emotions, with the

exception of emotion work, which would be negatively predicted by instructors responding to questions, demonstrating interest, and having an interactive teaching style. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1: Teacher confirmation (i.e., responding to questions, demonstrating interest, interactive teaching style) will positively predict students' emotional interest, perceived emotional support, and emotional valence.
- H2: Teacher confirmation (i.e., responding to questions, demonstrating interest, interactive teaching style) will negatively predict students' emotion work.

Method

Procedures

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, 159 undergraduate students from various communication courses at a large Mid-Atlantic university were solicited in class to complete a brief questionnaire. Participants were solicited near the end of the academic semester and were asked to complete the questionnaire in reference to the class they had prior to the scheduled data collection (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986). The questionnaire included basic demographic information, the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS; Ellis, 2000), the Emotional Interest Subscale (Mazer, 2012), and the Classroom Emotions Scale (CES; Titsworth et al., 2010).

Participants

Participants for this study included 82 women (52%) and 77 men (48%) who ranged in age from 18 to 35 years ($M = 21.13$, $SD = 1.86$). Participants broadly represented 25 different majors from across the university, including communication studies (14%), business management (13%), public relations (8%), and accounting (6%). The majority of participants were Caucasian (89%) and were primarily seniors (53%, $n = 84$), followed by juniors (32%, $n = 51$), sophomores (11%, $n = 18$), and first-year students (4%, $n = 6$). To complete the survey, participants reported on 76 male instructors (48%) and 83 female instructors (52%).

Instrumentation

The TCS (Ellis, 2000) is a 16-item measure that assesses student perceptions of their instructors' confirming behaviors in the classroom. Specifically, three dimensions are assessed: responding to questions (5 items; e.g., "takes time to answer students' questions fully"), demonstrating interest (6 items; e.g., "makes an effort to get to know students"), and teaching style (5 items; e.g., "incorporates exercises into the lecture when appropriate"). Responses are solicited via a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 0 = "strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree." Previous reliability coefficients have ranged from .81 to .87 for the three subscales (Ellis, 2004; Schrodt et al., 2006; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). The current study produced Cronbach's alphas of .79

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Responding to Questions	16.30	3.02	.79	—					
2. Demonstrating Interest	18.35	3.96	.82	.74**	—				
3. Interactive Teaching Style	13.60	4.35	.83	.55**	.67**	—			
4. Emotional Interest	28.42	7.86	.94	.44**	.53**	.58**	—		
5. Emotional Support	22.62	6.78	.90	.35**	.50**	.36**	.36**	—	
6. Emotional Work	8.45	3.09	.82	-.27**	-.32**	-.18*	-.21*	-.21*	—
7. Emotional Valence	7.36	3.31	.81	.48**	.51**	.43**	.63**	.39**	-.44**

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$. One-tailed.

(responding to questions), .82 (demonstrating interest), and .83 (teaching style) for the three subscales. Means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients for all scales are shown in Table 1.

The Emotional Interest Subscale is a nine-item measure taken from Mazer's (2012) Student Interest Scale. The subscale assesses students' emotional interest in a specific course (e.g., "... because the class experience feels very positive") using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree." Previous reliabilities for the subscale have ranged from .95 to .97 (Mazer, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .90.

The CES (Titsworth et al., 2010) is a 14-item assessment that measures students' classroom emotions via three dimensions: emotional support (8 items; e.g., "I get the emotional help and support I need from my instructor"); emotion work (4 items; e.g., "Interacting with this instructor requires a lot of emotional energy); and emotional valence (2 items; e.g., "I would generally describe the emotions toward this class as positive"). Responses are solicited using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree." Previous Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales have ranged from .60 to .89 in previous research (Titsworth et al., 2010, 2013). In the current study, the reliabilities coefficients were .90 (emotional support), .82 (emotion work), and .81 (emotional valence).

Results

To address the hypotheses, Pearson correlations were initially computed to determine the general associations among the study's variables (see Table 1). All correlation coefficients were statistically significant. Positive relationships were observed among all of the measured constructs, with the exception of students' emotion work, which was negatively related to teacher confirmation behaviors (i.e., responding to questions, demonstrating interest, teaching style) as well as emotional interest, emotional support, and emotional valence. Following the correlational analyses, standard regression procedures were followed to determine the extent to which

teacher confirmation behaviors predicted each of the emotional outcomes (i.e., emotional interest, emotional support, emotion work, emotional valence). In total, four multiple regressions were conducted to assess these relationships. Examination of the tolerance statistics and variance inflation values revealed that multicollinearity was not a threat to the regression models. A summary of the regression results is shown in Table 2.

To evaluate the first hypothesis, three multiple regressions were examined. For the first regression model, emotional interest was regressed onto the three confirmation variables. The overall model was significant, $F(3, 158) = 30.53, p < .001, R^2 = .37, R^2_{ADJ} = .36$. Further examination of the standardized betas revealed students had greater emotional interest when their instructor employed an interactive teaching style and demonstrated interest in their learning. The second regression model used emotional support as the dependent variable and was also significant, $F(3, 158) = 17.35, p < .001, R^2 = .25, R^2_{ADJ} = .24$. Examination of the standardized betas in the second model indicated students felt greater amounts of emotional support when their instructor demonstrated interest in their learning. The third regression model used emotional valence as the dependent variable and was also statistically significant, $F(3, 158) = 21.39, p < .001, R^2 = .29, R^2_{ADJ} = .28$. Standardized betas from the third model revealed that students perceived the emotional valence of their class as more positive when their instructor responded to their questions and demonstrated interest in their learning. Taken together, the results of these three regression models supported the first hypothesis.

To evaluate the second hypothesis, a multiple regression using teacher confirmation behaviors to predict students' emotion work was examined. Results of the regression analysis revealed a significant model, $F(3, 158) = 21.39, p < .01, R^2 = .10$,

Table 2 Multiple Regression Analyses Using Teacher Confirmation Dimensions to Predict Students' Emotional Outcomes

Dependent/Predictor Variables	B	SEB	β	t
<i>Emotional Interest</i>				
Responding to Questions	.124	.249	.048	.49
Demonstrating Interest	.439	.213	.221*	2.05
Teaching Style	.730	.156	.405**	4.69
<i>Emotional Support</i>				
Responding to Questions	-.097	.235	-.043	-.41
Demonstrating Interest	.851	.201	.497**	4.23
Teaching Style	.081	.147	.052	.55
<i>Emotion Work</i>				
Responding to Questions	-.091	.117	-.089	-.78
Demonstrating Interest	-.235	.100	-.300*	-2.35
Teaching Style	.052	.073	-.073	.72
<i>Emotional Valence</i>				
Responding to Questions	.123	.061	.204*	2.01
Demonstrating Interest	.121	.052	.264*	2.32
Teaching Style	.059	.038	.141	1.54

Note. Significant predictor variables are in bold. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

$R^2_{\text{ADJ}} = .09$. Examination of the standardized betas revealed that students engaged in less emotion work when their instructor demonstrated interest in their learning. Therefore, the results of this regression supported the second hypothesis.

Discussion

Mottet et al. (2006) urged instructional communication researchers to determine specific teacher behaviors that lead to enhanced student emotional responses. Guided by broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998) and ERT (Mottet et al., 2006), this study sought to determine the extent to which teacher confirmation behaviors predicted college students' emotional experiences and outcomes in the classroom. Toward this goal, two significant findings emerged. First, when instructors respond to students' questions, demonstrate interest in students' learning experiences, and employ an interactive teaching style in the classroom, students experience a multitude of emotional benefits including increased emotional interest, emotional support, and a more positively valenced experience in the classroom. Second, when instructors demonstrate interest in their learners' experiences, students tend to report engaging in less emotion work. Collectively, these findings expand the current literature on teacher confirmation and students' classroom emotions and have important implications for instructors and future research.

As hypothesized, teacher confirmation (i.e., responding to questions, demonstrating interest, teaching style) positively predicted numerous emotional student outcomes in the classroom. Not only were these effects positive, the regression models (with the exception of emotion work) accounted for variance ranging from 25% to 37%, suggesting that, in general, instructors' communicative behaviors in the classroom have a noticeable influence over students' emotional responses (Titsworth et al., 2010, 2013). More specifically, and in alignment with previous instructional communication research, students' emotional responses were most strongly predicted by the confirming behaviors of demonstrating interest and interactive teaching style (Ellis, 2000). Similar to these dimensions, multiple studies have shown that a strong positive relationship exists between teacher immediacy behaviors and emotional interest (Frymier, 1993, 1994; Mazer, 2012, 2013a). On a related note, several immediacy behaviors are subsumed within the teaching style and demonstrating interest dimensions of confirmation (e.g., "smiles at the class"; see Ellis, 2000), thus helping to explain the strong positive relationships found in this study. Put differently, these findings reflect the general conclusion drawn from more than a decade of teacher confirmation research in that instructors who engage in confirming behaviors in the classroom tend to enhance students' perceptions of themselves, their abilities, and their overall outcomes in the course (Ellis, 2000, 2004; Goodboy & Myers, 2008). It appears, then, that greater emotional interest, emotional support, and a more positive emotional valence about the class are additional outcomes that are positively influenced when students receive confirmation in the classroom.

The second significant finding from this study was that students' emotion work was negatively predicted by teachers demonstrating interest in their students'

learning. Put differently, when instructors care about students and invest time and energy into their learning experiences, students appear less compelled to engage in emotional labor or expend unnecessary emotional energy in the classroom (Titsworth et al., 2010). In contrast, when students perceive their instructor as uncaring or lacking interest in their educational experience, this is likely processed as a teacher misbehavior, which in turn elicits negative affect and a greater likelihood of emotion work in the classroom (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). The possibility of increased emotion work resulting from the lack of confirmation behaviors bodes negatively for students' achievement, motivation, and other learning outcomes (Titsworth et al., 2010). As Titsworth et al. noted, "When students perceive that they engage in higher levels of emotion work, they are perhaps more likely to enact avoidance behaviors" (p. 448), which in turn reduces students' efficiency to learn and understand course material. Moreover, when students engage in emotion work, they intentionally and actively forge acceptable emotional expressions, which require the expenditure of valuable cognitive resources that could otherwise be allocated toward learning (Zapf, 2002). In other words, students who feel compelled to mask or fake their emotions often do so at the risk of their own classroom performance (Titsworth et al., 2010). Therefore, the results of this study encourage instructors to develop an interest in their students' learning and to communicate this interest openly through confirmation behaviors in order to minimize students' emotion work in the classroom.

Implications

Collectively, the findings from this study have important practical and theoretical implications for instructional communication scholars. Perhaps the most important implication from this study centers on today's college students and the transcending role of many instructors in higher education. In the college classroom, the majority of students acknowledge the instructor as the primary source of information and the facilitator of the learning experience (Galvin, 1999). However, as this study and others have recently shown (e.g., Mazer, 2013a; Titsworth et al., 2010, 2013), many college instructors are now expected to be a primary agent for enhancing students' emotional experiences in the classroom. As Sprague (1999) observed, classroom goals and outcomes are constantly evolving to meet the demands of the economy and the needs of the students. One such need that today's college students often require is a nurturing classroom environment that facilitates positive emotions toward learning experiences (Renn & Reason, 2012).

Largely comprised of the Millennial generation, today's college students are often characterized with having a need for regular positive reinforcement (McGlynn, 2005; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Thus, it is possible that many of these current students consider confirmation as an *expected* teaching behavior from all instructors, rather than an *effective* teaching behavior used by trained and experienced instructors. Simply put, many college students from the Millennial generation seek and desire communication from their instructors that make them feel better about their

classroom performance (Stout, 2000). Instructors may at times be both empathetic and frustrated by this growing need and expectation. Regardless, drawing from broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), instructors would be wise to consider teaching strategies that elicit enhanced positive emotions, as these experiences help to broaden students' cognitive functioning and improve their ability to learn course content. Although sometimes described as "entitled" and "demanding" (Boswell, 2012; Kopp, Zinn, Finney, & Jurich, 2011), Millennial students have a yearning for knowledge and the capacity to become one of the highest-achieving generations in human history (Bourke & Mechler, 2010). Of course, the primary task of instructors continues to be the instilment of knowledge in the minds of students (Waldeck, Plax, & Kearney, 2010). Yet, in order to accomplish this task more effectively, instructors should consider the influence of personal characteristics, previous educational experiences, and emotional processes on students' desire and ability to learn. One way in which instructors can accommodate these emotionally oriented needs, while also enhancing traditional learning outcomes, is by using confirming behaviors in the classroom (Ellis, 2000).

The findings from this study also demonstrate important theoretical implications. Similar to Zhang and Zhang (2013), we combined broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998) and ERT (Mottet et al., 2006) to help understand the importance of emotions in the classroom and the role that teacher confirmation may have over influencing students' emotional outcomes. The application of broaden-and-build theory to the educational context is admittedly scarce (Reschly et al., 2008; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). Yet the findings from this study and the theory's primary tenets suggest it is well suited for future investigations exploring college students' emotions. Similar to previous research (e.g., Titsworth et al., 2013), the results of this investigation further validate the notion that students do experience a host of positive emotions while in the college classroom. According to Fredrickson (1998), these emotional experiences (e.g., perceived emotional support) become important because they extend students' cognitive resources, enhance their ability to think creatively, and increase their willingness to engage in their surrounding environment (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Therefore, based upon the current results, it appears that future investigations using broaden-and-build theory are warranted to understand further the importance of positive emotional experiences in the classroom, particularly as they relate to students' cognitive performance.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any scholarly investigation, this study was not without limitations. Although the data allowed us to run predictive analyses (i.e., multiple regressions), they did not eliminate all extraneous variables or allow conclusions to be drawn about the causality of the findings. Similar to concerns that Feeley (2002) raised regarding halo effects in instructional communication, Titsworth et al. (2013) noted, "A reasonable possibility exists that when students have positive experiences in classes, stemming from any number of possible cues, they tend to remember their teachers in more

positive ways” (p. 205). In other words, the findings from this study may have been limited to some extent by students’ failure to discriminate conceptually unique constructs, instead responding to items by assigning general overall beliefs toward the targeted teacher or class (Feeley, 2002). Therefore, similar to Titsworth et al. (2010), future investigations should continue to distinguish between students’ emotional states and their affect toward the instructor or class. Future research could also help alleviate these concerns by employing longitudinal investigations and experimental designs to examine further the effects of confirmation on students’ emotional experiences in the classroom.

Moreover, although this study was guided in part by ERT, it did not directly assess one of its key premises in that emotional responses lead students to engage in approach/avoidance behaviors in the classroom (Mottet et al., 2006). Rather, like Titsworth et al. (2013), the purpose of this study was to focus explicitly on the first assumption of ERT (i.e., teachers’ communication behaviors are capable of enhancing emotional responses) in order to understand further the role of the teacher in facilitating college students’ emotional experiences. Toward that goal, this study contributed to the existing body of literature that has used ERT by demonstrating teachers can enhance students’ emotional responses through the use of confirmation behaviors (Ellis, 2000). However, going forward, future scholars should continue to advance and develop ERT by determining the extent to which students’ classroom emotions relate to their actual classroom behaviors and cognitive learning outcomes (Horan et al., 2012; Titsworth et al., 2010).

Conclusion

As Meyer and Turner (2006) noted, the “study of emotions in classrooms is necessarily complex, which is part of its intrigue, and the reason that we need improvements” (p. 388). Indeed, instructional communication researchers (e.g., Horan et al., 2012; Mazer, 2012; Titsworth et al., 2013) have begun to uncover the complexity of students’ emotions, including the role that they serve in the classroom and the influence that teachers can exert through effective instructional behaviors. Through the use of teacher confirmation, instructors communicate to students that they are significant and valuable members of the classroom, which in turn enhances their learning experiences (Ellis, 2000, 2004). The results of this study suggest that when instructors are confirming, students experience positive emotional outcomes in addition to their increased learning. According to previous theoretical work (Fredrickson, 1998; Mottet et al., 2006), these positive emotions then help to solidify and advance the application of course material, suggesting that confirmation serves multiple purposes in the college classroom. Therefore, instructors who are concerned not only with how much their students learn, but also how they feel about their classroom experiences, should continue to use confirming behaviors so that students feel valued and appreciated.

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