Communication Education

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The purpose of this study was to (a) identify perceived triggering agents of student dissent in the college classroom, (b) determine common target receivers of dissent, and (c) reveal the types of dissent that students enact based on their intentional motives and construction of message content. Participants were 123 undergraduate students who completed a survey and provided multiple written narratives in response to open-ended questions. Results of a content analysis revealed that (a) common perceived triggering agents of dissent included (in rank order) unfair testing/assignments, unfair grading, and teaching style, followed by instructor offensiveness, policy, violating syllabus, instructor indolence, lack of feedback, and group members slacking; (b) target receivers of dissent were primarily the class professor, classmates, friends, and family members, among others; and (c) students engaged in three types of dissent including expressive dissent (i.e., to vent their feelings and frustrations), rhetorical dissent (i.e., to attempt to correct a perceived wrongdoing by the instructor), and vengeful dissent (i.e., to retaliate and ruin the reputation of an instructor).

Keywords: Instructional Dissent; Student Dissent; Unfairness; Student Communication; Teacher Misbehavior

Students, as classroom consumers, are frequently dissatisfied with their classroom experiences and instructors (McMillan & Cheney, 1996). Indeed, instructors play an important role in creating this dissatisfaction through their communication in the classroom. For instance, instructors who misbehave in the classroom or use antisocial power bases compromise student communication satisfaction with their instructors (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009; Goodboy, Bolkan, Myers, & Zhao, 2011) and student affect (Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006; Richmond, 1990; Richmond & McCroskey, 1984). As Lindahl and Unger (2010) noted, many instructors are often bothered by cruel and globally negative student feedback resulting from student

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dissatisfaction because when students are unhappy, they tend to communicate their displeasure in response. Although aversive perceived instructor communication behavior can foster student dissatisfaction, students may also quibble over a variety of perceived classroom justice issues including the perceived fairness of the grades they receive, classroom-related procedures and policies, and interpersonal treatment from an instructor (Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005; Paulsel, Chory-Assad, & Dunleavy, 2005). Instructional communication research suggests that students will react negatively to ineffective instruction and negative classroom experiences. Of these negative reactions to classroom experiences, one type of reaction may take the form of dissent, which refers to the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions concerning policies and practices (Kassing, 1997). Although formative research on dissent in the classroom is scant, more attention has been given to similar negative reactions that occur in the classroom (i.e., student resistance, student challenge behavior, student nagging). To examine the idea of student dissent in the classroom, it is necessary to review the related literature on negative student reactions.

Negative Student Reactions

Instructional communication research suggests that students respond with several forms of negative reactions to instruction including student resistance strategies, student challenge behavior, and student nagging. First, students may use resistance strategies, which are oppositional behaviors used in the classroom to resist instructors' persuasive attempts (Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989). Common student resistance behaviors include refusing to complete work or participate, arguing, and making fun of teachers (Alpert, 1991; Field & Olafson, 1999). Kearney, Plax, and Burroughs (1991) found that students enact 19 types of resistance (for a review, see Chory & Goodboy, 2010) and are likely to use reluctant compliance (i.e., unwillingly complying), direct communication (i.e., talking to a teacher directly), and priorities (i.e., informing a teacher about other priorities) to resist compliance attempts from instructors. Research suggests that students are more likely to resist instructors who use antisocial compliance strategies and misbehaviors, and who are nonimmediate and not liked by students (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009; Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Lee, Levine, & Cambra, 1997; Plax, Kearney, Downs, & Stewart, 1986).

Second, students may use challenge behaviors, which are mediational strategies students use to seek clarification about classroom processes and to coconstruct the culture of the classroom (Simonds, 1997). Simonds (1997) discovered four types of challenge behaviors including evaluation challenges (i.e., questioning testing procedures and grades), procedural challenges (i.e., testing rules and norms in the classroom), practicality challenges (i.e., questioning the relevance of the course or tasks) and power challenges (i.e., trying to influence the behavior of the teacher or other students in the class). Student challenge behaviors can be reduced when instructors use expert and referent power (Myers, 1999), display nonverbal

immediacy cues (Goodboy & Myers, 2009), maintain clarity (Simonds, 1998), and use teacher confirmation in their classrooms (Goodboy & Myers, 2008).

Third, students may use nagging behaviors, which are attempts to pester an instructor with demands, pleas, and requests for compliance in a nonaggressive manner using the same message repeatedly (Dunleavy, Martin, Brann, Booth-Butterfield, Myers, & Weber, 2008). Dunleavy and Myers (2008) revealed that students use nagging strategies to elicit student support, demonstrate frustration, strike a deal, challenge instructor authority, elicit instructor sympathy, suggest instructor incompetence, flatter the instructor, and barrage the instructor with requests. Dunleavy et al. (2008) revealed that certain nags are more face-threatening for the instructor and student than others.

Although student resistance, student challenge behavior, and student nagging are considered negative student reactions to dissatisfaction in the classroom, the collective research on these variables shares three commonalities. First, all of these student communication behaviors are attempts to exert student power in the classroom over the instructor. Second, all of these behaviors involve a student's desire to enact some sort of change in the classroom. Third, these three student behaviors may be viewed by instructors as disruptive and counterproductive to student learning and classroom functioning. Although these programs of research have certainly yielded the groundwork for student communication reactions in the classroom, there is, however, another common negative student reaction that deserves attention. Little research has examined how students dissent in the college classroom; that is, how students communicate to express their contradictory opinions to others inside and/or outside of the classroom. Previous studies on student resistance, challenge behavior, and nagging all focus on compliance and persuasion in the classroom, although these variables share distinct conceptual labels. However, student dissent does not always involve a desire for instructor compliance or influence, but rather involves the mere communication of disagreement. Therefore, this study attempts to begin research on student dissent in the college classroom, focusing on any communication behavior (not just securing/ resisting compliance-gaining) that students use to indicate disagreement. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is threefold to: (a) identify the triggering agents of student dissent, (b) examine the targets/receivers of dissent expression, and (c) uncover the types of student dissent messages.

Dissent Research

Dissent has yet to be empirically examined in the instructional context, but Redding (1985) proposed that although students may be taught to go along with organizational expectations and avoid conflict, communication students should be consciousness-raisers by considering whistle-blowing instead of conforming to the societal expectations by pleasing others and not "rocking the boat." In a qualitative study examining students' behavioral reactions to perceptions of classroom injustice, students most frequently responded to unfairness by engaging in student dissent (Horan, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010). Although Horan et al. found that most of this

dissent was directed by students to the instructor, students also expressed dissent to other instructors, advisors, coaches, students (in class and out of class), friends, significant others, family members, and via course evaluations. Therefore, it appears that students do communicate to others when they feel "wronged" in a classroom. Yet, no other published research to date has examined the notion that students do dissent in the classroom. Fortunately, dissent has received considerable attention in the organizational context, so this study aims to extend the notion of organizational dissent into instructional settings.

Organizational dissent refers to the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions concerning organizational policies and practices (Kassing, 1997). Kassing (1998) proposed three types of dissent in the organization: articulated, latent, and displaced. *Articulated dissent* refers to open and direct communication to influential organizational members. *Latent dissent* involves communicating opinions to ineffective audiences (i.e., coworkers) rather than superiors with organizational power. *Displaced* dissent involves expressing criticism to external audiences (i.e., friends, family, significant others).

Kassing (1997) proposed a multifaceted model of organizational dissent and conceptualized dissent as a multistep process. Specifically, he asserted that dissent involves feeling apart and detached from an organization while expressing disagreement and contradictory opinions. Although Kassing argued that dissent is present in every organization, employees may experience dissent but decide not to communicate it. Furthermore, employees may stifle their dissent expression in the organization and choose to communicate to external audiences. Therefore, employees may possess contradictory opinions; however, dissent expression may not always transpire within the organization. Kassing (1997) proposed that dissent may be communicated or restricted depending on if workers desire opportunities to communicate opinions at work and management may welcome such communication. Such influences may prove frustrating or encouraging, depending on the organization and employee. To explain disparity in workers expression of dissent, Kassing (1997) proposed a four-step model to explain the associations leading to the communication of dissent. The four subsets of the model include: (a) triggering agents, (b) strategy selection influences, (c) strategy selection, and (d) dissent expression.

Triggering Agents

Dissent occurs after a triggering agent causes an individual to desire to express a contradictory opinion. Usually, something happens in the organization to cause the dissent expression; dissent almost never occurs for no apparent reason. Redding (1985) suggested that poor decision-making in the organization is a primary predictor of dissent. Kassing and Armstrong (2002) explained that dissent-triggering events may be self-focused, other-focused, or neutral. Kassing and Armstrong found that dissent triggering events include the following: employee treatment (fairness about employee rights), organizational change (changes and implementation),

decision-making (how decisions are made), inefficiency (ineffectiveness in the workplace), role/responsibility (perceptions of workload), resources (how resources are used), ethics (unethical practices), performance evaluation (how workers are evaluated), and preventing harm (danger in the workplace). Kassing and Armstrong also discovered that employees were more likely to communicate dissatisfaction to both supervisors and coworkers about changes in the organization and problems with coworkers while less likely to dissent about ethical issues and harm prevention. Although research by Kassing and colleagues has revealed the triggering agents for dissent in the organizational context, little is known about what causes dissent in the instructional context. Because research in the instructional context has identified many instructor misbehaviors that students dislike which result in unfavorable student reactions (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009; Kearney et al., 1991) and considering that Horan et al. (2010) found that 52.1% of student behavioral responses to perceived classroom injustices involved dissent, it is likely there are other numerous causes of dissent beyond student fairness perceptions. Therefore, the following research question is offered:

RQ1:   What triggering agents cause college students to engage in instructional dissent?

Dissent Targets, Strategy Selection, and Expression

Kassing (1997) explained that employees will decide on their communicative strategies for expressing dissent based on individual, relational, and organizational influences. *Individual influences* refer to "predispositions and expectations people import from outside their respective organizations, as well as how they behave within the organization" (Kassing, 1997, p. 324); *relational influences* involve "the types and quality of relationships people maintain within the organization;" and *organizational influences* refer to "how people relate to and perceive organizations". These mitigating factors are then predictors of the dissent message chosen by an employee. Depending on individual, relational, and organizational influences, employees decide on how dissent will be communicated. As Kassing (1997, 1998) noted, workers make assessments of how they will express their dissent and consider possible retaliation when choosing their particular strategy. Kassing argued that employees will choose to direct the dissent to either articulated, latent, or displaced targets. Kassing (1998) discovered that articulated dissent was related positively to workplace freedom of speech, employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, strength of supervisory relationship, perceptions of management's openness to input, and perceptions of organizational influence. Latent dissent was found to be related negatively to workplace freedom of speech, employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, strength of supervisory relationship, perceptions of management's openness to input, and perceptions of organizational influence. Displaced dissent was only associated negatively with perceptions of organizational influence and organizational commitment. Subsequent research has suggested that organizational dissent expression is a function of superior–subordinate relationship quality (Kassing, 2000a), workplace freedom of speech (Kassing, 2000b), organizational burnout syndrome (Avtgis,

Thomas-Maddox, Taylor, & Patterson, 2007), organizational tenure (Kassing & Dicioccio, 2004), perceptions of organizational justice (Goodboy, Chory, & Dunleavy, 2008; Kassing & McDowell, 2008), organization based self-esteem (Payne, 2007), and organizational climate and attachment (Kassing, 2008). Kassing and colleagues have revealed many pertinent findings on articulated, latent, and displaced targets of dissent and related correlates. Considering that the college classroom shares some commonalities with formal organizations (Chory & McCroskey, 1999), it is likely that targets of dissent in the instructional context will mirror those in the organization, but to ascertain the common targets of student dissent, the following research question is offered:

> RQ2: Who are the most frequently targeted receivers of instructional dissent?

However, no research so far has examined the types of messages that are crafted by students, who are driven by their motives for dissent. That is, it is relatively unknown what students hope to accomplish by dissension and what types of messages are strategically crafted. Since instructional dissent is a strategic communication process, these messages may vary drastically in terms of content. Therefore, to explore this notion, the final research question is offered:

> RQ3: What types of instructional dissent messages do students communicate?

Method

Participants

After receiving institutional review board approval, participants were 123 undergraduate students enrolled in a large lecture introduction to communication studies course at a midsized Eastern university of approximately 9,000 students. Participants were 50 men and 73 women whose ages ranged from 18 to 23 years ($M = 19.90$, $SD = 1.02$). Twenty eight ($n = 28$) participants were freshmen, 59 participants were sophomores, 22 participants were juniors, and 12 participants were seniors (two did not identify a class rank).

Procedures

Because Kassing (2009) argued that "previous scholars have provided fruitful analysis of dissent episodes by soliciting employee's narrative accounts" (p. 319), written narratives were solicited from students to understand their dissent episodes. Participants responded to four open-ended questions given the following directions:

> Students sometimes express their disagreement about classroom policies/practices or differences of opinion regarding class. That is, when students do not agree with something that happened in class, they tend to communicate to other people instead of keeping negative feelings inside. Please give an example when *you* expressed your disagreement or difference of opinion concerning something that happened in class and resulted in you complaining to someone else about the incident. Please use the space provided to answer the following open-ended questions.

Students were instructed to anonymously report on a different instructor than the one present during data collection to yield a wide sample of instructors and to avoid potential social desirability biases. After reading these directions, students were provided with the following four questions with ample writing space for each: (a) Describe a classroom issue that you disagreed with that led you to complain to someone. What was the specific problem or issue in the class that made you complain to someone?; (b) Who did you specifically talk to about this classroom disagreement?; (c) Explain (in detail) what you said or did in response to this disagreement. Explain the message you communicated to this person; (d) What did you hope to accomplish by talking to this person? What was your goal or motive for complaining? What did you want to happen as a result of complaining? This open-ended narrative procedure was similar to the procedure used by Kassing (2009) to uncover reasons for employee circumvention/dissent.

The third question was not formally used in analyses, but was meant to help participants describe their communication in a written narrative as a referent for cognitive recall. Answers to the third question almost unanimously reflected the triggering agent in question one (e.g., "I think my grade is wrong" = "Could you please look over my grade again?"; "I am upset with my professor" = "Would you be upset if you were in my position?"). All of the narratives were transcribed completely for over a hundred pages of written anecdotes and were then copied into a spreadsheet database for data analysis so that each unit of text could be given to independent coders to identify key themes (Myers & Bryant, 2004).

Data Analysis

To analyze the transcribed narratives, a content analysis was implemented based on open coding from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000). Each transcribed narrative was open coded and "broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). Using a constant comparative analysis, the existing categories were retained when data recurred and were modified when necessary, and new categories were added when a category did not exist for the data. After an initial codebook was developed, axial coding was used to condense existing categories that were observed to "crosscut and link" (Strauss & Cobrin, p. 124). The resulting process led to a final codebook.[1] Three independent coders were trained to use the codebook and coded 30% of the data (10% of the data for each coder) to assess interobserver agreement, which yielded an acceptable 91% rate of agreement (Holsti, 1969).

Results

The first research question sought to identify the triggering agents and causes of student dissent in the classroom. In response to the research question, participants identified nine separate causes of instructional dissent which did not occur with equal frequency, χ^2 (8) = 52.68, $p < .001$. The most common triggering agents of

dissent (61%) were *unfair testing/assignments* (i.e., students felt that exams or assignments were unfair; $n = 27$, 22.0%), *unfair grading* (i.e., students felt that the professor enacted unfair grading practices or made a grading mistake; $n = 25$, 20.3%), and *teaching style* (i.e., students disliked the instructional practices used in the classroom; $n = 23$, 18.7%). The remaining triggering agents included *instructor offensiveness* (i.e., the instructor communicated in a hostile manner; $n = 16$, 13.0%), *classroom policies* (i.e., students disliked a classroom policy such as mandatory participation or text messaging penalties in class; $n = 12$, 9.8%), *violating the syllabus* (i.e., the instructor deviated from an item explicitly stated on the syllabus such as an established test date; $n = 7$, 5.7%), *instructor indolence* (i.e., the instructor acted in a lazy manner such as returning assignments too late; $n = 7$, 5.7%), *lack of feedback* (i.e., the instructor did not provide any feedback on assignments, so students could not improve their performance; $n = 4$, 3.3%), and *group members slacking* (i.e., students felt that other group members were not contributing enough toward the group task; $n = 2$, 1.6%). Interestingly, all of the triggering agents of dissent were attributed to instructor behaviors and decisions except for *group members slacking*. Frequencies and representative narratives of dissent triggering agents are presented in Table 1.

Research question two examined the target recipients of student dissent. Much like Kassing's (1997) model of dissent, students sought out a variety of receivers to express their disagreements concerning class. Students who engaged in articulated dissent sought out individuals with the power to enact change and rectify their classroom issue (i.e., professor, chair, another professor, advisor, formal evaluations, teaching assistant, dean, president); those who engaged in latent dissent communicated with targets of a similar status (i.e., classmates, other students, group members); students who enacted displaced dissent sought out individuals outside of the classroom (i.e., friends, family members, roommates, significant others, bosses). However, the data suggest that students primarily enacted dissent with their classmates ($n = 60$, 20.3%), their professor who caused the dissent ($n = 54$, 18.3%), friends ($n = 52$, 17.6%), and family ($n = 52$, 17.6%). Notably, a majority of the students dissented to more than one target ($n = 89$, 72.4%). Frequencies of the dissent targets are displayed in Table 2.

Research question three examined the types of dissent messages that are expressed by students based on their motive for dissent. Examination of the narratives yielded three distinct types of instructional dissent which did not occur with equal frequency, χ^2 (2) = 29.38, $p < .001$. First, students reported creating dissent messages for the purpose of persuading their instructor to take action and correct a wrongdoing. This type of dissent was labeled *rhetorical dissent* ($n = 62$). Recall that a majority of the triggering agents involved unfair testing/assignments, unfair grading, and teaching style problems. Students who enacted rhetorical dissent were concerned with rectifying these classroom injustices. Post hoc analyses using chi-square, χ^2 (2) = 57.36, $p < .001$, revealed that 78.6% ($n = 55$) of students who engaged in rhetorical dissent did so in an articulated manner (i.e., to individuals who can remedy their classroom disagreement in a position of power, primarily the professor him/herself or the chairperson). Therefore, it appears that one type of student dissent

Table 1   Triggering Agents of Instructional Dissent and Representative Examples

	n	%
Unfair testing A multiple-choice question did not have the correct answer as an option. When I approached the teacher and showed him what the book said, he got defensive and told me to expand my knowledge to other books and pick the closest answer if the correct answer isn't there.	27	22.0
Unfair grading Last week, I had to present my final research project with my group. We were the first ones to go, and the teacher didn't tell us any of the guidelines. After we finished describing our findings, the professor tore us apart because we didn't go into enough detail. Apparently we didn't go and break our findings down enough. However, she showed our findings based on status and college, for both students and advisors. The next group that presented had the same topic and only expressed their findings in general, not going into any detail. They kept it at a general level and the teacher applauded and thought everything was great. I don't understand how our group explained the findings in detail and was told we could do better and then the next group gives no detail and it's a good presentation.	25	20.3
Teaching style I disagreed about a professor's teaching style or lack thereof. I went to the head of the department and asked if they could talk to that professor about changing their teaching style/technique. I hoped it would have changed but it did not! The teaching style was more or less standing up in front and reading off of notes for the whole class. Like how will I learn? I can read on my own!	23	18.7
Instructor offensiveness One time I didn't understand something that my teacher was teaching. I asked him to explain it again and he totally embarrassed me and told me I should be in a lower class if I couldn't keep up with the class.	16	13.0
Classroom policies The problem in my classroom was that we were not allowed to go to the bathroom! I thought this was very unfair. My teacher was not an understanding person.	12	9.8
Violating the syllabus As an upperclassman in a mainly freshman-comprised intro-level general education, I have skipped the course (8am) on days which I've had exams in my graduate biology courses. After approx. two months of attending the general education, I realized that if she hadn't taken attendance yet, she most likely wouldn't. Her syllabus stated that "extra consideration would be given to students with good attendance in regard to final grades." I assumed that meant [for] those "on the border," she would move to the higher grade. I decided that I would benefit from skipping every so often in exchange for a few extra study hours. Half-way through the semester, she begun taking attendance, but for points toward our grade, not as stated in our syllabus.	7	5.7
Instructor indolence I disagree with how long my professor takes to hand back assignments. He didn't hand back our papers for over a month. I complained to my classmates and then asked him about it.	7	5.7

Table 1 (*Continued*)

	n	%
Lack of feedback	4	3.3
In a computer class I had last semester, the professor quizzed us twice a week and gave us a test on top of that during the week when we met MWF. We would have 50 min to take a quiz, finish, and then take a test. On top of that, he would leave the room while we were taking the quizzes and tests. We would still have a quiz or test if he was not in the class; he would send someone in to take our name and leave, so we were unable to ask him questions because he was not there. We were tested way more than taught. We had to hand in assignments from Word, Excel, and so on, and they were graded, but he told us he doesn't grade them until the end of the semester. So whenever I or other people had trouble, we didn't even know how we were doing on the assignments. He never ended up giving them back.		
Group members slacking[a]	2	1.6
In one of my classes, we were split up into groups. We had to create a 45-min presentation. However, only me [sic] and another student came to the first few meetings with sources and work done. We would have time in class to discuss our project, but they would either sit and listen or make up excuses for not having anything.		
Total	123	100%

[a]The only cause of dissent that was not directly attributed to the instructor.

is used to potentially change perceived wrongdoings and, not surprisingly, is directed toward the professor who, unlike most other targets of dissent, can provide a solution with legitimate power. As one student wrote, "I demanded to get credit for the assignment that I handed in on time! The professor eventually found the report and gave me a 100%, regardless of the actual quality of the report."

A second type of dissent involved a student desire to express and vent feelings, feel better by discussing contradictory opinions, and garner sympathy and/or empathy from other individuals. This type of dissent was labeled *expressive dissent* ($n = 46$). Students reported that when triggering agents had upset them, they turned to others for a sort of cathartic therapy because they wanted to vent their frustrations to anyone who would listen instead of actually seeking a tangible remedy. Students who engaged in expressive dissent were likely to turn to latent targets such as classmates and displaced targets such as friends and family members. Students reported that they wanted to gain support from others so they could feel better about the triggering agent. One student wrote, "I complained because I was too upset and I just needed someone to talk to. I wanted to get my frustration out."

A final type of instructional dissent involved crafting dissent messages to ruin a professor's reputation, ensure that future students avoid taking a class with the professor, or attempt to get the professor fired for perceived wrongdoings. This type of dissent was labeled *vengeful dissent* ($n = 14$). Students revealed that this type of dissent was enacted to seek revenge and to hurt the credibility of a professor among their students and colleagues. As one student explained,

Table 2   Recipients of Instructional Dissent

Receiver	n	%
Articulated dissent		
Class professor	54	18.3
Chair	10	3.4
Another professor	7	2.4
Advisor	6	2.0
Evaluations	5	1.6
Teaching assistant	1	0.3
Dean	1	0.3
President	1	0.3
Latent dissent		
Classmates	60	20.3
Other students	9	3.3
Group members	2	0.7
Displaced dissent		
Friends	52	17.6
Family	52	17.6
Roommates	20	6.8
Significant other	14	4.7
Boss	1	0.3

Note. Frequencies ($N = 295$) are greater than the sample size of participants ($N = 122$) because many participants reported multiple targets of dissent.

> I don't think professors should abuse their authority and hold it against you. I took a stand because I demand that they give you equal respect as they would expect from you. I wanted to make sure other students knew not to take this teacher.

Frequencies and representative narratives of the expressive, rhetorical, and vengeful dissent types are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3   Types of Instructional Dissent and Representative Examples

	n	%
Expressive	46	37.4
I just wanted to vent some steam and relax a bit. Even if I brought this to the head of the department, I felt that my voice wouldn't have been heard and only would have been seen as a student trying to slack off.		
Rhetorical	62	50.4
I hoped that my professor would change my grade and mark the questions right that I got wrong. The next day I received an email from the professor. He explained that he couldn't give me credit on all of the problems, just two out of the three. I felt like I got my goal accomplished, and the result was a higher grade.		
Vengeful	14	11.4
I complained to ruin his reputation so that other students avoid his class and to get him fired.		
Total	122	99.2%

Note. Types of dissent do not add up to 100% ($N = 123$) because one narrative could not be coded into the coding scheme and was coded as "other." This "other" example was a type of dissent that was told to friends as an entertaining story about an incident that happened to another student in class. To tell a story to entertain others could not be coded into the typology and was omitted.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to begin exploratory research on instructional dissent by examining the perceived triggering agents for students, the targets they turn to for dissent expression, and the types of dissent they enact. Collectively, three main conclusions emerged from the narrative data. First, student perceptions of instructors' bad grading and teaching practices are the primary triggering agents of dissent. Students were most likely to dissent when instructors were perceived to use unfair testing, unfair grading, and a poor teaching style. More minor causes of dissent included perceived instructor offensiveness, classroom policies, violating the syllabus, instructor indolence, lack of feedback, and group members slacking. All of these triggering agents are directly attributed to instructors, besides group members slacking. Therefore, instructors should be especially conscientious to avoid these triggering agents, which are conceptually equivalent, if not identical to some of the research on teacher misbehaviors (specifically instructor indolence and instructor offensiveness), which impede effective classroom instruction (Kearney et al., 1991). Moreover, the idea that students dislike groupwork is not new. Myers and Goodboy (2005) discovered that students' disliking of group work actually increases throughout the semester. The potential for group members to slack in small groups is a risk that appears to elicit student dissent (possibly to other group members) resulting from the frustration of not achieving mandatory group goals. The triggering agents of dissent, then, appear to be common causes of student dissatisfaction, which in turn result in student dissent. These findings also share some conceptual overlap with triggering agents revealed in the organizational context (Kassing & Armstrong, 2002). Specifically, unfair testing, unfair grading, and violating the syllabus can be considered "ethical issues" whereas teaching style, classroom policies, and lack of feedback can be considered "change" motivations.[2] Therefore, it appears that triggering agents are similar between the organizational and instructional communication contexts.

Second, the targets of dissent coincide with Kassing's (1998) model consisting of articulated targets (mostly the professor and chairperson), latent targets (mostly other classmates), and displaced targets (mostly friends and family members). Students less frequently turned to a variety of other targets including advisors, roommates, other professors, other students, and significant others, to name a few. Therefore, Kassing's (1997) propositions in the organizational context appear transferable and relevant in the instructional context.

Third, the most novel findings in this study involve the types of student dissent uncovered through student motives for engaging in dissent. Three unique types of dissent were revealed: expressive dissent, rhetorical dissent, and vengeful dissent. *Expressive dissent* was used by students who were attempting to vent their feelings and frustrations about a classroom disagreement. Theoretically, much of this catharsis may be an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance or justify failure via external attributions. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that students will attempt to reduce dissonance when discrepant cognitions are present (Festinger, 1957). Students who are not performing well in a class or who are irritated by instructor

(mis)behavior may turn to others to validate their thoughts on the subject and ensure cognitive consonance by reducing uncomfortable thoughts formed about themselves. Moreover, attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley & Michela, 1980) suggests that students may externalize their classroom failures and potentially blame the instructor for such failures, as students are unlikely to attribute blame to themselves. Dissent may serve as a method to reinforce external attributions for negative classroom experiences (e.g., a bad grade) by blaming the instructor and explaining their frustration to anyone who will listen. Consequently, expressive dissent appears to be a therapeutic form of dissent that students use for no other purpose than to feel better.

Rhetorical dissent, however, is used for the sole purpose of seeking change and persuading the instructor to correct a perceived wrongdoing. While some students may want to vent their feelings, other students indicated that they wanted a solution to the triggering agent and expected change in the classroom. Not surprisingly, much of this dissent was articulated and directed toward the professor who has the power to remedy the problem (versus external audiences who have no power). These findings corroborate research that suggests students use a variety of behavioral alteration techniques to gain compliance from an instructor (Golish, 1999; Golish & Olson, 2000). Consistent with relational/rhetorical goal theory (Mottet, Frymier, & Beebe, 2006), which suggests that students possess rhetorical goals (i.e., to achieve instructional goals in the classroom), these goals are achieved through interactions with their instructor, and rhetorical dissent may be one strategy to obtain these goals. Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Paulsel (2004) found that instructors were more likely to comply with a student request when the student was responsive. Students who approach instructors in a responsive manner and who use effective communication may actually achieve this goal (Frymier, 2005), and students who succeed at persuading their instructors to comply may be reinforced to use rhetorical dissent as one strategy to secure compliance.

Vengeful dissent was performed to inflict harm to the instructor in the form of retaliation or revenge. Students indicated that they dissent to get the instructor in trouble (possibly causing the instructor to get fired) and to ruin the instructor's reputation in order to ensure that other students avoid being subjected to the same problems or to make other professors aware of a problematic colleague. Vengeful dissent may be explained by equity theory (Adams, 1965), which suggests that students will attempt to restore equity in the classroom when they feel underbenefited. Previous research has suggested that students will engage in aggressive and hostile behavior to hurt an instructor if they feel that students are being hurt (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004). Vengeful dissent appears to be an aggressive behavior that is constructed for that very reason.

Limitations/Future Directions

As with any study, the current study has several limitations. The main limitation in this study is that the results may not be generalizable to every classroom. Certain classes may have unique triggering agents of dissent, which theoretically in turn would

influence the targets of dissent and type of dissent expression. Also, the length of time that had elapsed since the dissent episode was not measured. It is possible that some students reported on events that happened some time ago, which may be influenced by selective recall biases. It is also possible that student recollections of their dissent episodes may involve one-sided interpretations of the communication that could be influenced by perceptual biases. Without the paired recollections from the instructor, it is difficult to ascertain if the recall data were influenced by such biases.

Since research on instructional dissent is in its infancy, there are numerous future directions for instructional scholars to examine. First, since personality and communication traits (i.e., locus of control and aggressive communication traits) are related to dissent in organizations (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999, 2001) it would be advantageous to ascertain if students' traits influence the types of dissent enacted in the classroom. For example, does trait vengefulness or verbal aggression lead to more vengeful dissent? Does trait argumentativeness elicit more rhetorical dissent? Research on students' individual differences will yield a more complete picture of instructional dissent expression. Second, developing a model of dissent in the classroom, similar to Kassing's (1997) model, would be useful to direct future research endeavors. By explaining the instructional dissent framework via theory, researchers could then test the model, and researchers would have an explanatory mechanism for future examinations of instructional dissent. Research should examine both mediating and moderating variables of instructional dissent. Third, there is no quantitative measure for operationalizing instructional dissent. As Horan et al. (2010) noted, dissent appears to be an area ripe for future research. It would prove useful to create a psychometric measure for expressive, rhetorical, and vengeful dissent in order to conduct this future research. Until a valid and reliable instructional dissent measure is constructed, researchers cannot begin to quantitatively examine these student communication behaviors in a programmatic fashion.

Conclusion

The results of the current study suggest that students do engage in dissent frequently based on a variety of reasons and communicate dissent in predictable manners based on their motives for dissent. Because research suggests that students form lasting impressions of instructors early in the semester (Laws, Apperson, Buchert, & Bregman, 2010; Tom, Tong, & Heese, 2010), instructors who do not want students to communicate negative messages about them should be especially careful to avoid the triggering agents of dissent. Furthermore, instructors should understand that not all instructional dissent is communicated to harm them; rather, some students are merely venting their frustrations or hoping to fix the problem and move on. The classroom, like the organization, is a setting that is likely to produce contradictory opinions and resulting dissent expression. However, unlike the organizational context which has benefitted from Kassing's programmatic research, the instructional context requires more research so that instructors may understand the dissent process in an

effort to diminish potential student dissent, and manage and respond to student dissent effectively.

Notes

[1]   The initial content analysis yielded eight triggering agents of student dissent. The initial codebook consisted of Unfair Testing/Grading (defined as any instance in which a student believed a test or other assignment was unfair), Unfair Grading (any instance in which an instructor or teaching assistant enacted an unfair grading practice or committed a grading mistake), Teaching Style (any example of a student disliking the methods or way an instructor teaches), Instructor Offensiveness (any offensive, verbally aggressive, or rude communication directed toward a student or students), Classroom Policies (any rule or policy in class that is disliked), Violating the Syllabus (any deviation or violation from expectations explicitly stated in the syllabus), Instructor Indolence (any instance in which the instructor was not doing his/her job due to laziness), and Group Members Slacking (any instance in which group members were not meeting group expectations). A constant comparative analysis yielded an additional ninth category, labeled Lack of Feedback (any instance in which an instructor failed to provide detailed or any feedback on an submitted assignment). This category emerged as a distinct conceptual label from Instructor Indolence. The targets of dissent were straightforward and coded without definitions in the final codebook. The types of dissent data yielded three distinct types that did not crosscut or link: rhetorical (defined as any dissent message designed to influence another person towards the direction of a student goal), expressive (any dissent message designed to express and vent student feelings or gain support from others), and vengeful (any dissent message designed to seek revenge for a perceived wrongdoing).

[2]   I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this conceptual overlap in findings between the organizational and instructional contexts.

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