

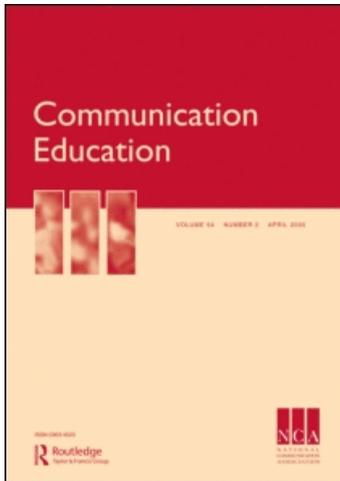
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Understanding Students' Classroom Justice Experiences and Responses

Sean M. Horan, Rebecca M. Chory & Alan K. Goodboy

The purpose of this study was threefold: to (a) identify students' experiences of distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice; (b) to examine students' emotional responses to these unjust experiences; and (c) to investigate students' behavioral reactions to perceived injustice. Participants were 138 undergraduate students who provided written narratives in response to three open-ended questions. Results revealed (a) distributive justice issues included grades, opportunities to improve grades, instructor affect, and punishment; (b) procedural justice issues included grading procedures, make-up/late policies, scheduling/workload, information for exams, feedback, instructor error, not following through with promises, class procedures, and not enforcing policies; and (c) interactional justice issues included insensitivity/rudeness, stating or implying stupidity, sexist/racist/prejudiced remarks, singling out students, accusing students of wrongdoing, and instructor affect. Students' emotional responses ranged from anger to empathy and their behavioral reactions ranged from dissent to withdrawal. Collectively, students reported procedural injustice almost three times as often as the other two types of injustice, and student emotional and behavioral responses were overwhelmingly negative. These results lend support to the validity of prior classroom justice measures, theorizing, and research.

Keywords: Classroom Justice; Equity Theory; Students' Emotions; Students' Behaviors; Organizational Justice; Unfairness; Dissent

Of recent interest to instructional communication researchers is the notion of fairness, termed *classroom justice*. Chory (2007; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005; Paulsel, Chory-Assad, & Dunleavy, 2005) applied three types of organizational justice to the classroom: *distributive justice* describes

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perceptions of the fairness of the outcomes distributed in an allocation process, *procedural justice* refers to perceptions of the fairness of the processes used to assign outcomes/allotments, and *interactional justice* describes perceptions of the fairness of interpersonal treatment that occurs during the resource allocation process (Bies & Moag, 1986; Deutsch, 1975). Distributive justice perceptions are formed when students evaluate the fairness of their received outcome (e.g., grade, instructor's time), procedural justice perceptions refer to students' judgments about the fairness of classroom-related procedures and policies, and interactional justice perceptions are formed when students assess the fairness of the manner in which the instructor treats the class or individual students (Chory; Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel; Paulsel & Chory-Assad; Paulsel et al.).

Classroom Justice

A growing body of research indicates that student perceptions of classroom justice are related to a number of instructional communication outcomes. For example, when students perceive their instructors are fair, they perceive their instructors as higher in credibility (Chory, 2007), as communicating from legitimate, expert, reward, and referent power bases (Paulsel et al., 2005), and as less likely to use antisocial behavioral alteration techniques (BATS; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a). Likewise, students of fair versus unfair instructors report higher levels of motivation and affective learning (Chory-Assad, 2002). In addition, research shows that students who perceive their instructors as unfair also report behaving in negative ways; specifically, students report they are more likely to engage in indirect aggression (Chory-Assad; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b), hostility (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b), revenge, deception, (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b) and teacher-owned resistance (Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). Chory and Goodboy (2010) contend that students' perceptions of classroom justice "seem to dictate student resistance" (p. 190).

Instead of examining classroom justice from the student perspective, Horan and Myers (2009) studied instructors' fairness concerns. They found that instructors were primarily concerned with interactional justice, followed by procedural justice, and then distributive justice. They also found that, consistent with student research (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a; Paulsel et al., 2005), instructor power and antisocial BAT use and instructor justice concerns were related.

The body of classroom justice research suggests three general conclusions. First, college students and instructors are concerned about fairness in the classroom. Second, students report antisocial reactions (e.g., deception, aggression, resistance) to perceived classroom injustice and positive learning-related responses (e.g., affective learning, motivation) to perceived fairness. Third, student perceptions of classroom justice are related to their perceptions of instructors' classroom communication (e.g., power use).

Rationale

Classroom justice theorizing and research, including the three-dimensional conceptualization and measures of distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness, were originally based on organizational behavior and industrial/organizational psychology theory and research (see Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b). The classroom justice research, to date, provides support that this organizational-based theorizing and its related measures about fairness in the instructional environment are valid.

Before the systematic study of classroom justice, a few researchers peripherally examined fairness in the classroom. In a series of studies examining how outcome satisfaction influenced satisfaction with formal leaders, Tyler and Caine (1981) found that student justice perceptions were enhanced when grades were based on many, versus one, grading opportunities. Although not a specific investigation of instructional communication issues, Tata (1999) found that both the perceived fairness of grading procedures and grade distribution influenced students' evaluations of instructors in hypothetical scenarios. Most recently, Colquitt (2001) tested the validity of his organizational justice measure, and included a student sample to compare with an employee sample. His study revealed that student perceptions of distributive and procedural justice were positively related to grade satisfaction and compliance with class rules, respectively.

In her initial study of classroom justice, Chory-Assad (2002) argued for the validity of applying organizational justice research and theorizing to the instructional context by citing prior instructional communication studies that tapped into issues of fairness and its importance to students (e.g., Frymier & Houser, 2000; Gorham & Millette, 1997; Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). She also pointed out that other organizational constructs, such as culture (Chen, 2000) and continuous quality improvement (Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996), had been successfully applied to the classroom. The research that followed has demonstrated the construct validity of the classroom justice conceptualization and its related measures.

For example, research shows that organizational procedural justice and job satisfaction are positively related (e.g., Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991), and classroom procedural justice and affective learning, the instructional equivalent of job satisfaction (Chory & McCroskey, 1999), are also positively related (Chory-Assad, 2002). Likewise, in line with organizational research showing negative relationships between justice and employee resistance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), deception (Grover, 1997), revenge (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), and hostility (Greenberg, 1987), classroom justice research reveals negative relationships between classroom justice and student resistance, deception, revenge, and hostility (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b; Colquitt, 2001; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). Consistent with equity theory-based results observed for employees in organizations (e.g., Greenberg; Schwarzald, Koslowsky, & Shalit, 1992), students also appear to seek to restore relational balance with their instructors when they perceive injustice has occurred (Chory-Assad; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b). Also like organizational

justice, confirmatory factor analyses of measures (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992) and empirical results showing that the different classroom justice dimensions are related in different ways to various outcomes, demonstrate that classroom justice is a multidimensional construct (Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b; Colquitt, 2001; Paulsel et al., 2005).

Although the existing research on classroom justice suggests that its conceptualization and measures are valid, additional research is needed to directly test these assumptions. The present study was designed to address this issue, as well as others. Specifically, the present study had three goals. First, this investigation sought to discover if the issues identified in prior quantitative data-based justice studies emerge as important in this qualitative investigation. For instance, prior studies have found that perceptions of justice are related to perceptions of instructor clarity (Chesebro, Martin, & Bulson, 2004), instructor credibility (Chory, 2007), instructor antisocial BAT use (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a; Horan & Myers, 2009; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005), and student perceptions of grading practices (Tata, 1999; Tyler & Caine, 1981). Results of this study will reveal if students, when prompted to discuss issues of injustice, provide situations that depict issues like the ones previously described. Second, this research investigated the validity of the existing classroom justice conceptualizations (e.g., three dimensions), measures (see Chory; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b), and research results (e.g., the relationship between student justice perceptions and student hostility). Third, the current study is geared toward providing information that can be used to develop new measures (e.g., student emotional and behavioral responses to injustice) and research techniques (e.g., scenarios) for future classroom justice studies.

Research Questions

The first research question is geared toward identifying instances of unfairness that students have actually experienced in the classroom. Results of this question will reveal whether the teacher behaviors students report are consistent with the instructor behaviors examined in prior justice studies. For instance, classroom justice studies have revealed that student perceptions of instructors' power (Paulsel et al., 2005), clarity (Chesebro et al., 2004), credibility (Chory, 2007), and antisocial BAT use (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a) are related to fairness. In addition, research shows that instructors' use of the established grading criteria (Tata, 1999) and instructors' offering multiple grading opportunities (Tyler & Caine, 1981) are perceived by students as fair classroom practices. It is unknown, however, whether these instructor communication constructs are salient to students' justice perceptions.

Another benefit to students describing their experiences with instructor unfairness relates to measurement. Although the existing classroom justice scales appear to be psychometrically sound, it is unknown if the items students are asked to evaluate in the measures (e.g., instructor make-up policies) reflect the things that students actually consider when evaluating fairness. Additionally, obtaining these descriptions

would allow scholars to advance the study of classroom justice. Chory (2007) described the limitations of the existing classroom justice research, notably that prior studies were correlational in nature, and thus, they did not warrant causal claims to be made. She recommended the “use of hypothetical teachers in written scenarios or the experimental manipulation of teachers as ‘actors’” (p. 101). Consequently, obtaining students’ written descriptions of injustice would aid in the creation of ecologically valid scenarios or experimental manipulations.

Finally, qualitative descriptions of injustice are important to obtain so they can be used in instructional training sessions. For instance, instructors may be taught to refrain from engaging in practices that students frequently identify as unfair. Thus, research question one is posed:

RQ1: What types of instructor behaviors do students perceive as unfair?

A benefit of obtaining descriptions of unfair experiences in the classroom from a large sample of students is that it allows for an understanding of how often certain behaviors occur. Moving beyond thematic analysis to quantifying themes will help to identify the unfair teacher behaviors that dominate the classroom and those that appear to occur more sporadically, an important consideration when developing representative authentic scenarios.

RQ2: What are the most frequently reported types of unfair instructor behaviors?

An additional purpose of this study is to examine the validity of the three-dimensional conceptualization of classroom justice. Once examples of students’ experiences of injustice are obtained, they can be classified into categories to discover if, in fact, the distributive, procedural, and interactional justice categories fully and accurately capture the scope of instructional fairness. Likewise, understanding the frequency with which a certain type of justice emerges will help classroom communication trainers to provide instructors with the most efficient means of addressing justice-related issues and will guide future manipulations of justice in experimental studies. Thus, research question three queries:

RQ3: What types of classroom injustice are associated with the instructor behaviors that students perceive as unfair?

When discussing the importance of organizational justice, Colquitt (2001) argued that the perceptions of fairness of decisions have “socioemotional” outcomes for employees. Similarly, based on Thibaut and Walker (1975), he crafted a procedural justice item for employees to rate the extent to which they had been able to express their “feelings” during the outcome distribution process. Within the classroom, prior research suggested that students experience emotional reactions to [in]justice in the classroom. Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004b) argued that when equity is blocked by injustice, students experience emotional reactions “such as frustration, anger, and dissatisfaction” (p. 257). Later, Paulsel (2005) reported that classroom justice positively predicted the emotional responses of pleasure, arousal, and dominance.

Although the preceding studies support the notion that students have emotional reactions to [un]fairness, those studies are also limited. For instance, Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004b) speculated about emotional responses but did not measure them. Further, both Paulsel (2005) and Horan, Martin, and Weber (2010) had students complete forced-choice items on preselected emotions; therefore, their studies fail to capture the range of emotions students may actually experience. Thus, the present study asked students to describe how they felt in response to unfair classroom experiences. Understanding students' emotional reactions to unfairness will allow instructors to better respond and manage students' reactions and, ideally, help instructors prevent behaviors like aggression, and promote other behaviors, such as motivation. In addition, obtaining students' qualitative emotional responses will allow future researchers to develop a measure to assess students' emotional responses to injustice. Accordingly, research question four is put forth:

RQ4: What are students' emotional reactions to classroom injustice?

In addition to understanding students' emotional responses, it is important to understand their behavioral responses. Existing research shows that numerous behaviors are associated with students' perceptions of unfairness. As previously reviewed, when students perceive their instructors as unfair, they evaluate that instructor less favorably (Tata, 1999), enact teacher-owned resistance strategies (Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005), are less compliant with classroom rules (Colquitt, 2001), behave in a hostile manner (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b), communicate deception and revenge (Paulsel & Chory-Assad), and engage in indirect aggression (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b).

Although the previous studies are informative, they were not based on students' recall of behavioral responses to unfair events. In addition, students in those studies were asked to indicate their likelihood of engaging in these specific behavioral responses. These responses may, or may not, capture the range of behaviors that students actually engage in. Obtaining qualitative descriptions of behavioral responses will also prove beneficial for those who train instructors and in the design of future measurement. Thus, the fifth research question is posed:

RQ5: What are students' behavioral reactions to classroom injustice?

Method

Participants

After receiving institutional review board approval, volunteers were recruited from communication classes at two public universities in two Eastern states in the United States. One school had a student population of about 30,000, and the other enrolled approximately 10,000 students. Participants were 138 students (42.3% male, 57.7% female) with a mean age of 21.02 years ($SD = 2.96$). They reported on 56 (41.2%) male and 80 (58.8%) female teachers (two, 1.4%, declined to indicate sex). Over 63% of students ($n = 86$) reported on *professors*, almost 17% ($n = 23$) reported on

graduate student instructors, and 20% ($n = 28$) did not know their instructor's rank (one did not report rank).

Instrumentation

Participants responded to three open-ended questions. First, participants read: "Teachers communicate and behave in memorable ways. From all your college/university experiences, describe in detail a time when an instructor of yours did or said something you thought was UNFAIR. What did the teacher say or do that made you think he/she were unfair? In the space below, please describe, in as much detail as possible, what happened (i.e., what he/she said and did)." Next, participants read: "How did you FEEL after this unfair act? In the space below, please describe, in as much detail as possible, how you felt." Finally, they read: How did you react to this unfairness? What did you say? What did you do? In the space below, please describe, in as much detail as possible, what you SAID or DID in response to this unfair act."

Next, participants were asked to indicate how long ago the instructor unfairness occurred. Students reported that the events they described happened an average of 10.14 ($SD = 11.09$) months ago. They then encountered a series of items to assess demographic and course characteristics. Most students anticipated earning a B in the course they described (44.2%; A = 26.8%, C = 18.1%, D = 4.3%, F = 2.2%, W = 2.2%, 2.2% declined to report a grade). Overall, students reported a low level of satisfaction with these grades (*not satisfied* = 33.3%, *somewhat satisfied* = 30.4%, *satisfied* = 23.2%, *very satisfied* = 12.3%; .7% declined to indicate their satisfaction). Finally, 10.1% of students reported they dropped the course because of the unfair incident.

Results

The participants' descriptions of a time in which their college/university instructor did or said something they perceived as unfair ($n = 138$, 1 per participant) were first unitized by two of the authors to determine the number of justice violations participants identified. Some of the 138 participant descriptions contained violations of more than one type of justice. For example, a student wrote

In a class, my group was given a lower grade than we expected. We covered all of the objectives given to us, and even she agreed. But, when we asked why we got a lower grade, she said, 'Because others were better.' Even though there was not a subjective part of the grading process, she still graded us subjectively instead of objectively.

This incident was coded as containing two justice violations: The student perceived 1) the project grade was unfair and 2) the procedure the instructor used to grade the project was unfair. Each justice violation constituted a separate unit. Guetzkow's (1950) U, an indicator of unitizing disagreement in which the difference in the number of units identified by two coders is divided by the total number of units identified by the coders, was .10. Unitizing disagreements were settled through discussion between the coders, resulting in the identification of 193 units/justice violations.

These 193 separate justice violations were then analyzed to determine the types of classroom injustice students reported their instructors engaged in (third research question). A content analysis was performed based on the grounded theory approach to coding (Charmaz, 2000). Participant responses were first open coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a process in which the data are “broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (p. 102). Using a constant comparative approach, the authors modified existing categories to best reflect the data and added new categories when the data did not fit an existing conceptual category. After the initial categories were developed, the authors implemented axial coding (Strauss & Cobrin) to condense the existing categories during open coding by “observing how categories crosscut and link” (p. 124). The researchers first read through all the participant responses several times. They then discussed the responses in-depth and attempted to organize them according to various coding schemes. A three-category scheme was eventually decided upon. *Distributive justice violations* were defined as instances in which students perceived that the outcome or resource given out by the instructor was unfair. *Procedural justice violations* were instances in which students perceived their instructors engaged in an unfair course-related process. *Interactional justice violations* occurred when students perceived their instructors communicated with them or other students in an unfair manner.

After this justice coding system was agreed upon, two of the researchers coded all 193 justice violations, resulting in 98% agreement and a kappa¹ of .98. When disagreements occurred, the coders discussed the response until they agreed on the final code. In response to the third research question, results indicate that students reported their instructors engaged in procedural injustice ($n = 111$, 57.5%) more frequently than they engaged in distributive ($n = 41$, 21.2%) or interactional ($n = 41$, 21.2%) injustice, $\chi^2(2) = 50.77$, $p < .001$.

To answer the first and second research questions, each of the 193 classroom justice violations identified in the participants' responses was then examined by the researchers to determine what the participants perceived their instructors did to cause the injustice. Recall that students were asked to describe “a time when an instructor of yours did or said something you thought was UNFAIR. What did the teacher say or do that made you think he/she was unfair?” Participants' responses were examined by two researchers to unitize the instructor behaviors students perceived to violate classroom justice. Occasionally, students related instances in which instructors engaged in more than one behavior that violated a single type of justice. Each instructor behavior constituted a separate unit. Guetzkow's U was .07. Unitizing disagreements were resolved through discussion between coders. A total of 208 separate units/unfair instructor behaviors were identified. The responses for each justice type were analyzed separately.

After reading through the responses several times, the coders agreed upon a four-category coding system for instructor behaviors that violated distributive justice. Consistent with the conceptualization of distributive justice, the categories pertained to the outcomes participants perceived their instructors distributed unfairly: *grades*,

opportunities to improve grades, instructor affect, and punishments. Two coders classified all the instructor violations of distributive justice with 93% agreement and a kappa of .90. When the coders disagreed on a classification, they discussed it and came to a mutual agreement on the final code. The frequency with which instructors engaged in distributive injustice differed across the four outcomes, $\chi^2(3) = 41.83, p < .001$. Student grades being perceived as unfairly distributed occurred most frequently ($n = 28, 68.3\%$). Opportunities to improve grades, instructor affect, and punishments did not differ from one another in frequency, $\chi^2(2) = 2.00, p > .05$. Frequencies and examples for all instructor distributive injustice behaviors are summarized in Table 1.

As with instructor distributive injustice behaviors, the researchers read the procedural injustice behaviors several times and developed a nine-category classification system. Two of the researchers then coded all the relevant behaviors, resulting in 98% agreement and a kappa of .98. They resolved any disagreements through discussion. The nine instructor behaviors students perceived as procedurally unfair did not occur with equal frequency, $\chi^2(8) = 88.35, p < .001$. Over half of these behaviors ($n = 63, 52.2\%$) related to how instructors graded classroom work/assignments ($n = 40, 33.0\%$) and instructors' policies concerning make-ups when students missed classes or arrived late to classes ($n = 23, 19.2\%$). Frequencies and examples for all instructor procedural injustice behaviors are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1 Instructor behaviors representing distributive injustice

Distributive Injustice ($N = 41$)	n	%
Grade	28	68.3
One of my teachers gave us a quiz question that was not correctly stated. The whole class got the same concept from the question and answered it the same way as it was stated. We all got the answer from the lecture from the previous class meeting. She realized that the class had all gotten the same answers because when we reviewed the quiz we all said, "Well, do you accept this because this is the answer we all got from the lecture," and she said, "No."		
Opportunities	6	14.6
A section of the class had received some information on material on an exam, that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the class did not get. We had received our mark, and a few days later, the professor had received knowledge regarding the information being leaked to part of the class. I had not received the information but did receive [sic] a high mark. We were given two options: the test did not count, or everyone's grade dropped 15%. Neither of which I liked, no one had a say in the matter.		
Instructor Affect	5	12.2
A teacher would always laugh and joke around with certain students, but wouldn't laugh at others' jokes. This may have hurt their self-esteem and the student may have been hurt.		
Punishment	2	4.9
I had a class that [sic] a lot of students disliked the professors [sic] and she was aware of it. Students would often talk back to her. I found this rude however, she was a horrible teacher. At one point she became so angry that she assigned the entire class extra work and a test for the following class. This upset me greatly because I never showed disrespect yet was being punished because of others' actions.		
Total	41	100%

Table 2 Instructor behaviors representing procedural injustice

Procedural Injustice (<i>N</i> = 120)	<i>n</i>	%
Grading Procedures When it comes to collegiate sports, teachers are much more lenient on them than I think is fair. One teacher clearly graded their papers and tests and assignments on a curve. It's not fair that just because they excel in sports it means they should get a free ride in classes.	40	33.0
Make-Up/Late Policies On the first day of one of my classes, as the teacher went over the syllabus, he announced in regards to attendance/make-up quizzes/exams, only university excuses would be accepted, which many teachers do, but he then went on to say, "I don't care if your mother dies, you are not excused." Not only was it insensitive, but this policy seems extremely unfair—if someone is a cheerleader, they can be excused from a test to go do something they love, but if someone loses a close family member they are expected to be there?	23	19.2
Scheduling/Workload During dead week one semester, my professor changed the date of the following week [<i>sic</i>]. The test was scheduled for Tuesday and the professor moved it to Thursday. When the class griped about how it was unfair, the professor said there would be no further discussion about the date of the exam.	16	13.3
Information for Exams Well, in the class we had two tests and the class asked what should we know for the test. The instructor said, "Know everything from day one." Then we asked, "Well, if we don't have a study guide, then can we have a review and the instructor said we have been reviewing since day one.	13	10.8
Feedback I had a professor that was unfair with getting our grades back on time. She would take at least two weeks to give us any grades back.	10	8.3
Instructor Error I was in a math class my junior year and you could just tell that the teacher could care less about whether his students did well or not. All the test grades were bad and he lectured the class about how stupid we all were. Obviously, if the whole class did awful, it's his teaching ability not the students.	10	8.3
Not Following Through One time a teacher had said that a class was cancelled for game day. The day before the game, he had said that we were running out of time in the semester and that we would be having a quiz the next day.	4	3.3
Class Procedures I had the flu and had to leave a final to throw up in the bathroom. The teacher locked the door and did not let me back in to finish my final. I failed the class because of it.	2	1.7
Not Enforcing Policy I had a teacher who told us to do our homework every day. I did my homework every time, more than half of the 30 kids in class did not. When they did do it, they copied it out of the back of the book. They were cheating in front of her and she didn't care. She just made little jokes about them. She ended up dropping a lot of homework grades anyway, so they really won in the end.	2	1.7
Total	120	100%

After thoroughly reviewing the instructor interactional injustice behaviors the researchers decided upon a six-category classification scheme. Two of the researchers classified these behaviors with 88% agreement and a kappa of .85. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. The frequency of the instructor interactional

injustice behaviors varied across the six categories, $\chi^2(5) = 32.53, p < .001$. *Instructor made insensitive/rude comments* was the most frequently reported interactional justice category ($n = 20, 42.6\%$), followed by *instructor stated or implied student was stupid* ($n = 12, 25.5\%$). Frequencies and examples for all instructor interactional injustice behaviors are displayed in Table 3.

Research question four inquired about the emotions students report experiencing in reaction to classroom injustice. Participants' responses were unitized by two researchers to determine the number of emotional reactions experienced. At times, students reported experiencing more than one emotion in response to a single justice incident. Each emotional response constituted a separate unit. Guetzkow's U was .04. Unitizing disagreements were settled via discussion between coders. Results indicated that participants reported 161 emotional reactions to classroom injustice.

Table 3 Instructor behaviors representing interactional injustice

Interactional Injustice ($N = 47$)	n	%
<p>Insensitive/Rude</p> <p>One of my professors was not necessarily acting unfair towards me, but she did not treat me like an adult, which I think is unacceptable. I would always say, "hello" and "Have a nice day" to this certain professor and she would never say anything in response. She did, however, respond when other students would approach her. At the end of the semester when all the other students handed in their final she said, "have a good holiday." When I handed mine in, I said the same to her and she said nothing.</p>	20	42.6
<p>Implied/Stated Stupidity</p> <p>I can't remember exactly what the words she said were, but I remember that she insulted myself and a group that I was in. It was last semester in my anatomy and physiology lab and there was a process we weren't understanding during an experiment. She said something to the fact of how it was so easy and it shouldn't be hard for us to do this. Some of the girls were nursing majors so I know they felt bad, but for myself, I just thought it was an unfair comment.</p>	12	25.5
<p>Sexist/Racist/Prejudiced</p> <p>I once had a professor that consistently stated throughout the course that he/she was prejudiced to many groups of people. Often mocking their accents, lifestyles, and traditions. It became apparent that he/she was extremely biased.</p>	7	14.9
<p>Singled Out Student</p> <p>In a class discussion, we talked about regional accents as forms of NV Comm. The professor singled out students in class 1 by 1, to get a student from WV to say a phrase with their accent, to entertain the prof's dislike of that particular accent.</p>	5	10.6
<p>Accused Student of Wrongdoing</p> <p>I wrote a research paper, and he handed it back to me saying he thinks I plagiarized even though we turned it in via turnitin.com (plagiarism website) and it showed that I didn't, then he thought that I had someone else write it for me because it was so good. And I told him I worked on it for hours and it was all me. He then made me write a short story based on a picture to see if the two papers were alike. I still received a C. I didn't get my grade changed.</p>	2	4.3
<p>Instructor Affect</p> <p>I had an instructor that had a group of her friends as students and she pretty much ignored the rest of us. She would only answer their questions and just talk to them about things that had nothing to do with the class.</p>	1	2.1
Total	47	100%

After reviewing the responses, the researchers agreed upon an 11-category coding scheme. Two of the researchers coded all the emotional responses (96% agreement, .95 kappa) and resolved disagreements via discussion. The 11 emotional responses differed in their frequency of occurrence, $\chi^2 (10) = 165.11, p < .001$. Participants most frequently reported they responded to perceptions of classroom injustice with *anger* ($n = 56, 34.8\%$), followed by feeling *pained* ($n = 29, 18.0\%$), and *frustrated* ($n = 18, 11.2\%$). Participants did not differ in the frequency with which they reported the other emotions, $\chi^2 (7) = 7.10, p > .05$. Table 4 features these results and examples.

The emotional responses were also examined separately for each justice type. The pattern of results generally did not differ from the results reported for overall injustice. For each classroom justice type and overall classroom justice, the most frequently reported emotions were feeling angry, pained, frustrated, and powerless.²

Research question five asked about students' behavioral reactions to perceptions of classroom injustice. Participants' responses were unitized by two of the authors to determine the number of behavioral reactions students enacted in response to perceptions of classroom injustice. Occasionally, students reported engaging in more than one type of behavior in response to a single justice incident. Each behavioral response constituted a separate unit. Guetzkow's U was .03. Unitizing disagreements were settled via discussion between coders. Results indicated that participants reported 169 behavioral reactions to classroom injustice.

After reading through the responses many times, the researchers agreed upon a five-category coding system. Two of the researchers coded all the emotional responses (95% agreement, .94 kappa) and resolved disagreements through discussion. The five behavioral categories varied in their frequency of occurrence, $\chi^2 (4) = 151.44, p < .001$. Student *dissent* occurred most frequently ($n = 88, 52.1\%$), followed by student *inaction/acceptance* ($n = 53, 31.4\%$), $\chi^2 (1) = 8.69, p < .003$. *Inaction/acceptance* occurred more frequently than did student *hostility, withdrawal, and adaptation*, $\chi^2 (3) = 71.44, p < .001$; which did not differ from each other in how frequently they were reported, $\chi^2 (2) = 1.79, p > .05$. Table 5 contains these results and examples of each type of behavioral reaction reported.

The behavioral responses were also examined separately for each justice type. The pattern of results generally did not differ from the results reported for overall injustice. For each classroom justice type and overall classroom justice, the most frequently reported behavioral responses were student *dissent*, followed by student *inaction/acceptance*, and *hostility*.³

Discussion

The aim of this investigation was to identify students' experiences with classroom (in)justice, as well as their behavioral and emotional reactions to such messages. Results indicated that students reported their instructors as engaging in unfair

Table 4 Student emotional responses to classroom injustice

Emotion	<i>n</i>	%
Angry I was extremely angry after my teacher said that comment, immediately I knew he was going to be a complete asshole all year. I wanted to drop the class, but knew I would easily be able to do well, despite his stringent policies.	56	34.8
Pained I was upset. I felt I was treated poorly along with my classmates all because my professor could not properly do her job.	29	18.0
Frustrated Frustrated because it takes a lot of work to prepare and write an essay, especially in another language, if you have other classes where you have work to do.	18	11.2
Powerless You feel helpless, that you can't help getting sick.	12	7.5
Stressed I couldn't concentrate in my next class. I got stressed out because I had to wait so long to talk with her.	10	6.2
Violated I felt violated in a way because I did get a good grade only because I was afraid to turn him in for sexual harassment. Good Grade = C passing because few people passed.	8	5.0
Cheated I felt cheated out of a higher grade.	7	4.3
Embarrassed I felt embarrassed. She made me think everyone in the room (who seemed to understand it) would be looking at me like I am an idiot.	7	4.3
Empathetic I felt so bad for the girl because she really was confused on the matter and was just looking for the understanding.	5	3.1
Disgusted Disgusted and obligated to report.	4	2.5
Other Honestly, no [<i>sic</i>] having a WV accent, I laughed. I enjoyed the discussion because I am interested by the topic. I was entertained/amused. Understand: It was a violation of social norms, but I enjoyed it.	5	3.1
Total	161	100%

behaviors that represented the three previously identified components of classroom justice: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005; Paulsel et al., 2005). Students reported their instructors as violating procedural justice (e.g., unfair grading practices) most frequently, followed by distributive (e.g., unfair grades) and interactional (e.g., making insensitive or rude comments) justice with virtually identical frequencies. Furthermore, the unfair instructor behaviors they mentioned were largely consistent with the items featured in the existing classroom justice measures and research on instructor grading procedures (Tata, 1999; Tyler & Caine,

Table 5 Student behavioral responses to classroom injustice

Behavior	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Student Dissent</i>	88	52.1
<i>To Teacher</i>		
I said, "You've let people turn in assignments late before" and the professor wouldn't budge and just said that it was only once and that was last time.		
<i>To Another Teacher/Coach/Advisor</i>		
As I said, I tried to go to the department to make a complaint, and even to my LD advisor but since he had his 10 year, I told him that I thought he was being unfair and because he said all that stuff to me it was hard to hold back tears. It was one of the worst confrontations that I have ever had.		
<i>To Department Chair/Superiors</i>		
When we realized our group would only have one day after Thanksgiving break before we present, I brought it up to her in the Board of Directors meeting. She gave us a break with returning our feedback early but when she didn't there was nothing I could say or do.		
<i>On Teacher Evaluations</i>		
I wrote, "The last project was horrible you should have given us more time."		
<i>To Family/Friends</i>		
I just kept it to myself until I got home and complained a little to my boyfriend.		
<i>To Other Students in the Class</i>		
I complained to my group members about how unfair it was. I didn't say anything to my professor about it because I thought it would have no effect on her.		
<i>To Other Students Not in the Class</i>		
I complained to fellow students.		
<i>Student Inaction/Acceptance</i>	53	31.4
<i>Complied</i>		
Just answered the question and left it alone.		
<i>Did Nothing</i>		
I didn't say anything. I didn't want to get into trouble over something so dumb.		
<i>Accepted It</i>		
No, I accepted the results and moved on.		
<i>Left The Situation</i>		
After I realized he wasn't going to do anything, I left.		
<i>Student Hostility</i>	11	6.5
<i>Hostile Nonverbals</i>		
I gave a dirty look, but said nothing.		
<i>Hostile Verbals</i>		
I was just verbally abusing my teacher, yelling at her about things that weren't even related to the test. P.S. I feel bad now but I was mad.		
<i>Student Withdrawal</i>	11	6.5
<i>Stopped Effort</i>		
I never tried to answer any of his questions, academic ones or otherwise.		
<i>Dropped Class/Changed Major</i>		
I dropped the class because it would have been impossible to get the grade I needed.		
<i>Student Adaptation</i>	6	3.6
I vowed to study twice as hard for the next exam.		
Total	169	100%

1981), power, and credibility (Chory; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b; Paulsel et al.). In terms of reactions to perceptions of instructors' unfairness, students reported they most frequently experienced the emotions of anger, pain, and frustration, which is in line with existing instructional fairness work (e.g., Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b; Horan et al., 2010; Paulsel, 2005), and they mentioned behaving in ways consistent with student reactions studied in past classroom justice research (e.g., Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b; Colquitt, 2001; Paulsel & Chory-Assad).

Theoretical Implications

Students' experiences of classroom injustice. Results of the first three research questions provide insight into students' experiences with what they perceive as instructors' unfairness. The results suggest that students perceive receiving a wide range of unfair messages from their college instructors and that these messages fit the three-dimensional treatment of classroom justice (Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005; Paulsel et al., 2005). Students report that their instructors engage in procedural injustice almost three times as often as they engage in distributive or interactional injustice. These results provide support for the validity of the three-dimension conceptualization and operationalization of classroom justice.

The most frequently reported unfair instructor behaviors were: *unfair grading procedures* (e.g., using what students perceived to be different criteria for different students), *unfair grade* (e.g., grade did not reflect the effort the student put into the course), *unfair make-up/late policies* (e.g., student could not make-up an exam even though the student was ill), *insensitive or rude comments* (e.g., instructor perceived as communicating lack of sympathy or understanding), *information for exams* (e.g., information on exam review sheet did not appear on the exam), and instructor *implied or stated the student was stupid* (e.g., instructor says student is going to fail the course even though it is early in the semester). With the exception of *insensitive/rude comments*, these behaviors ultimately concern the student's grade or competence. For instance, not being able to make up an exam adversely affects a student's course grade, and the instructor communicating that the student is stupid suggests the instructor will give the student a low grade, reflecting the perception that the student lacks intelligence.

These results are consistent with work on classroom justice and learning/grade orientation. The latter contends that students have either a grade motivation (e.g., the student is driven solely to maintain a pleasing grade) or a learning motivation (e.g., students are driven to obtain knowledge; Frymier & Weser, 2001; Milton, Pollio, & Eison, 1986). Horan and Myers (2009) argued that students with a grade orientation "likely are concerned with distributive justice, and would be accepting of an instructor with little concern over procedural or interactional justice as long as the ultimate outcome—the grade—was positive for them" (p. 491). Although the present study showed procedural justice to be more salient than distributive justice, the

unfair procedures students mentioned were likely to result in unfair grades. Learning-motivated students may have similar grade-related justice concerns, as they may view grades as a reflection or indicator of their learning. Future research may wish to examine the relationships between learning orientation and classroom justice perceptions.

The unfair instructor behaviors students reported in this study also support the choice of instructor-related variables, such as instructor grading procedures (Leventhal, 1980; Tata, 1999), credibility, and power, that have been included in prior classroom justice research. Past studies have shown that student perceptions of instructor credibility (competence, character, and caring), power use, and antisocial BAT use are related to students' perceptions of fairness (Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a; Paulsel et al., 2005). The present study demonstrated that students mention instructor behaviors related to these constructs as engendering perceptions of unfairness. For example, *instructor error* concerns student perceptions that teachers make mistakes, are wrong at times, and are incompetent. This category speaks to the credibility component of competence and the expert power base. The interactional justice categories as a whole reflect student concerns centered around instructor caring, character, and referent power. For example, instructors being *insensitive/rude* demonstrates that the instructor is not understanding or concerned with students—characteristics of a caring instructor. Similarly, instructors whose communication is marked by *sexist/racist/prejudiced* comments are not likely to be seen as ethical, moral, or honorable (i.e., as indicative of high character). Rude and prejudiced instructors are also not likely to be perceived as people with whom students identify or want to please (i.e., low referent power). Finally, because grades may serve as punishments or rewards, depending on the student's perspective, the grade-related justice violations, such as grade, scheduling/workload, and grading procedures invoke notions of coercive and reward power and the punishment-related BATs.

Students' emotional reactions to classroom injustice. Students in the present study reported feeling a variety of overwhelmingly negative emotions as a result of perceiving unfairness in the classroom. Consistent with past theorizing (Colquitt, 2001), students do appear to have socioemotional reactions to injustice. Specifically in line with prior reasoning (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b), the most frequently reported emotional reactions included anger and frustration. In addition, students' emotional reactions to injustice are in line with Emotional Response Theory (Mottet, Frymier, & Beebe, 2006), which argues that students feel pleasure, arousal, and dominance in response to instructors' messages. Pleasure describes how well a student feels (e.g., comfortable–uncomfortable, happy–unhappy, and joyful–miserable; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). After experiencing injustice, students report feeling low pleasure—they feel pained (e.g., upset, hurt, disappointed), cheated, and disgusted. Arousal describes a student's "mobilization or energy" level (Russell & Barrett, 1999, p. 809; e.g., stimulated–relaxed, excited–calm, and frenzied–sluggish; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Students respond to unfairness with feelings of high arousal. They feel angry, stressed, and frustrated. Dominance describes one's feeling of power,

authority, and influence (Mehrabian, 1981; e.g., submissive–dominant, decisive–indecisive, and bold–meek; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Students react to classroom injustice with feelings of powerlessness, embarrassment, and being violated. These results speak to the validity of prior Emotional Response Theory-based classroom justice studies (e.g., Horan et al., 2010; Paulsel, 2005).

Students' behavioral reactions to classroom injustice. Students most frequently reported responding to perceptions of classroom injustice by communicating *dissent*. Most dissent appeared to be expressed by students to the instructor. For example, students reported trying to talk with their instructors after the unfair incident, asking for explanations of the instructor's actions, and trying to persuade the instructor to act in a manner the students perceived as fair. Students also expressed dissent by reporting the instructor to a "higher-up" or talking to another school-related professional, such as a coach or academic advisor. Dissent also included students giving negative instructor/course evaluations and complaining to other students, friends, or family.

After dissent, the most common behavioral reaction was *inaction/acceptance* of the injustice. This response included students simply complying with what they perceived to be an unfair request, accepting the unfair practice or outcome (e.g., grade), physically leaving the environment in which the injustice occurred, or not doing anything (e.g., "I did nothing"). This finding is consistent with recent work by Burroughs (2007) who found that students most frequently reported engaging in complete compliance when instructors asked them to do something they did not want to do. Similarly, Colquitt (2001) reported positive correlations among the three types of justice and students' rule compliance. This inaction/acceptance may be due to the inherent power discrepancy between teachers and students. Students who respond by doing nothing may not perceive that they have a voice in the classroom that allows them to act as agents of change.

The results for student behavioral reactions suggest that the previously examined student responses to unfairness, such as aggression, hostility, and antisocial and teacher-owned resistance, may not be the most frequently reported reactions, but they do occur relatively often. For example, students reported engaging in hostile and aggressive behaviors such as calling the instructor an obscene name, yelling at the instructor, cursing the instructor, and giving the instructor mean looks. They also reported responding to classroom injustice by engaging in behaviors resembling the antisocial resistance strategy of rallying student support by dissenting to other students in the class and "ganging up" with others in the class against the instructor. The antisocial resistance strategy of revenge was reflected in students' giving the instructor negative course evaluations, talking about the instructor's unfairness to students not in the class, and filing complaints about the instructor's unfairness with official school outlets (e.g., the department chair). This last action, along with dissenting to another coach/teacher/advisor, also represents the teacher-owned resistance strategy of appealing to powerful others.

Methodological and Measurement Implications

Past measures of classroom justice. As previously argued, obtaining qualitative descriptions of injustice allows for a comparison of the instances of injustice that students experience and the issues of fairness measured using the existing instruments (Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b). Examination of the justice scales' items and the descriptions of injustice offered by students reveals they are consistent. The distributive justice measure (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b) asks students to evaluate the fairness of their course grades, which is the outcome most frequently mentioned by students in the present study as being unfairly distributed. The measure asks students to compare the grades they received to the grades of other students, the time they put into the course, and their expectations. These standards of comparison were mentioned in the current study. For instance, a student wrote "I never received a perfect score like the rest of the class." Another student reported "I tried extremely hard and did not receive a grade even close to all the hard work and effort I put into the course."

The unfair instructor behaviors reported by students also reflect the items contained in Chory-Assad and Paulsel's (2004b) measure of procedural justice. This measure asks students to evaluate the fairness of the missed work policies, the exams, course scheduling, how the class is conducted, and the effort required in the course. Consistent with these items, students in the present study reported issues of unfairness regarding missed work/make-up policies, scheduling/workload, and course procedures. For example, a student described a situation in which an instructor failed to e-mail a study guide (s)he promised to send and a situation in which the professor did not allow a student "to hand in an assignment late with proof I was at a funeral."

Regarding, interactional justice, Chory's (2007) measure assesses students' perceptions of how fairly the instructor treats students, communicates with them, and listens to them. Students in the present study reported instructors as treating students "like dirt," ignoring their questions, and singling them out for punishment in front of the class. These responses are consistent with the issues addressed in the interactional justice scale. Collectively, the results of the present study provide support for the validity of the existing classroom justice measures.

Future studies related to classroom justice. The qualitative descriptions of students' emotional and behavioral responses to perceptions of classroom injustice may be used in developing quantitative measures. Based on the information provided here, emotion measures should include items assessing student anger, pain, frustration, embarrassment, and disgust; and feeling powerless, stressed, violated, cheated, and empathetic. Measures of students' behavioral reactions should include assessments of student dissent, inaction/acceptance, hostility, withdrawal, and adaptation. The dissent category, in particular, appears to be an area ripe for future research, as it was the most commonly reported behavioral response and it encompasses many

subcategories (e.g., dissent to the instructor, family/friends, other students, superiors, etc.).

In addition to scale development, the results provide information that can be used to create ecologically valid behavioral manipulations and scenarios for future research. Studies manipulating distributive justice should depict an unfair grade, procedural justice manipulations should address unfair grading practices or make-up/late work policies, and interactional justice manipulations should include rude/insensitive comments. Situations involving these unfair behaviors appear to be the most commonly shared experiences and, consequently, students should be able to identify with these manipulations and respond accurately to them.

Practical Implications

The present study provides information that can be used in instructor training. First, results suggest that students are very concerned with unfair grades, as well as interactional unfairness. The most frequently mentioned unfair instructor behavior concerned grading procedures, followed by teachers assigning unfair grades. Thus, instructional training programs should spend time reviewing fair assessment practices, make-up/late policies, the importance of high quality and timely student feedback, and ways to address students' expectations about their grades. Second, instructors should continue to be concerned with the fair interpersonal treatment of students. Instructors need to be keenly aware that students expect to be treated with dignity and respect and they notice and react negatively to communication they perceive to be insulting.

In formulating suggestions for classroom practices based on the present study's results, it is important to keep in mind that these data represent students' perceptions. As such, they may not reflect objective reality (if such a thing could be defined), instructors' intentions, or instructors' perceptions of the behaviors. Furthermore, what students perceive as unfair may be in the best interest of students, instructors, or the class as a whole. For example, a policy of students not being allowed to make up missed exams for any reason prevents instructors from having to discriminate among students' excuses, which could result in even more fairness-related problems. Students having to deal with practices and outcomes they perceive to be unfair may also prepare them for functioning in a corporate/professional setting in which they are likely to encounter many unfair situations. This lesson may be worth the student fallout if handled appropriately. However, it is also important to recognize that despite instructors' best intentions, they occasionally engage in unfair practices that should be corrected if possible. Furthermore, students respond emotionally and behaviorally based on their perceptions of fairness. It is inevitable that at some point, students will perceive instructors as behaving unfairly, so instructors should be prepared to deal with angry, frustrated, upset students who are likely to dissent in some form. In sum, any classroom adaptations based on the present study's results should be made after careful consideration of all factors involved.

Limitations and Conclusion

As with any investigation, results should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. Primarily, students were asked to describe an unfair instance. Thus, it is likely that students reported their most extreme or memorable experience with unfairness. The time lapse between the incident and reporting (e.g., 10.14 months) is consistent with this speculation. A related limitation pertains to the qualitative method; that is, the survey method captures one incident. Certainly, qualitative methods that yield richer data, such as focus groups, diaries, and in-depth interviews, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of fairness in the classroom. Future research should explore classroom justice using these methods.

As numerous scholars have indicated, fairness in the classroom is an important issue (e.g., Moore, Moore, & McDonald, 2008; Walsh & Maffei, 1994). Consistent with this argument are the results of classroom justice research, which indicates that students' perceptions of fairness are related to behavioral and perceptual outcomes. Likewise, the present study demonstrated that students are able to recall instances of unfairness and that they experience negative emotional and behavioral reactions to such messages. The results observed in the present study reinforce the importance of scholars continuing to develop theory and research on classroom justice, its antecedents, consequences, and defining characteristics, and the importance of instructors maintaining awareness of how they communicate justice in the classroom.

Notes

- [1] All kappa reliability estimates are based on Potter and Levine-Donnerstein's (1999) formula for Cohen's kappa.
- [2] Detailed results are available from the second author.
- [3] Detailed results are available from the second author.

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