No Complain, No Gain: Students' Organizational, Relational, and Personal Reasons for Withholding Rhetorical Dissent from their College Instructors

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No Complain, No Gain: Students' Organizational, Relational, and Personal Reasons for Withholding Rhetorical Dissent from their College Instructors

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Dissatisfaction between students and faculty is not uncommon, but the majority of students do not complain to their instructors when they have issues that need addressing. Because complaining to instructors gives them the potential to fix student problems, we conducted this study to determine why students choose not to complain to their instructors when they experience dissatisfaction. We used a qualitative approach to answering this question and asked a sample of 186 participants to report their reasons for withholding rhetorical dissent. Our data indicated that students withheld dissent from their instructors due to organizational factors and, to a lesser extent, relational and personal factors. We discuss these results and identify implications for instructors.

Keywords: Communication; Dissent; Instructional

Without information to the contrary, college instructors may believe they are doing a fine job in the classroom. However, when it comes to college instruction, no news is not necessarily good news; most students who have complaints about their classroom experiences never communicate their discontent directly to their instructors (Goodboy, 2011a). This is important to remember because, although instructors might enter their classrooms under the assumption that they are working hard to promote a positive learning environment, student dissatisfaction is not an uncommon phenomenon (Harrison, 2007). In fact, estimates of student dissatisfaction indicate

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that at least part of the college student population experiences discontent regularly. For instance, in their review of the literature, Cooper-Hind and Taylor (2012) mentioned that "student complaints in universities are increasing" and that a significant portion of students are "not satisfied with their university experience" (p. 56).

Even students who are generally satisfied with their educational experiences may encounter dissatisfaction every now and then; instructors are not perfect and are likely to make mistakes or upset students at least occasionally. Indeed, only a minority of students report never having experienced conflict with an instructor (Tantleff-Dunn, Dunn, & Gokee, 2002). Though discontent can result from a variety of causes, scholars assert that shortcomings such as grading issues, teacher incompetence, or bias against students (Harrison, 2007) function as violations of student expectations (Lala & Priluck, 2011) and lead to dissatisfaction in the classroom. That said, if students become dissatisfied with their educational experiences, they have a variety of options to pursue. For instance, students may use behavior-alteration techniques (Golish, 1999) or nagging behaviors (Dunleavy & Myers, 2008) to get what they want. Additionally, students may resist instructors' requests (Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989), challenge the culture of their classrooms (Simonds, 1997), become hostile, withdraw from the course, or provide negative feedback on student evaluations (Horan, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010).

In addition to these options, when students become dissatisfied they may also choose to communicate instructional dissent. According to Goodboy (2011b), instructional dissent occurs "when students express their disagreements or complaints about class-related issues" (p. 423), and reflects "how students communicate to express their contradictory opinions to others inside and/or outside of the classroom" (Goodboy, 2011a, p. 298). When students dissent they typically do so by being expressive, vengeful, or rhetorical during the complaint process (Goodboy, 2011a). Specifically, when students complain using expressive dissent they vent their class-related frustrations in order to feel better and gain sympathy. When students use vengeful dissent, they spread negative publicity about an instructor to damage his/her credibility. Finally, when students use rhetorical dissent, they attempt to persuade instructors to fix perceived wrongdoings by communicating directly with their professors in an attempt to perform better in their classes. Of interest to the current study is the process behind rhetorical dissent, which is considered to be a more constructive form of complaining (Goodboy, 2011b).

Although disagreement in the classroom may seem like something that instructors would want to avoid as a way of protecting their face (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012), researchers examining disagreement in organizational settings might suggest that instructors start to think otherwise. For example, in research examining employee–employer interactions, dissent is interpreted as a constructive attempt to communicate the need for change (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). Moreover, in the consumer literature, complaining is considered beneficial because, as Blodgett and Anderson (2000) claim, by doing so customers "provide retailers the opportunity to address and remedy the problem" (p. 322). The same is true in college classrooms. That is,

rhetorical dissent should be considered constructive behavior insofar as it "encourages direct interaction between students and their instructors" and allows instructors "to directly address the issue or the person that is causing them to experience classroom dissent" (Goodboy & Myers, 2012, p. 454).

Unfortunately, the majority of students do not communicate directly with their instructors when they have issues that need addressing (Goodboy, 2011a). This is problematic because when students withhold complaints from their instructors, instructors lose the opportunity to rectify individual problems and improve overall teaching methods (Su & Bao, 2001). This may be why Wright (2012) mentioned, "Future research must not overlook the experiences of academic disappointment that are unexpressed in the classroom because they are just as, if not more important than those that are discussed with instructors" (p. 287). Because rhetorical dissent can be beneficial in the classroom, the purpose of this study was to determine why students choose to withhold this type of communication from their instructors.

Withholding Constructive Feedback

Although the notion of dissent is relatively new in instructional settings, the concept is not new to researchers examining organizational contexts. In fact, there is voluminous literature relating to the idea of dissent in employee–employer relationships (e.g., Kassing, 1997, 1998), and to the idea of customer complaining in consumer–provider relationships (e.g., Blodgett & Anderson, 2000; Bolkan, Goodboy, & Bachman, 2012). Though these relationships may seem different compared to student–instructor relationships, there is evidence to suggest that conceptualizing the classroom as an organization is warranted (e.g., Bolkan, Goodboy, & Griffin, 2011; McMillan & Cheney, 1996). Thus, direction for the current project may be found in research pertaining to organizational communication following unsatisfactory exchanges between organizations and their employees/consumers.

Within organizations, dissent is a subset of voice that occurs when "employees recognize incongruence between actual and desired states of affairs" (Kassing, 1997, p. 311). For our purposes, we were concerned with articulated dissent, which is defined as "sharing concerns directly and openly with management, supervisors, and corporate offices" (Kassing, 1998, p. 207). Crucially, expressing articulated dissent "is an important communication activity" (Kassing, 1998, p. 183) that functions as corrective feedback for organizations because it provides organizational leaders with the opportunity to "hear feedback they may not receive from other audiences" (p. 187). However, similar to students who tend not to dissent to their instructors, not all employees choose to express their discontent to their supervisors. In fact, some estimates claim that upwards of 85% of employees have remained silent about an issue or problem at one time or another (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). The same is true for consumers. Though dissatisfaction with business practices is not uncommon (Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990), most consumers who experience dissatisfaction do not address organizations directly (Zemke, 1994). Researchers who have examined the reasons why employees choose not to engage in articulated

dissent have found some patterns related to this choice. Generally, elements that influence the decision to dissent include organizational, relational, and personal factors (Kassing, 1997, 2008), the same factors that explain why consumers do not communicate their dissatisfaction directly to organizations.

For some scholars, the biggest influence on dissent decisions is related to the organizational climate (e.g., Hegstrom, 1990), which is broadly defined as employees' perceptions of organizational reactions to dissent. For instance, researchers claim that two of the most important antecedents of articulated dissent are employees' perceptions of managers' responsiveness (i.e., the perception that handling employee concerns is a priority) and the certainty associated with managers' reactions to employee concerns (Saunders, Sheppard, Knight, & Roth, 1992). Relatedly, Kassing (2000b) suggests that employees who perceive that their workplaces promote freedom of speech are more likely to use articulated dissent than employees who do not. Other researchers also support the contention that decisions regarding dissent may be "dictated by the organizational climate" (Sprague & Ruud, 1988, p. 173), differentiated by organizations that are open to dissent and those that are not. For example, scholars suggest that some employees do not articulate their dissent for fear of being labeled as a trouble-maker, losing trust and support, or being retaliated against directly (Milliken et al., 2003). Perceptions of the organizational climate are important in consumer complaint scenarios as well. According to Voorhees and Brady (2005), customers are more likely to complain to organizations when they perceive those organizations to be responsive and fair when addressing consumers' concerns. Similarly, research has demonstrated that the probability of voicing complaints to organizations increases when there is a high probability of resolving complaints (Kolodinsky, 1993), and when consumers perceive organizations to be more receptive to complaints (Richins, 1983; Singh & Wilkes, 1996).

Relational factors also influence subordinates' decisions to dissent in organizations (Kassing, 1998; Milliken et al., 2003). For example, Kassing (2000a) found that subordinates who enjoy high-quality relationships with their supervisors were more likely to participate in articulated dissent compared to subordinates with low-quality relationships. In addition, researchers have shown that subordinates who have high-quality relationships with their supervisors are more likely than employees with low-quality relationships to experience lower power distance with their employers and to sustain challenges in the face of managerial control attempts (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989). In essence, employees who feel close to their bosses may be more likely to voice dissent to them in a constructive manner because they have developed a working relationship built on trust (Waldron, 1991). The same appears to be true in complaint scenarios where consumers who are more loyal to organizations are less likely to complain to third parties when faced with failures (Oh, 2004), and are more likely to seek redress from organizations directly (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000).

Finally, scholars suggest that personal factors also influence employees' and consumers' choices to dissent and complain. For example, people who are more argumentative, but less verbally aggressive, tend to use articulated dissent more than others (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999). Moreover, Kassing and Avtgis (2001) demonstrated that employees who

had an internal locus of control were more likely to express articulated dissent than employees who had an external locus of control. In the consumer literature, individual factors that influence customers' propensity to complain include their attitudes toward complaining (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000; Kim, Kim, Im, & Shin, 2003), their degree of dissatisfaction, the importance of the service or product, and the perceived value of complaining (i.e., the costs of complaining compared to the value of possible redress) (Cho, Im, Hiltz, & Fjermestad, 2002).

Collectively, these findings indicate several reasons why people choose to withhold articulated dissent from employers or complaints from organizations. In essence, decisions to complain to the source of the problem are influenced by questions surrounding organizational responses ("Will the dissent be met in a positive or negative manner?"), relational quality ("Am I comfortable enough to voice my opinion?"), and personal considerations ("Does my situation warrant speaking up? Is complaining worth the hassle?"). An examination of general complaining in educational settings may lead readers to come to similar conclusions regarding the reasons students choose not to engage in conflict in higher education. For instance, Lala and Priluck (2011) found that following an episode of dissatisfaction, students were more likely to complain to school administrators, deans, department chairs, advisors, and professors when the severity of the failure increased, the cost of complaining was low, and the probability of a positive response was high. In an examination of student reports to the ombudsperson, Harrison and Morrill (2004) found that students "expressed concerns about power, retribution, and the futility of pursuit when discussing their conflicts" (p. 328). As far as the ombudsperson was concerned, students pursued grievances "only when they felt the power over them was minimized, and current problems outweighed concerns about retribution" (p. 328). Relatedly, in an investigation of conflicts students felt strongly about, Harrison (2007) reported that students did not pursue conflicts related to instructors in a general sense (i.e., talk to classmates, university officials, professors, etc.) because they did not expect a positive outcome, were afraid of retribution, the complaining process was too much trouble, and because they did not know how to pursue their grievances. Finally, Mukherjee, Pinto, and Malhotra (2009) found that following a hypothetical dissatisfying classroom experience, participants in their study were more likely to take complaints directly to professors when they respected them, liked them, and believed that they were friendly. To summarize, similar to contexts involving employee dissent or consumer complaining, the majority of the reasons students have for avoiding conflict in higher education tend to group into an organizational factor (e.g., the probability of a positive response or retribution), a relational factor (e.g., the perceived likeability and friendliness of professors), and a personal factor (e.g., the severity of the failure and the costs of complaining).

Research Questions

Though researchers who study complaining in educational settings have discovered reasons why students might not pursue conflict in academia in general, scholars have

yet to examine the reasons students have for withholding rhetorical dissent directed to instructors in specific. That is, researchers may have an idea about why students do not pursue conflict with university officials or other individuals as a way of resolving conflict, but they have yet to examine specifically why students choose not to communicate directly with their instructors when experiencing dissatisfaction. Ultimately, knowing why students withhold rhetorical dissent from their instructors following unsatisfying instructional experiences may help researchers determine if students withhold dissent for the same reasons they do in other contexts (i.e., employers, organizations, ombudspersons), and may help instructors determine how to best encourage direct communication from their students.

In addition to determining why students choose to withhold rhetorical dissent, we also sought information regarding classroom occurrences that trigger the desire to communicate rhetorical dissent. We did so because despite findings that general dissent is a product of teacher misbehaviors or injustice in the classroom (e.g., Goodboy, 2011a; Horan et al., 2010), it is still not clear which specific triggers lead to the potential for rhetorical dissent. For example, though researchers have found that violations of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice serve as triggers for perceptions of unfairness in college classrooms (Horan et al., 2010), these triggers are not necessarily associated with rhetorical dissent. To this point, Goodboy (2011b) discovered that students' perceptions of classroom justice were able to predict expressive and vengeful dissent, but that these perceptions did not influence students' propensity to engage in rhetorical dissent. Therefore, another goal of this study was to determine which triggers influence the potential for rhetorical dissent.

Additionally, researchers examining dissent have yet to uncover what students do when they could dissent rhetorically but choose not to. Though some scholars suggest the possibility that students may engage in expressive and/or vengeful dissent (Goodboy, 2011a, 2011b; Horan et al., 2010), it is not clear whether students perceive these alternatives to be substitutes for rhetorical dissent. Instead, students may save their grievances for end-of-semester instructor evaluations or they may simply do nothing (Horan et al., 2010). Because scholars have not yet articulated which behaviors students engage in as a substitute for rhetorical dissent, we sought to determine what students do when they experience discontent but choose not to communicate their grievances directly to their instructors.

Finally, if rhetorical dissent provides instructors with the opportunity to address perceived problems in the classroom, it may be important for researchers to determine what students expect would make them happy after experiencing dissatisfaction. Though there is a dearth of information regarding best practices for instructors following dissent, scholars have provided important insights regarding organizational remediation following consumer complaints. Typically, researchers assert that perceptions of fair outcomes, fair and timely policies for addressing concerns, and positive interpersonal treatment largely influence consumers' reactions to organizational remediation (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran 1998); though

scholars argue that other variables such as perceived control (e.g., Bolkan, Goodboy, & Daly, 2010) and the quality/type of communication matter as well (e.g., Bolkan & Daly, 2008, 2009). Still, few studies examining instructor responses to student dissent exist and, as a result, researchers are unable articulate which outcomes students perceive might satisfy their discontent.

Knowing which triggers motivate the possibility for rhetorical dissent, why students choose not to engage in rhetorical dissent, what students do instead of dissenting rhetorically, and what would make students satisfied following rhetorical dissent stands to benefit both instructors and students. This is true insofar as communicating dissent directly to instructors provides them with the opportunity to rectify problems for the students who choose to engage in this behavior. That said, determining which problems need to be rectified and how to rectify them is crucial to this process. Moreover, by learning why students withhold their dissent and what they do instead, instructors may be able to encourage dissent from their students and recognize when the potential for rhetorical dissent exists but is not being realized. To help guide our inquiry, we posed the following research questions:

RQ1: Which instructor behaviors trigger the potential for rhetorical dissent?

RQ2: Why do college students withhold rhetorical dissent?

RQ3: If students choose not communicate rhetorical dissent, what do they do instead?

RQ4: After experiencing dissatisfaction, what do students consider to be satisfying responses to their problems?

Method

Participants

After gaining institutional review board approval, responses from a sample of 186 undergraduate students (68 men and 115 women, three unreported) were collected from a Northeastern and a Western university. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 36 years ($M = 20.64$, $SD = 3.44$) with 36 freshmen, 63 sophomores, 30 juniors, and 54 seniors (three unreported). Participants were provided with minimal extra credit.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from several upper-division communication courses where instructors provided them with an open-ended survey containing the following directions: "Research has demonstrated that students sometimes attempt to persuade their instructors to correct a perceived wrongdoing in the course. This might occur for a variety of reasons (e.g., unfair grade, test extension, attendance problem, classroom policy, etc.). However, students do not always take their concerns to their professors." Participants were then asked to "Think about a time when you were dissatisfied with a professor or a class but withheld that information from the professor and *did not complain to him/her*. In other words, think about when you had

a problem in a class but decided not to talk to your professor about it (but you could have if you wanted to)." Next, participants were asked to indicate (1) what happened, (2) why they did not talk to the professor, (3) what they did instead of talking to the professor, and (4) what outcome they desired. Students were told to take the survey instrument home and to return it in a week. To avoid potential confounding factors, students were told not to report on the instructor from the classes where they received the survey.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data we conducted a content analysis based on a grounded theory approach. Specifically, for each research question the first author created categories into which responses could be classified. These categories were "identified by their correspondence to a particular structural definition" (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 62) which emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2000). Throughout the process, data were grouped into formed categories or classified into new categories through a constant comparative approach. Once the data were analyzed and formed into thematic categories, the first author conducted axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as a way of making connections between the results. The final set of categories was used to create a codebook that contained a description and representative example of each classification. In addition, the codebook contained a category of "other" if the data did not fit the description of the categories.

Using the codebook, a trained coder examined 100 percent of the data to determine intercoder agreement. Using kappa, intercoder agreement was .87 for RQ1 (i.e., the question of what happened), .90 for RQ2 (i.e., why students did not complain), .95 for RQ3 (i.e., what students did instead), and .88 for RQ4 (i.e., what would have fixed their problems). The first author and coder resolved their differences by revisiting the data for which there was disagreement and coming to a mutual decision regarding the coding of participants' responses.

Results

Participants provided a total of 861 responses (participants were allowed to write multiple responses per question) with 222 examples for the question of what happened to trigger the dissatisfaction, 221 for the question asking why they did not speak with the instructor, 193 for what the students did instead of talking to the instructor, and 225 for what outcome they desired.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was written to help guide our inquiry regarding what instructor behaviors create the potential for rhetorical dissent. The majority of participants reported perceived teacher incompetence ($n = 62$, 27.9%) and perceived unfair testing/grading ($n = 57$, 25.7%) as triggers for their potential rhetorical dissent. After these reasons, participants reported perceived teacher indolence ($n = 24$, 10.8%) and

Table 1 Factors Influencing Student Dissatisfaction and Representative Examples

	n	%
Teacher incompetence: Unclear lectures, poor delivery, boring.	62	27.9

"The teacher would teach and lecture just reading directly off the slides at a really fast pace so even if you wanted to take notes it was practically impossible to do so and not miss half of each slide. Also would not slow down if asked would say we should have already read the material."

Unfair grading and testing: Tests were not created well, lecture material not on tests, deserved a better grade for tests or the class, taking points off for unknown reasons. — 57 25.7

"The teacher didn't prepare us for the tests. I would study hard and still not understand what was on the test."

"In one of my classes, the exam was online and we had been told how many questions of each type would be on the exam and I completed all twenty one questions, ending up with a 72%. My score said it was 36/50 but there were only 21 questions. I was confused how it added up to 50 and feared I may have missed a page of questions or something."

Teacher indolence: No study guide, unprepared for class, late, note showing up for class, does not go to office hours, does not answer emails. — 24 10.8

"I had a professor who was always late to class and didn't seem to care if we learned anything. The professor was even 25–30 minutes late and still made us take the quiz. The professor was unorganized, had the wrong book to purchase for her class online, and didn't know how to use email."

Teacher offensiveness: Embarrassing students, being rude to students, not caring about students. — 21 9.5

"My professor did not address the class in the most professional manner. They often made rude comments under his/her breath about students or just in general, but since I was in the front row I could hear the comments."

Lack of accommodation: Not changing policies for special circumstances (e.g., illness for self or other). — 9 4.1

"My grandmother past (sic) away and for her services I was going to be missing class Tuesday and Thursday. She told us the first class not to miss class unless we personally were in the hospital, and no other excuses were good enough. I just missed class and took the 10 point deduction of (sic) my final grade."

Grading mistake: Teacher makes a mistake in the grading for a test or the class. — 8 3.6

"The professor deducted points on my grade because he mistakenly marked me absent for more than what was stated in the class policy and as a result, my grade dropped a whole letter."

Favoritism: Calling on specific students in class, allowing some students to do things differently in class. — 7 3.2

"I don't like when teachers pick a favorite student in class. The teacher only picks on them and never anyone else."

"My professor specified at the beginning of the semester that we needed to be present for every class and test. No excuses. I always attended class and did my work. This one kid was always late and his phone would go off. He was never present for exams but was still allowed to retake them. I told him you're going to fail. He replied 'I don't think so. She loves me like a son.'"

Class is too easy: Class time is unproductive, students learn nothing in the course. — 6 2.7

"I can seriously say I learned nothing in his class. We literally every class just went around the room and read aloud our how to each other . . . That's gotta (sic) be the most unproductive thing to do in a college class."

"The professor was very laid back in her style of teaching, and while she demonstrated that she knew the subject well, she didn't instill that we learn the material. She would lecture and then assign us more work that didn't teach us the material and would sometimes not require us to turn it in at all."

Table 1 (*Continued*)

	n	%
Bad course policies: Policies that are too strict or that do not make sense to students.	4	1.8
"I felt the professor wasn't being fair to my classmates and myself about having electronics in class. The professor has a rule if he sees your phone he will take 10% off your next test. One day a girl stood up to go to the bathroom and he stopped her and asked for her name and said that he could see her phone screen shining through her sweatshirt pocket so he took 10% off."		
Falsely accused of talking/cheating: Teacher claims that the student is misbehaving when he/she is not.	3	1.4
"The teacher always said I was talking in class when I wasn't. There was a group of people who sat behind me who would always talk. But every time he turned around he looked at me. So one day he called me and the people behind me up after class and said I would like it if you guys stop talking or I will take points off your final grade. I told him it wasn't me but he just wasn't buying it. The group kept talking but the teacher never said anything and took points off my grade at the end."		

Note: 21 responses (9.5%) did not fit the categories.

offensiveness ($n = 21$, 9.5%) as triggers. Other triggers of potential rhetorical dissent included students' perceptions of a lack of accommodation ($n = 9$, 4.1%), grading mistakes ($n = 8$, 3.6%), favoritism ($n = 7$, 3.2%), that the course was too easy ($n = 6$, 2.7%), bad course policies ($n = 4$, 1.8%), and being falsely accused of talking or cheating ($n = 3$, 1.4%). Together, these triggers accounted for approximately 90.5% of the reasons students gave for potential rhetorical dissent. The remaining responses ($n = 21$, 9.5%) were allocated to those that did not fit the categories. Results are available in Table 1.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was written to help us determine why students withhold rhetorical dissent. In our sample, most participants reported that they did not dissent to their instructors due to a lack of perceived efficacy ($n = 85$, 38.5%). Next, participants reported that they withheld rhetorical dissent because they thought their instructors were unapproachable ($n = 25$, 11.3%), because they thought that dissenting to instructors was inappropriate ($n = 21$, 9.5%), because they feared retaliation ($n = 20$, 9.0%), and because they did not think that dissenting was worth the effort ($n = 18$, 8.1%). In addition, participants reported that they withheld rhetorical dissent because they wanted to manage their instructors' impressions of them as students ($n = 9$, 4.1%), because they thought that the problem was their own fault ($n = 9$, 4.1%), because they were embarrassed to bring up the problem ($n = 7$, 3.2%), because they hoped the problem would fix itself ($n = 6$, 2.7%), and because they did not perceive that they had self-efficacy when it came to dissenting to their instructors ($n = 4$, 1.8%). The remaining responses ($n = 17$, 7.7%) did not fit the categories. For results, see Table 2.

Table 2 Reasons for Withholding Rhetorical Dissent and Representative Examples

	n	%
(O) Lack of efficacy: Complaining wouldn't do any good, no chance of getting things fixed, knew other students complained and nothing happened.	85	38.5
"...I knew nothing I did would change his opinion so I let it go and decided not to fight him on it even though I was beyond pissed."		
(R) Unapproachable: Teacher was intimidating/unapproachable.	25	11.3
"My professor was never approachable and was very intimidating."		
(R) Concerns about appropriateness: Would be rude/inappropriate to complain to the teacher, didn't want to hurt teacher's feelings.	21	9.5
"I did not feel comfortable approaching the teacher because it didn't seem appropriate as I am a student. If that is their personality or teaching style, I did not want to criticize them though I could have gotten more out of the class."		
(O) Fear of retaliation	20	9.0
Instrumental retaliation: Afraid of retaliation related to grades.		
"I did not talk with her about this because I did not want to make her mad and begin grading my papers harder than everyone else."		
Interpersonal retaliation: Afraid of retaliation related to interpersonal outcomes.		
"The professor is very obnoxious per say (sic) and I am afraid to talk to him because he might single me out again or just make me feel stupid for even saying anything."		
(P) Not worth the effort: The issue was not a big deal, too much of a hassle to complain.	18	8.1
"I did not want to put more stress on myself in debating the issues when it was only over one question and I passed the test anyway."		
(R) Impression management: Fear that the professor would think less of the student.	9	4.1
"It was the beginning of the semester and I didn't want to start off with a bad first impression."		
(P) Student's own fault: Student perceived him/herself as the cause of the problem.	9	4.1
"I did not talk to the professor because I thought it might have been an error on my part."		
(P) Embarrassed to bring it up: Feeling ashamed or stupid about bringing up the problem.	7	3.2
"I felt like if I confronted the teacher I would look pretty stupid. He made the material seem like it should have been common knowledge when it was a mixture of anatomy/psychology."		
Hoped problem would fix itself: Hoped the teacher would rectify the wrongdoing without the articulation of a complaint.	6	2.7
"I didn't talk to the professor because I figured with so many students getting zeros because the due date was unclear that he would give a new due date and eliminate the zeros, but he didn't."		
(P) Self-efficacy: Student didn't know how to make the complaint.	4	1.8
"I honestly wouldn't know what to say or how to say it."		

Note: 17 responses (7.7%) did not fit the categories. Factors: O, organizational; P, personal; R, relational.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was written to help us determine what students do as an alternative to rhetorical dissent. Participants largely reported responding passively when they experienced dissatisfaction in the classroom ($n = 118$, 61.1%). In addition, students reported engaging in expressive dissent ($n = 32$, 16.6%), resistance ($n = 13$, 6.7%), circumvention ($n = 10$, 5.2%), dissenting through course evaluations ($n = 6$, 3.1%), and quitting class ($n = 4$, 2.1%). The remaining percentage ($n = 10$, 5.2%) includes responses that did not fit these categories. See Table 3 for results.

Table 3 What Students Do Instead of Rhetorically Dissenting and Representative Examples

	n	%
Passive response	118	61.1
Accommodation: Accommodated the professor by working harder, trying harder.		
"I just studied by myself and worked hard."		
Inaction: Nothing, hoped the problem would fix itself.		
"Instead of talking to the professor, I just took both midterms on the same day."		
Expressive dissent: Told parents, friends, other classmates.	32	16.6
"I vented to my friends and family naturally and just stayed mad the entire semester about it."		
Resistance: Participated less or retaliated in class.	13	6.7
"I started rebelling in class and did the same thing she was doing."		
Circumvention: Told advisor, chair, dean, TA.	10	5.2
"I went to the department head, and then proceeded to the dean with the issue."		
Course evaluations: Used course evaluations to communicate discontent	6	3.1
"When we did the teacher evaluation form I let her know how I really felt."		
"Waited 'til the end of the semester and went HARD on her evaluation (especially since I heard she was employed by yearly contract . . . not tenured)."		
Quit class: Dropped or withdrew from the course.	4	2.1
"Dropped the class."		
"Withdrew because I failed her first test with 2 questions wrong."		

Note: 10 responses (5.2%) did not fit the categories.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was written to help us ascertain what students perceive will make them satisfied after experiencing dissatisfaction in the classroom. The majority of participants reported that they simply wanted the problem fixed ($n = 84$, 37.3%), or that they wished their instructors were more caring ($n = 61$, 27.1%). It is interesting to note that several participants wished they had engaged in rhetorical dissent ($n = 21$, 9.3%). Moreover, participants reported that the following would have helped: withdrawing from the class ($n = 20$, 8.9%), teacher assistance ($n = 10$, 4.4%), department oversight ($n = 5$, 2.2%), and an apology ($n = 4$, 1.8%). The remaining percentage ($n = 20$, 8.9%) did not fit these categories. For results see Table 4.

Table 4 Student Perceptions of What Would Lead to Satisfaction and Representative Examples

	n	%
Fix the problem: Do not engage in the misbehaviors anymore, fix the problem that the professor created. "I would have obviously preferred my professor to have validated my excuse, but he was very rigid and strict about the whole situation and I had the feeling he thought I was lying."	84	37.3
Caring	61	27.1
More approachable/open-minded: Friendlier, more open to student input, more flexible. "Being able to communicate with the professor. The prof. didn't seem like a people person."		

Table 4 (*Continued*)

	n	%

Address concerns: Talk with class about the problem, explanation of what happened, ask about concerns and request student feedback.
  "If he would have discussed the test average with the class."
Perspective take: Understand events in class form the perspective of students, take responsibility for some of the classroom problems
  "If the professor can feel what the students feel."
  "If the professor realized how hard the work really was…"
  "If he just took some responsibility for not preparing his students better."
Rhetorical dissent: Student should have spoken to the professor. — 21 — 9.3
"I probably should have let her know that I was having a hard time in class and that giving the class organized notes would have been more helpful."
Withdrawal: Fire the professor, switch professors, drop the class. — 20 — 8.9
"In an ideal world, the only thing that would make me feel better about this classroom issue would have been dropping her class and retaking math with a different professor another semester."
Teacher assistance: Teacher offer assistance for the future. — 10 — 4.4
"Would have been a lot better if she would have sat down with me 1 on 1 and helped me understand what the class was about."
"If my teacher had come up to me and told me to talk to her. Maybe she should have noticed I wasn't doing well."
Department oversight: Having the ability to have a higher authority correct the behavior of — 5 — 2.2 the professor.
"I would have found some satisfaction if the head of the department began sitting in randomly on some classes to witness what we students were witnessing."
Apology: Student wanted the professor to apologize for the misbehavior. — 4 — 1.8
"I just wanted her to apologize."

Note: 20 responses (8.9%) did not fit the categories.

Discussion

Based on the results of the current project, we can confirm the notion that, despite doing their best to help students learn, instructors do things that upset their pupils and cause dissatisfaction. Similar to previous work (e.g., Goodboy, 2011b; Tantleff-Dunn et al., 2002), our results suggest that the causes of dissatisfaction in the classroom—at least from a student's perspective—are largely the fault of instructors. This idea is important to instructors because inhibiting the learning process through misbehaviors or the violation of student expectations carries negative consequences (Goodboy, 2011a). Moreover, this idea is important to educational institutions considering that one of the most important predictors of students' satisfaction with their university experience is their perception of instructional effectiveness (Elliot, 2002–2003).

The first research question asked which instructor behaviors trigger the potential for rhetorical dissent, and results essentially replicated those found by Goodboy (2011a). Specifically, the triggering agents that caused students to consider rhetorical dissent mirror many instructor misbehaviors such as instructor indolence and offensiveness (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991), as well as student justice violations

including unfair testing and grading and a lack of accommodation (Chory-Assad, 2002). Though these triggering agents had been articulated for dissent in general, they continue to hold true for rhetorical dissent as well (e.g., Goodboy 2011a, 2011b; Horan et al., 2010). The majority of these triggering agents were global and would frustrate any student (e.g., bad course policies, teacher incompetence), but some were detailed and referred to specific problems relevant to individual participants (e.g., falsely accused of talking/cheating, lack of accommodation).

Regardless of whether the triggering agents were global or specific, most of them related to what Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe (2006) referred to as rhetorical goals. Thus, rhetorical dissent apparently coincides with the functional motive of student communication and may reflect a student's desire to perform well in the course (Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 1999). This information suggests that students have expectations for learning and that the majority of their complaints come from their instructors' inability (or unwillingness) to facilitate this process. Perhaps this finding emerged because participants' relational goals were adequately addressed by their instructors. Alternatively, it might be the case that unlike their rhetorical goals, students may not have had specific expectations for their relational goals and were therefore not as likely to experience dissatisfaction with teacher behaviors as they pertained to these purposes.

Although choosing to withhold dissent from instructors may seem contrary to students' goals associated with learning, the reasons students gave for withholding this information are consistent with what researchers in organizational contexts would predict. Specifically, in response to the second research question, many of the students in our study withheld dissent due to organizational factors and, to a lesser extent, relational and personal factors. When examined from this framework, roughly 50 percent of the explanations given by students for not communicating directly with instructors were related to organizational factors. Similar to what one would expect regarding decisions to withhold complaints in organizational contexts (e.g., Milliken et al., 2003; Sprague & Ruud, 1988), the organizational factors that influenced students' decisions to withhold dissent included a lack of efficacy and fear of retaliation. Ultimately, what these reasons for withholding dissent have in common is the idea of organizational responsiveness, or what Kassing (1997) called a "managerial invitation to become involved" (p. 313). That is, students seemed to care quite a bit about whether their complaints would be met in a positive or negative manner, and their decisions to dissent rhetorically appear to be a reflection of whether or not they believed their instructors were open to feedback.

In addition to organizational factors, almost 25 percent of the reasons given for withholding dissent were related to relational factors, including perceptions that the instructor was unapproachable, concerns about the appropriateness of dissenting, and students' desires to manage their impressions with their instructors. The common theme in each of these ideas is that the student–instructor relationship is not one that allows for open and honest communication. This interpretation has support from Waldron (1991) who found that subordinates who enjoyed high-quality relationships with their superiors were less likely to communicate to their

leaders with the intent to manage impressions. The author claimed that employees with low-quality relationships were more likely to communicate in this fashion because they had low levels of trust in their supervisors and were, therefore, more likely to communicate in ways "designed to avoid relational difficulties" (p. 302). The same may be true in college classrooms. Students who have low-quality relationships with their instructors might be less willing to communicate their dissent directly because they may be worried that their feedback will cause relational problems.

Finally, roughly 17 percent of the reasons given by participants for withholding rhetorical dissent from their instructors were dedicated to personal factors, including students' perceptions that communicating about the problem was not worth the effort, perceptions that the problem was their own' fault, being embarrassed to bring up the problem, and not knowing how to make the complaint. The major theme in this factor relates to the notion of value; almost half of the reasons reported in the personal factor for withholding dissent centered on the idea that students withheld their complaints because they perceived that it was not worth the effort to speak up. This sentiment is echoed in the literature related to organizational dissent and consumer complaints (e.g., Oh, 2004; Sprague & Ruud, 1988) and indicates that students may not have perceived their problems to have been egregious enough to warrant speaking up, or that they may have perceived the process of complaining as being too costly to warrant their efforts. Whatever their motives, our results reveal that, after experiencing dissatisfaction, students weigh their potential outcomes against their anticipated labor when choosing to dissent to instructors.

If students do not dissent then what do they do instead? In response to our third research question we found that, for the most part, the students in our study did not do anything. These findings are in line with previous research that found that after experiencing injustice in the classroom, students often engage in inaction/acceptance (Horan et al., 2010). Although it may seem odd that students do not attempt to rectify perceived problems in the classroom when doing so may help them perform better in their courses, this choice makes sense considering that the perceived consequences of people's behaviors are important predictors of their attitudes and subsequent actions (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In essence, results from this study indicate that if students do not believe that they can do anything to rectify their situations, they will not waste their effort attempting to do so. Instead, and understandably, students prefer to stop worrying about the problem and to use their resources to focus on adjusting their behavior in what they perceive to be more productive ways such as working harder.

After doing nothing, many students noted that they used expressive dissent instead of rhetorical dissent. This finding is important because it suggests that some students would rather vent their frustrations about their dissatisfaction instead of seeking to rectify their perceived classroom problems (Goodboy, 2011a). However, though expressive dissent may help students feel better in a cathartic manner, it does little to fix perceived problems. Other students, who were more concerned with addressing their classroom problems, reported using circumvention as an alternative to rhetorical dissent by notifying the department chair, an advisor, or the dean. Though

this behavior may address the student's problem indirectly, it also bears the potential consequences of not consulting the instructor first in the hierarchy. In the organizational context, Kassing (2007) discovered that when employees used circumvention as an upward dissent strategy, most noted a decline in relationship quality with their supervisors as well as a decline in work conditions. Indeed, some instructors, like supervisors, may also resent circumvention. However, Kassing also found circumvention sometimes resulted in compromise, neutrality, and understanding from supervisors. Therefore, students, like employees, may perceive circumvention to be an adequate substitute for rhetorical dissent, especially when instructors are perceived to be dogmatic or unapproachable.

It is important to mention that as a substitute for rhetorical dissent, some students chose to dissent using the course evaluation process. Indeed, one of the primary functions of students' evaluations is to provide constructive feedback to instructors to improve teaching (Cohen, 1980), and this type of communication may reflect an asynchronous and indirect means of communicating rhetorical dissent for the purposes of enhancing teaching practices and protecting other students (Fisher & Miller, 2008). As it pertains to the current project, however, the use of student evaluations as a platform for dissent seemed infrequent, and students' goals for using this form of communication were varied. Specifically, six students mentioned that they reserved their comments for the student evaluations; although three mentioned they used the evaluations as a way to articulate their problematic experiences to their instructors, another three explicitly stated that their intent was to dissent vengefully as a way to punish their instructors for what happened in class.

Finally, our fourth research question asked what students perceived would make them satisfied after experiencing dissatisfaction in the classroom. Although students may desire a variety of outcomes when faced with dissatisfying educational environments, most students in our sample simply wanted the problem fixed or wanted their instructors to be more caring and open to student input. Though these may seem like two different notions, the second idea may be an indirect way of addressing the first. For example, if instructors are more open-minded and flexible, students may be better at persuading their instructors to agree with their points of view which might, in turn, lead to adjusted teaching practices to suit students' needs. Additionally, if instructors can be convinced to take the perspective of their students, they may come to see the error in their ways and may make adjustments to their teaching in a manner that eradicates their misbehaviors. Thus, when faced with dissatisfying classroom experiences, it appears that most students simply want the problem to be addressed and adjusted by the instructor.

Of course, if they want a problem to be solved, instructors might wonder why students do not simply address the problem directly. Results from this study suggest that students do not choose to withhold complaints because they fail to understand that talking to instructors about their problems *may* help their situations. Rather, they withhold complaints because they do not believe talking to instructors *will* help their situations. Thus, a pertinent question to consider is, "What can instructors

do to positively influence the chances of receiving constructive student feedback through rhetorical dissent?"

Instructional Implications

A basic truism in the organizational dissent and consumer complaint literature is that encouraging complaints is a valuable managerial/business practice. In support of this notion, Blodgett and Anderson (2000) claimed that "successful retailers have found that it is beneficial to encourage dissatisfied customers to seek redress" through complaining (p. 322). Based on the results of this study, we are confident the same is true for college instructors. Considering that student dissatisfaction seems inevitable (Goodboy, 2011b), instructors who want to correct students' dissatisfying experiences should encourage them to communicate rhetorical dissent. However, we recommend that instructors do not facilitate complaints indiscriminately. Instead, instructors may be more successful if they strategically address the underlying reasons why students do not dissent rhetorically.

The first, and perhaps most important, issue for instructors to consider if they wish to facilitate rhetorical dissent is to create a classroom climate that promotes students' perceptions of their openness to corrective feedback. Students need to believe that they have the power to make a difference in the classroom and that they will not be punished for making their contradictory sentiments known. One way to solicit feedback without the threat of reprisal may be to offer students the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback. For example, if an instructor decides to collect midsemester evaluations, this may be done in a manner that prevents individual identification. If students are told to bring in a typed evaluation that asks for candid feedback related to making class better, they may turn in their answers together to avoid individual detection. Above and beyond that initial consideration, students must be made to believe that their instructors are open to hearing their points of view and are willing to address their needs if appropriate. Ways to demonstrate openness to students' opinions might include inviting feedback in the course or during office hours, promoting the tolerance of differing points of view in class, or noticeably changing teaching practices in accordance with solicited feedback. All of these ideas may communicate that instructors value feedback and are appropriately responsive to student concerns.

Second, instructors should consider their relationships with their students. By demonstrating to students that they care about their well-being, instructors may help facilitate close relationships that engender honest communication. One way to build these types of relationships with students may be through informal conversations outside of class. This suggestion is born from the organizational literature that claims this type of interaction may help create higher quality relationships between employees and supervisors (Waldron, 1991). Crucially however, instructors must recognize that although most students believe out-of-class communication is beneficial to their success, some students feel uncomfortable having these conversations and it is largely up to the instructor to promote this interaction (Cotton & Wilson, 2006).

Another way to build relationships with students may be to lead students through their educations instead of simply supervising them. According to Dansereau, Graen, & Haga (1975), this may mean showing an interest in students' needs and allowing students to participate in decisions that affect them. This notion refers to the idea of a creating a democratic classroom which is postulated to promote successful learning environments in academic contexts (Darling-Hammond, 1996). In addition, instructors can enhance their relationships with their students by being charismatic leaders, providing individualized consideration, and promoting intellectual stimulation (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009, 2011). Finally, instructors may increase their potential for receiving rhetorical dissent by using prosocial power bases such as expert and referent power, as opposed to antisocial bases, to influence their students (e.g., Goodboy, Bolkan, Myers, & Zhao, 2011; Mukherjee et al., 2009).

Third, because students often do not complain because it is not worth the effort, instructors might consider decreasing the personal cost of complaining by making the communication of rhetorical dissent easy to do. Thus, by making the complaining process less of an effort, instructors may be more effective in soliciting rhetorical dissent. In fact, researchers examining consumer complaints have supported this conclusion (e.g., Huppertz, 2007). One way to make rhetorical dissent easier would be for instructors to be proactive in their pursuit of honest and open student feedback. By creating opportunities for students to voice their opinions in class, perhaps through anonymous midsemester evaluations, students may be more likely to communicate candidly than if they were forced to seek out their instructors themselves. Alternatively, by coming to class early and/or staying late, instructors may provide students with the opportunity to speak with them without having to make an extra trip outside of class. Moreover, instructors may promote rhetorical dissent by helping students realize that expressing their discontent is a beneficial activity. That said, instructors may consider training students to be more argumentative (see Rancer & Avtgis, 2006) considering these efforts are "effective in influencing the motivation and argumentative behavior of adults" (Rancer, Whitecap, Kosberg, & Avtgis, 1997, p. 276). Specifically, training may include a variety of instructional processes including "providing people with relevant arguments" (Infante, 1985, p. 37) and informing students about the positive outcomes of arguing by framing it as a constructive activity that can lead to successful conflict resolution and changes in the behaviors of others (Rancer, Kosberg, & Baukus, 1992). By helping students develop skills and a positive attitude in relation to arguing, instructors may motivate their pupils to speak up when they are dissatisfied with their classroom experiences.

In conclusion, when it comes to college instruction, no news regarding student dissatisfaction is not necessarily good news. Without being aware of it, instructors may be engaging in behaviors that cause dissatisfaction in their classrooms and impede the learning process for their students. Considering that much of what causes student dissatisfaction is a function of instructor misbehaviors (Kearney et al., 1991), it only seems right that instructors take the time to rectify these (often unspoken) problems by learning about their shortcomings from the people they affect the most.

Therefore, whatever the mechanism, instructors should consider what they can do to promote constructive feedback in their classrooms by way of rhetorical dissent. This may take the form of demonstrating one's responsiveness to feedback, creating the types of relationships with students that allow them to become comfortable enough to bring up bothersome issues, making complaining easy to do, and/or training students to be argumentative in class. Ultimately, instructors who encourage rhetorical dissent from their students do them (and themselves) a service by enhancing learning opportunities and encouraging conversations that have the potential to correct perceived course deficiencies.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any study, the current investigation has its limitations. One limitation includes the lack of detail associated with the data collected about our sample. Certain characteristics such as students' majors, status as first-generation students, or working status might have influenced students' propensity to dissent to their instructors. For example, learning-oriented students might have differed in their use of rhetorical dissent compared to grade-oriented students (Eison, Pollio, & Milton, 1986). However, we did not collect information related to these characteristics so we are unable to answer specific questions as they related to our sample. Neither did we collect details about the instructors involved in this study. That said, future researchers may consider investigating whether student or instructor characteristics influence students' decisions to speak up to their instructors when they perceive a wrongdoing in class.

Next, because rhetorical dissent was operationalized as interacting with professors directly to correct perceived wrongdoings for individuals who voiced their dissatisfaction (Goodboy, 2011b), making complaints to instructors via student evaluations was not conceptualized as rhetorical dissent in this study. However, researchers should include course evaluations in their future projects, as varying forms of dissent may be communicated indirectly during the course evaluation process (Denson, Loveday, & Dalton, 2010) or through online platforms such as ratemyprofessors.com (Edwards, Edwards, Shaver, & Oaks, 2009).

Finally, this study presented a variety of ways to alleviate students' reluctance to dissent rhetorically. If researchers can determine which instructor behaviors facilitate rhetorical dissent, they may be able to help instructors and students achieve greater understanding and agreement in the college environment. Therefore, future researchers may consider examining which instructor behaviors, characteristics, and communication practices work to increase students' willingness to come forward with complaints.

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