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Getting Excited for Our Class: Instructor Immediacy, Rapport, and Effects for Students

Emily Napier

Getting Excited for *Our* Class: Instructor Immediacy, Rapport, and Effects for Students

By

Emily N. Napier

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Mr. Daniel Hedden, Reader Date

ABSTRACT

This thesis examined the relationships between instructors and students to determine the effects of prosocial instructor behavior on the college student experience for both in-person and online learning. Study One examined instructor rapport with students and verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors in face-to-face classes. Students reported on how their instructor constructed the classroom climate and perceptions of their instructor's behavior. Results indicated that students' perceptions of instructor verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors were related to lower student communication apprehension with instructors; whereas perceived classroom rapport was related with higher perceptions of their instructor's credibility and was also related with a lower likelihood for students to engage in expressive and vengeful dissent about their instructor. Study Two used an experimental design to determine which instructor behaviors led to students' perceptions of rapport, instructor credibility, and engagement in online learning. Results indicated that participants in the high professionalism and high clarity condition perceived more rapport, higher instructor credibility, and were more likely to be engaged in the class compared to participants in the low professionalism and low clarity condition. Perceptions of professionalism, clarity, and verbal immediacy all worked together as a significant model to predict rapport, instructor credibility, and engagement. In combination, this thesis revealed that positive student outcomes are a function of both instructor behavior and the environment they create.

Introduction

Instructor-student relationships are an important part of the classroom environment and have major implications for college students (Fraser, Aldrige, & Soerjaningish, 2010; Johnson, 2006; Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012). When students have positive relationships with their instructors, they are more likely to attend class, enjoy their class, study for tests, and contact their instructor with questions (Benson, Cohen, & Buskist, 2005). Additionally, positive instructor-student relationships are not only associated with beneficial outcomes for students, but for instructors and universities as well. Instructors are likely to experience more satisfaction from their job and have more motivation when they see students develop and succeed (Johnson, 2006). Universities also receive financial benefits when students are committed to persist in attending their programs, adding to the significance of learning how to make instructor-student relationships worthwhile in order to increase the associated benefits.

Understanding how positive instructor-student relationships develop will allow instructors to maximize the benefits of these relationships for not only students, but for instructors and universities as well. These positive relationships in the classroom are often built through instructor behaviors. This can include immediacy, which consists of prosocial behaviors that can encourage students to talk in class and share their opinions and viewpoints (Gorham, 1988). Immediacy behaviors can create a welcoming environment for students and create a sense of classroom rapport, or feelings of trust and harmony with the instructor (Frisby & Myers, 2008). Along with immediacy behaviors, rapport can provide a foundation for a positive instructor-student relationship. Frisby and Myers (2008) called for further research on rapport, given that the impact of rapport on instructor-student relationships has not been fully understood and that relatively little is known about rapport when compared to other relational variables, such

as immediacy, in the classroom. Thus, Study One aimed to answer this call to provide further insight into the effects of instructor immediacy and classroom rapport on students' perceptions of their instructors and their personal classroom behaviors. Study Two continued this exploration through an experiment on how instructor verbal immediacy behaviors, professionalism, and clarity impact and predict student perceptions of rapport, instructor credibility, and engagement.

Study One

The purpose of Study One was to determine the effects of specific instructor behaviors on outcomes that are beneficial for both students and instructors in college. Immediacy behaviors and classroom rapport set the tone for the college environment and are likely to influence student outcomes such as communication apprehension with instructors, perceptions of instructor credibility, and instructional dissent. To explore the way instructor behavior influences student outcomes, the next two sections will provide an overview of two classroom variables that relate to the instructor-student relationship: instructor immediacy behaviors and instructor-student rapport.

Immediacy Behaviors

The way in which college instructors communicate plays a vital role in what students get from their experience. Immediacy behaviors are specific actions that have the potential to enhance psychological closeness between instructors and students (Gorham, 1988). Verbal immediacy behaviors are how instructors converse with students (e.g., referring to students by name, sharing self-disclosures; Gorham, 1988), while nonverbal immediacy behaviors refer to the actions instructors use (e.g., making eye contact, using gestures; Gorham, 1988). Immediacy behaviors have been associated with an increase in cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning, and state motivation in students (Christensen & Menzel, 1988; Christophel, 2009). In addition,

perceptions of immediacy are also associated with a decreased likelihood that students will challenge their instructor (Goodboy & Myers, 2009). This suggests that immediacy not only increases perceived learning and satisfaction, but also influences respect and harmony with instructors, which can allow for effective classroom management. This may be in part because immediacy behaviors enhance perceptions of connectedness (Mehrabian, 1971), which is likely to contribute to perceptions of classroom rapport. Thus, it is important to understanding how immediacy relates to rapport because of the ability instructors have in controlling their use of immediacy behaviors, which may allow them to establish instructor-student rapport.

Rapport

Instructor immediacy sets the tone of the classroom, and rapport is likely to be the manifestation of the effects. Rapport is a positive feeling cultivated through an enjoyable and personal environment that is relationship specific and developed through confidence and trust by instructors and students (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Myers, 2008; Gremler & Gwinner, 2000; Rakel & Rakel, 2015). Thus, rapport is established through a mutual connection and is based on perceptions of the instructor. Rapport does not simply create harmony in the classroom, but also strengthens the instructor-student relationship (Frisby & Martin, 2010), which results in many positive outcomes for students, including increased classroom participation (Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014), cognitive and affective learning (Frisby, et al., 2014; Frisby & Martin, 2010) and student motivation in the course (Frisby & Myers, 2008).

Both rapport and instructor immediacy are influential factors on the instructor-student relationship. Perceptions of rapport are related to immediacy (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010) and these two constructs seem to be closely linked (Benson, et al., 2005). Given this relationship, it

may be beneficial to scholars to understand not only how these variables relate to one another, but also the effect that they have on student outcomes. Thus, one objective of Study One was to determine whether instructor behaviors that are designed to reduce psychological distance (i.e., immediacy behaviors) and if positive feelings created in the classroom (i.e., rapport) have similar or different effects on positive student outcomes. A particular area of inquiry centered around instructors' use of immediacy behaviors and creation of rapport and the effects of this classroom climate on students; it was hypothesized that classrooms characterized by immediacy behaviors and rapport would have impacts on students' apprehension to communicate with their instructors, perceptions of the instructor's credibility, and the way in which they were likely to express frustration. The three variables of interest are student-instructor communication apprehension, perceptions of instructor credibility, and instructional dissent. The following sections will address the student outcome variables of interest.

Student-Instructor Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) occurs when fear or anxiety arises when interacting with others (McCroskey, 1970). Student-instructor communication apprehension is a specific type of CA that refers to fear or anxiety surrounding real or anticipated communication with instructors (Jordan & Powers, 2007), which can have negative implications in the academic context. Students who have high general CA are less likely to talk with their instructor and seek academic assistance (Jordan & Powers, 2007; Martin, Valencic, & Heisel, 2002), more likely to receive lower grades, be less satisfied with their college experience, and drop out of school (Jordan & Powers, 2007; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989). More specifically, students who experienced high communication apprehension with instructors (SICA) are less motivated to communicate with their instructor and experience lower satisfaction in college

(Jordan & Powers, 2007). On the other hand, students who have low student-instructor communication apprehension communicate more with their instructors and as a result report feeling more content with their instructor, advisement, and college experience (Jordan & Powers, 2007). Communication frequency both in- and out-of-class also increased when students had less CA when communicating directly with their instructor (Jordan & Powers, 2007). Overall, when students do not feel comfortable approaching their instructors, they do not do as well in college.

Instructors may be able to decrease their students' communication apprehension through their classroom behaviors; and given the benefits of lower student-instructor CA, instructors who wish to maximize student success may be interested in adapting their behaviors in order to increase students' comfort in communicating with them. Instructors who are perceived as highly versatile and responsive, meaning they were adaptable to students' needs, encouraging, and approachable, influenced students to have lower general CA (Kearney & McCroskey, 1980); thus, it is likely that similar instructor behaviors -- in the form of immediacy -- would have a similar effect on the specific experience of student-instructor CA as well. In their call for scholars to further explore instructor-student rapport, Frisby and Martin (2010) acknowledged that some students who are already apprehensive about communicating with their instructor may experience discomfort and feel negatively about their instructor-student relationship either way. Other research suggests that instructors who establish a positive classroom climate can decrease students' communication apprehension (Kearney & McCroskey, 1980; Robinson, 1997), which can result in positive benefits for students' enjoyment and success in college. Thus, student-instructor CA should be further examined in relation to immediacy behaviors and rapport due to the possibility that a positive relational climate that creates a welcoming atmosphere would be

related to students experiencing less fear associated with communicating with their instructor. To gain an understanding of how immediacy and rapport are related to students' CA with instructors, the following hypotheses are posed:

H1: Perceptions of instructor immediacy behaviors will be negatively related to students' communication apprehension with instructors.

H2: Perceptions of instructor rapport will be negatively related to students' communication apprehension with instructors.

Instructor Credibility

Instructors' behaviors have the potential to influence not only student behavior, but also student perceptions of their instructor's credibility. Instructor credibility is a student-determined characteristic and a receiver-focused phenomenon granted from student perceptions (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1977). Students perceive instructors as credible when they engage in behaviors that reflect competence (e.g. expertise in the field), trustworthiness (e.g. honesty), and goodwill (e.g., caring for students; McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Instructors who are perceived as credible not only receive higher instructor evaluations from students (Teven & McCroskey, 1997); their students are also more likely to be engaged in class and participate more frequently (Myers, 2004). Credible instructors also have more repeat students, as students will take additional classes with them (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). However, instructor credibility is not only beneficial for instructors; students report higher cognitive and affective learning (Teven & McCroskey, 1997), motivation (Frymier & Thompson, 1992), increased likelihood to engage in out-of-class communication (e.g., email, office hours; Myers, 2004), and higher perceptions of classroom justice when they view their instructor as credible (Chory, 2007).

Perceptions of instructor credibility are often influenced by instructor behavior; instructor

credibility has been found to be associated with affinity-seeking behaviors (i.e., behaviors that increase likeability with students; Frymier & Thompson, 1992) and with verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors (for a review see Teven & Hanson, 2004; Santilli, Miller, & Katt, 2011; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). What is still unknown is if, and how, rapport relates to credibility. Because rapport, like immediacy, reflects a positive instructor-student relationship through the creation of a welcoming classroom, it is likely to have a similar effect on students' perceptions of their instructor's level of credibility. Thus, to gain a further understanding of how rapport is related to instructor credibility, the following hypothesis is posed:

H3: Perceptions of instructor rapport will be positively related to instructor credibility.

Instructional Dissent

Instructor behaviors can also impact the communication decisions students make when they are dissatisfied. Students express instructional dissent when disagreements arise concerning their instructor, academic course, or assignments (Goodboy, 2011a). There are three types of instructional dissent that students use: rhetorical dissent (i.e., attempting to persuade an instructor to correct a mistake), expressive dissent (i.e., venting to others about an instructor or course-related issue), and vengeful dissent (i.e., seeking to ruin an instructor's reputation; Goodboy, 2011a). While rhetorical dissent is largely perceived to be a productive method of expressing discontent, expressive and vengeful dissent are less productive and may have negative implications for both instructors and students.

Students who engage in rhetorical dissent experience benefits such as increased cognitive learning (Goodboy, 2011b), such that when students communicate their disagreements with their instructor it is beneficial to their personal learning process as well. Beyond implications for students, rhetorical dissent also has benefits for instructors; Frisby, Goodboy, and Bucker (2014)

found that instructors reported feeling more efficacious in their instructional strategies, or the way they direct classroom procedures, when students engaged in rhetorical dissent. Thus, students' use of rhetorical dissent can have positive implications in the academic classroom on both instructors and students alike.

However, when students engage in expressive and vengeful dissent, they tend to turn to others to express their dissatisfaction and when students seem to feel frustrated by their classroom environment they are motivated to engage in communication and behaviors that reflect that discontentment. This can have negative outcomes for students, as engagement in expressive and vengeful dissent is associated with a decrease in affective learning, communication satisfaction, motivation in the course, and more challenging behaviors of the instructor which can create a negative instructor-student relationship (Goodboy, 2011b).

In addition to the negative effects for students, expressive and vengeful dissent also creates a negative experience for instructors as well. Students' use of expressive dissent increased instructors' feelings of emotional exhaustion and resulted in decreases in teaching satisfaction and reduced feelings of classroom management efficacy (Frisby et al., 2014), meaning when students expressed frustrations and complaints towards others, it is associated with negative impacts for instructors mentally and for their job performance. Students' use of vengeful dissent is also unhelpful for instructors; instructors reported lower affective organizational commitment, or their desire to stay involved in their work environment, when students engaged in vengeful dissent (Frisby, et al., 2014). Overall, expressive and vengeful dissent have multiple negative implications on both parties of the instructor-student relationship, meaning that instructors should use behaviors that discourages student's enactment of expressive and vengeful dissent.

Based on knowledge of dissent, instructors will want to establish a classroom environment that encourages rhetorical dissent and decrease the likelihood that students will enact expressive or vengeful dissent. One way that instructors may increase students' enactment of productive dissent is to make students feel able to communicate with the instructor when they are concerned. Instructors' use of immediacy behaviors, which increase feelings of closeness between students and instructors, may lead students to feel more comfortable discussing their concerns with the instructor, rather than with peers (or by retaliating). To gain a further understanding of how immediacy behaviors are related to instructional dissent, the following hypothesis is posed:

H4: Perceptions of instructor immediacy behaviors will be positively related to (a) rhetorical dissent and negatively related to (b) expressive dissent and (c) vengeful dissent.

Additionally, positive and respectful environments reduce classroom conflict between instructors and students (Meyers, Bender, Hill, and Thomas, 2006). Due to the warm climate rapport creates in the classroom, students may be less likely to engage in expressive and vengeful dissent because students are often less frustrated with an instructor in this type of positive environment (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Students may also be more likely to engage in rhetorical dissent when they feel like they can approach the instructor with comments and complaints within an environment that welcomes conversation and student perspectives. To understand how rapport is related to instructional dissent, the following hypothesis is posed:

H5: Perceptions of instructor rapport will be positively related to (a) rhetorical dissent and negatively related to (b) expressive dissent and (c) vengeful dissent.

Given the strong relationships between immediacy and rapport (Frisby & Gaffney, 2015)

and credibility and classroom justice (Chory, 2007) it is likely that the use of immediacy behaviors, accompanied by positive classroom rapport, and perceptions of instructor credibility would predict students' likelihood to enact dissent, thus, the following hypothesis is posed:

H6: Perceptions of instructor rapport, instructor immediacy, and instructor credibility will predict students' use of (a) rhetorical dissent, (b) expressive dissent, and (c) vengeful dissent.

Method

Procedures

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, participants were recruited through an online forum on Reddit.com, where a study advertisement was reposted once a week for three months. Participants were first asked to review a cover letter, indicate consent to participate, and were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix A). Following their indication of consent, participants were prompted to think about the most recent class they had attended face-to-face, to indicate the initials of the instructor of that course, and to report on that instructor during the survey (see Appendix B). Completed surveys remained anonymous and the data were reported in the aggregate.

Participants

Participants were 30 undergraduates (19 women) recruited from an online discussion forum (i.e., Reddit.com). Participants were eligible to participate if they were (a) at least 18 years of age or older, (b) an undergraduate college student, and (c) in a face-to-face college course. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 39 years of age (M = 22.32, SD = 4.73). Most participants in this study were juniors (9), followed by freshmen (8), seniors (6), and sophomores (2). Three participants reported 'other' (i.e., transitioning to another school or about to graduate)

and two did not indicate their grade level. Participants' universities were mostly located in the Northeast area (9) or the Southern regions (9) of the United States, followed by the Midwest (5), and West (4). Three participants did not indicate their university's location. Participants also reported on a variety of courses including philosophy (2), accounting (1), design studio (1), nutrition (1), in addition to others.

Instrumentation

Immediacy behaviors were measured using Gorham's (1988) Verbal and Nonverbal Scale. Participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). The 34-item scale measured verbal immediacy (e.g., "addresses students by name"; "uses personal examples or talks about experiences she/he has had outside of class") and nonverbal immediacy (e.g., "uses a variety of vocal expressions while talking to the class"; "has a relaxed body position while talking to the class"). Previous Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .77 and .94 for verbal immediacy and .88 and .84 for nonverbal immediacy have been found for this measure (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham, 1988). A Cronbach's alpha of .78 was obtained for verbal immediacy and .73 for nonverbal immediacy in this study.

Rapport was measured using Frisby and Myers' (2008) modified measure of Gremler and Gwinner's (2000) customer-employee rapport scale. The 11-item scale measures students' perceptions of their instructor and participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include "I am comfortable interacting with my instructor" and "in thinking about this relationship, I have a harmonious relationship with my instructor". Prior Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .94 and .91 have been obtained for the measure (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Myers, 2008). Cronbach's alpha for this study was .96.

Student's *communication apprehension with their instructors* was measured using Jordan and Powers' (2007) 6-item Student-Instructor Communication Apprehension Measurement. Participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include "I find that I am very reluctant to seek out counseling from my instructors" and "I become nervous when talking with my instructors about my schedule". Previous Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .82 has been found for this measure (Jordan & Powers, 2007). A Cronbach's alpha of .79 was obtained for this study.

Instructor credibility was measured using McCroskey and Teven's (1999) 18-item measure, which includes subscales for competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness. Sample items on a 7-point semantic differential scale include "Incompetent – Competent" for competence, "Cares about me – Doesn't care about me" for goodwill, and "Honest – Dishonest" for trustworthiness. Prior Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .85 and .90 for competence, .92 and .97 for goodwill, and .92 and .92 for trustworthiness have been found for these subscales (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Teven & Hanson, 2004). A Cronbach's alpha of .66 was obtained for competence, .81 for goodwill, and .86 for trustworthiness in this study.

Instructional dissent was measured using Goodboy's (2011b) 22-item Instructional Dissent Scale, which measures students' enactment of rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful dissent. Participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Sample items include "I voice my opinions to my teacher when there is a disagreement because I want to do better in the course" for rhetorical dissent, "I complain to others to express my frustrations with this course" for expressive dissent, and "I hope to ruin my teacher's reputation by exposing his/her bad practices to others" for vengeful dissent. Prior Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .83 and .85 for rhetorical dissent, .95 and .95 for expressive dissent, .94

and .92 for vengeful dissent have been found (Goodboy, 2011b; Goodboy & Myers, 2012). A Cronbach's alpha of .82 for rhetorical dissent, .96 for expressive dissent, and .91 for vengeful dissent were obtained in this study.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables can be found in Table 1.

Hypothesis one predicted that instructor immediacy behaviors would be negatively related to students' communication apprehension with instructors. Results of a Pearson correlation supported this hypothesis. Verbal immediacy behaviors (r = -.55, p < .01) and nonverbal immediacy behaviors (r = -.36, p < .05) were negatively associated with students' communication apprehension with instructors.

Hypothesis two predicted that perceptions of instructor rapport would be negatively related to students' communication apprehension with instructors. Results of a Pearson correlation did not support this hypothesis. Rapport was not negatively associated with students' communication apprehension with instructors (r = -.29, p = .12).

Hypothesis three predicted that perceptions of instructor rapport would be positively related to instructor credibility. Results of a Pearson correlation supported this hypothesis. Rapport was positively associated with goodwill (r = .89, p < .001), trustworthiness (r = .75, p < .001), and competence (r = .57, p < .01).

Hypothesis four predicted that perceptions of instructor immediacy behaviors would be positively related to (a) rhetorical dissent, and negatively related to (b) expressive dissent (c) and vengeful dissent. Results of a Pearson correlation did not support this hypothesis. Verbal immediacy behaviors were not associated with rhetorical dissent (r = .35, p = .06), expressive dissent (r = -.22, p = .24), nor vengeful dissent (r = -.18, p = .34). Nonverbal immediacy

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study One

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Rapport	5.09	1.35	__								
2. Student-Instructor Communication Apprehension	3.23	1.07	-.29	__							
3. Verbal Immediacy	3.92	.50	.61**	-.55**	__						
4. Nonverbal Immediacy	4.57	.48	.54**	-.36	.66**	__					
5. Expressive Dissent	2.15	.98	-.68**	-.11	-.22	-.32	__				
6. Rhetorical Dissent	2.33	.86	.15	-.53**	.35	.04	-.009	__			
7. Vengeful Dissent	1.14	.50	-.64**	-.13	-.18	-.17	.61**	-.17	__		
8. Competence	6.22	.73	.57**	-.06	.22	.42*	-.46*	.05	-.33	__	
9. Goodwill	5.19	1.14	.89**	-.21	.53**	.52**	-.56**	-.07	-.55**	.48**	__
10. Trustworthiness	6.30	.72	.75**	-.17	.48**	.49**	-.57**	.09	-.70**	.42*	.71**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

behaviors were not associated with rhetorical dissent (r = .04, p = .84), expressive dissent (r = -.32, p = .08), nor vengeful dissent (r = -.17, p = .38). Participants' perceptions of instructor immediacy behaviors were not related to students' likelihood to enact instructional dissent.

Hypothesis five predicted that perceptions of instructor rapport would be positively related to (a) rhetorical dissent, and negatively related to (b) expressive dissent (c) and vengeful dissent. Results of a Pearson correlation partially supported this hypothesis. Rapport was not positively associated with rhetorical dissent (r = .15, p = .42), but it was negatively associated with expressive dissent (r = -.68, p < .001) and vengeful dissent (r = -.64, p < .001).

Hypothesis 6 was tested using OLS regression (see Table 2 for unstandardized beta coefficients, standard error, and significance values). Hypothesis 6a predicted that instructor rapport, instructor verbal and nonverbal immediacy, along with instructor credibility, would predict students' use of rhetorical dissent. The overall model was not significant (F(6, 21) = 1.96, p = .12, R^2 = .36).

Hypothesis 6b predicted that instructor rapport, instructor verbal and nonverbal immediacy, along with instructor credibility, would predict students' use of expressive dissent. The overall model was significant (F(6, 21) = 4.26, p < .01, R^2 = .55). Instructor rapport (B = -.72, p < .05) was a significant predictor of expressive dissent. Instructor verbal immediacy (p = .10), instructor nonverbal immediacy (p = .56), goodwill (p = .38), trustworthiness (p = .47), and competence (p = .98), were not significant predictors of expressive dissent. Students who perceived that their instructors cultivated an atmosphere of rapport were less likely to engage in expressive dissent.

Hypothesis 6c predicted that instructor rapport, instructor verbal and nonverbal immediacy, along with instructor credibility, would predict students' use of vengeful dissent.

Table 2

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Dissent

	Rhetorical Dissent			Expressive Dissent			Vengeful Dissent		
	B	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
Rapport	.43	.32	1.36	-.72*	.30	-2.41	-.29*	.14	-2.10
Verbal Immediacy	.99	.48	2.06	.77	.46	1.70	.32	.21	1.54
Nonverbal Immediacy	-.53	.48	-1.09	-.27	.46	-.60	.11	.21	.52
Competence	.09	.28	.30	-.01	.27	-.03	.07	.12	.58
Goodwill	0.69*	.32	-2.20	.27	.30	.90	.12	.14	.83
Trustworthiness	.06	.34	.19	-.24	.32	-.74	-.39*	.15	-2.63

* $p < .05$

The overall model was significant ($F(6, 21) = 5.97$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .63$). Instructor rapport ($B = -.29$, $p < .05$) and instructor trustworthiness ($B = -.39$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors of vengeful dissent. Instructor verbal immediacy ($p = .14$), instructor nonverbal immediacy ($p = .61$), goodwill ($p = .41$), and competence ($p = .57$) were not significant predictors of vengeful dissent. Students who perceived feelings of rapport and trust were less likely to engage in vengeful dissent.

Study 1 Discussion

Findings from Study One emphasize the importance that verbal immediacy behaviors, nonverbal immediacy behaviors, and rapport can have on student's construction of their instructor's image, as well as the effects of these behaviors on students' communication with their instructors and their out-of-classroom dissent behaviors. These results demonstrate that different instructor behaviors impact students in different ways. Specifically, when instructors used immediacy behaviors in class, students felt less apprehensive when communicating directly with them, whereas feelings of positive classroom rapport prompted students to view their instructor as more credible and led them to dissent less about their instructor in both their social circles and with university faculty. Study Two continues this exploration of the instructor-student relationship with more positive instructor behaviors, but in a different mode of instruction (i.e., online learning).

Study Two

Study One explored how student communication apprehension with instructors, perceptions of instructor credibility, and enactment of instructional dissent are impacted by instructor behaviors in a face-to-face context. However, due to the increasing prevalence and popularity of online classes, it is also important to determine how instructors translate prosocial

behavior and a positive classroom environment into a computer-mediated context. Effective online instruction has become even more important, as COVID-19 has increased instructors' reliance on online instruction -- many U.S. colleges have transitioned courses online to an asynchronous or synchronous format. Due to this switch, increased online communication between students and instructors will occur with the absence of the face-to-face component in traditional style classes, and instructional communication researchers will be interested in knowing how instructors can effectively enact positive behaviors through this medium.

Study Two, then, focuses on the college student experience in the online context, examining both behaviors that instructors may use in the online setting and students' perceptions of and reactions to these behaviors. Because instructors have an increased ability to manipulate or alter their behaviors in online courses, an Impression Management Theory framework is appropriate to guide the discussion of online teaching. Impression Management is defined as the presentation of self in a purposeful manner that manipulates an intended audience's perception (Goffman, 1959). Goffman proposed individuals can manage their settings, words, nonverbal communication, and appearance to create a desired image (Goffman, 1959; Wood, 2004). Instructors in the academic context can attempt to control the impressions students form of them by engaging in certain behaviors; thus, knowing which behaviors translate well to an online context, as well as understanding what perceptions students form as a result of those behaviors, is warranted. Using the results of Study One, this part of the thesis manipulated important elements of instructor presentation in order to determine their effect on student perception.

Scholars have previously assessed the implications of instructor behaviors by manipulating nonverbal immediacy and clarity in an experimental design; results indicated that students score higher grades when the instructor displayed both of these characteristics in the

sample videos provided to students (Bolkan, Goodboy, & Myers, 2017). Bolkan et al. (2017) call for further research to continue this type of investigation with other communication variables. Building from the variables that emerged as important in Study One, this study investigated how students perceive their instructors' impression management attempts in the online context -- specifically, how different characteristics of an instructor's introductory course email (i.e., verbal immediacy, professionalism, and clarity) influence students' perception of the instructor as credible, likely to create an environment of rapport, and the likelihood of the course itself to be engaging. The next three sections will provide an overview of the three instructor variables of interest that relate to the instructor-student relationship in the online environment.

Verbal Immediacy Behaviors

In Study One, immediacy behaviors emerged as related to students' perceived communication apprehension with their instructors. As discussed in the literature review for Study One, immediacy behaviors are associated with many positive outcomes for students (Christensen & Menzel, 1988; Christophel, 2009; Goodboy & Myers, 2009), and therefore, part of Study Two was an investigation into how immediacy can function in the online context. This context can present a challenge for immediacy behaviors because it may be more difficult for instructors to express and translate those behaviors when they lack the richness of face-to-face interactions. Consistent with this assertion, Carrell and Menzel (2001) found that perceptions of immediacy are usually higher for face-to-face classes; however, Bialowas and Steimel (2019) found that immediacy can be built in an online context when instructors are present and establish connection with their students. Their experiment demonstrated immediacy through short purposeful informational videos, which suggested that intentional instructor communication with students can foster immediacy in the online context (Bialowas & Steimel, 2019), despite the

challenges of the online environment. When immediacy is portrayed through online classes, students experience increased learning and satisfaction (Arbaugh, 2001), making those types of behaviors important for instructors to use in online courses. For this study, the instructor communicated through an asynchronous email; therefore, only verbal immediacy was included as part of the instructor's impression management attempt.

Instructor Professionalism

Instructors may also attempt to manipulate their image in the way they come across to students in the area of professionalism, in an attempt to manage their image in front of students in their class. Professionalism can be characterized by certain attitudes and behaviors that comprise an ideal manner in which an individual conducts themselves that reflects the tone of a given situation or atmosphere (Hammer, 2000). In the medical profession, professionalism has been defined as behaving in a certain way to achieve optimal outcomes in tasks and interactions (Hammer, Mason, Chalmers, Popovich, & Rupp, 2000), in addition to the positive presentation of self (e.g., image, dress) and possession of required knowledge and credentials (Bossers, Kernaghan, Hodgins, Merla, O'Connor, & Kessel, 1999). Professionalism is also represented through upholding a standard (e.g., being respectful, punctual, knowledgeable, certified, dressed appropriately, ethical; Hammer, 2000).

Perceptions of professionalism are likely to be a desired quality in instructors and reflect positively on student's experience. Teachers who display professional qualities through organizing their course in a well-considered way often received high ratings from students on course evaluations (Spooren & Mortelmans, 2006), meaning students often view professional instructors more positively and engage in behavior on end-of-course reviews to reflect those perceptions, which also benefits the instructor. In the online context, where other cues are

lacking, instructor professionalism may take on increased importance as students make assumptions of the instructor's preparedness and credibility. Seeing an instructor display professional qualities online (e.g., appropriate dress, suitable background on Zoom) may facilitate more positive thoughts of the instructor and encourage students to treat online courses with the same intentionality as in face-to-face.

Instructor Clarity

Clarity is also likely to be an influential characteristic of instructors in online learning. Instructor clarity is defined as effectively communicating precise course information through an organized, structured message that is comprehensible to students (Bolkan, 2017; Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998). Clarity exists on the dimensions of coherence and structure; coherence refers to the provision of relevant and essential information and structure represents the well-organized presentation of the materials (Bolkan, 2017). Previous research has established the importance of clarity in any instructional context; when instructors are clear, students report lower receiver apprehension (i.e., fear associated with understanding instructional directions) and lower cognitive load (i.e., pressure associated with understanding course information; Bolkan, 2017). In addition, students perceive that they learn more (Bolkan, 2017; Violanti, Kelly, Garland, & Christen, 2018) and experience more cognitive elaboration; in other words, students feel that they put forth more effort for instructors who are clear (Bolkan, 2017).

In an online context, instructor clarity is likely to be even more important, as students lack the face-to-face ability to ask probing questions and instructors may not have as easy access to nonverbal indicators of confusion from their students. Students often experience more perceived learning online when instructors display high clarity in combination with audio and text lectures (Limperos, Buckner, Kaufmann, & Frisby, 2015). Sheridan and Kelly (2010) also

identified ‘making course requirements clear’ as the most important instructor quality in online courses. Thus, clarity is likely to be particularly important for online learners because they may lack the ability to ask questions in real time; because of this, taking the time to be clear in communication with students is an element of impression management that may be particularly important for instructors in online courses. In the current study, verbal immediacy behaviors, professionalism, and clarity were manipulated into high and low categories, resulting in four conditions: (1) high immediacy and high professionalism/clarity, (2) high immediacy and low professionalism/clarity, (3) low immediacy and high professionalism/clarity, and (4) low immediacy and low professionalism/clarity.

Verbal immediacy, professionalism, and clarity are three behaviors that instructors can manipulate in their communication with their students; however, it is unclear which of these instructor behaviors result in positive student outcomes in an online course. Because rapport predicted a decrease in unproductive dissent in Study One, it was deemed important to understand how instructors can create a sense of rapport in the online classroom, and the first goal of the current study was to determine which elements of an instructor’s impression management led students to perceive that their online class would be one with good instructor-student rapport. Given that instructor credibility was also associated with rapport in Study One, the second goal of this study was to determine which elements of an impression management influenced students’ perception of the instructor’s credibility. Finally, Violanti et al. (2018) found that clarity and nonverbal immediacy behaviors worked together to keep students engaged in the college classroom setting; thus, the final goal of this study was to determine how the elements of impression management influenced students’ perception of engagement with their online course. The following sections will address the student outcome variables of interest.

Rapport

Study One indicated that the benefits of instructor-student rapport go beyond simply having an enjoyable class climate; rapport has implications for the way that students handle course-related complaints. Rapport takes on increased importance in the online context; although students frequently experience loneliness when taking online courses (Ali & Smith, 2015), Kaufmann and Vallade (2020) found that the presence of rapport in an online classroom decreased these perceptions of loneliness. This adds to the importance of instructor's ability to facilitate connection in an online environment, which can be managed through certain behaviors. Kaufmann and Vallade (2020) found that positive online learning climates that included instructor communication, course clarity, and course structure were significantly associated with rapport. To gain a further understanding of how feelings of rapport are established through an online instructor, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: Under which conditions of verbal immediacy, professionalism, and clarity do participants perceive the most rapport with an online instructor?

Instructor Credibility

Study One found that instructor rapport was significantly associated with instructor credibility, likely because instructors who cultivate a warm atmosphere are also inspiring perceptions of themselves as caring, competent, and trustworthy. Interestingly, despite this association, credibility did not emerge as a predictor of student dissent, suggesting that these perceptions function differently in terms of their effects on students' enacted behavior. Based on this information, Study Two was interested in whether the predictor variables for rapport and credibility would differ.

It is possible that students' perceptions of instructor credibility are likely to be impacted

by the presence of verbal immediacy behaviors, professionalism, and clarity in the online environment. Other studies found that the camera angle in virtual learning impacted students' perceptions of instructor credibility, ranking eye-level video the highest (Ramlatchan & Watson, 2020). This suggests that alterations instructors make in their online presence impact student perceptions of instructor's credibility. Thus, this study aimed to further this exploration by examining the effect of instructional elements of instructors' impression management on perceptions of credibility. The following hypothesis is posed:

H7: Participants in the high verbal immediacy, high professionalism, and high clarity condition will report the most instructor credibility.

Of additional interested were how these three instructional factors impact student's likelihood to be engaged in online courses. Because student engagement is associated with more success in college (i.e., learner empowerment, more motivation, and higher perceptions of affective learning; Mazer, 2013) it is important to determine specific behaviors instructors can use in the online environment to encourage students to stay engaged in the course. Collaço's (2017) study revealed that students felt more engaged in their class when their instructor encouraged involvement in the course, motivated and challenged them, in addition to creating a safe learning atmosphere. To further explore predictor variables of student engagement, the following hypothesis is posed:

H8: Participants in the high verbal immediacy, high professionalism, and high clarity condition will report the most engagement.

It is also likely that these instructor characteristics will work together to predict rapport, credibility, and engagement; the following hypothesis is posed:

H9: Perceptions of verbal immediacy behaviors, instructor professionalism, and clarity

will predict (a) rapport, (b) credibility, and (c) engagement.

Method

Participants

Participants were 136 undergraduate college students (97 women) recruited from universities and an online discussion platform (i.e., Reddit.com). Participants were eligible if they were (a) at least 18 years of age or older, (b) an undergraduate college student, and (c) in the U.S. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 62 years of age (M = 25.05 , SD = 9.93) and on average completed 5.11 online courses prior to the online transition during Spring 2020. Participants in this study were mostly freshman (42), followed by sophomores (39), seniors (33), and juniors (12). Six participants reported "other" and four did not indicate their grade level.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, a Qualtrics survey was reposted once a week for three months on Reddit.com and sent out to students through multiple colleges. Participants were first asked to review a cover letter, indicate whether they consented to participate, and were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix C). After indicating consent, participants completed a survey that contained, in order: one of four experimental conditions, measures of the instructor's verbal immediacy, professionalism, and clarity, and measures of their own perceptions of rapport, perceptions of the instructor's credibility, and perceptions of their own engagement. Then, they completed measures of demographic information about themselves. Completed surveys remained anonymous and the data were reported in the aggregate.

Instrumentation

The *experimental conditions* were vignettes created to take the form of a "Welcome"

email to the class from their Interpersonal Communication instructor. In the email, the instructor included a picture of herself and a brief description of the course. The researcher manipulated immediacy and professionalism/clarity to create the following groups: (1) high immediacy and high professionalism/clarity, (2) high immediacy and low professionalism/clarity, (3) low immediacy and high professionalism/clarity, and (4) low immediacy and low professionalism/clarity (See Appendix D).

High verbal immediacy was operationalized by having the instructor refer to "our class," or "what we will do" in addition to expressing interest in getting to know students enrolled in the course and offering communication with students through email or Zoom outside of class time. Low verbal immediacy was operationalized by having the instructor use phrases such as "my class" and "what I am doing," did not express interest in student opinions, and did not offer open communication with students outside of class.

High professionalism was manipulated through both the language in the email and the photo of the instructor. Highly professional emails included a proper email introduction, introduced the instructor to the class, and signed the email with "best" and included the instructor's credentials and contact information. Highly professional photos included business attire, an appropriate background, and bright lighting. Low professional emails included informal greetings and closings (i.e., "hey class, TTYL") and miscommunication errors (i.e., "you in my class"). Low professional photos included causal dress, an informal setting (i.e., sitting on a couch), and dim lighting.

High clarity was operationalized by including clear structure in the email (i.e., having an introduction, body, and conclusion), by clearly stating when the course meetings would be held, and by providing expectations for the course. Low clarity emails went off topic frequently, did

not have a clear outline structure, incorporated irrelevant information, and did not specify course meeting times.

Following their exposure to one of the four conditions, participants completed measures on the manipulation variables (i.e., verbal immediacy behaviors, professionalism, and clarity), in addition to student outcomes (i.e., rapport, perceptions of instructor credibility, and engagement; see Appendix E).

Verbal immediacy behaviors were measured using Gorham's (1988) Verbal Scale. The 19-item measure includes items such as "would ask questions or encourage students to talk" and "would refer to class as "our" class or what "we" are doing. Participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*extremely unlikely*) to 7 (*extremely likely*). Items were changed to reflect the mode of communication. Item 6, "addresses me by name" and item 20, "is addressed by his/her first name by the students", were removed to represent verbal immediacy in combination with professionalism. Previous Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .77 and .94 for verbal immediacy were found for this measure (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham, 1988). A Cronbach's alpha of .90 was obtained in this study.

Professionalism was measured using a scale created for this study to capture important characteristics of instructors and desired qualities from the student perspective (Korte, Lavin, & Davies, 2013; Workman & Freeburg, 2010). This 5-item measure includes items such as "this instructor's attire is professional," "this instructor displays effective written communication skills," and "this instructor is well-prepared with course material." Participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A Cronbach's alpha of .96 was obtained for this study. The items used for this measure are available in Appendix F.

Clarity was measured using the coherence and structure subscales from Bolkan's (2017) Clarity Indicators Scale. Sample items include "there is a lot of unnecessary information in this email" to measure coherence, and "this teacher would make class material easier to learn by teaching us one step at a time" to measure structure. Items were changed to reflect the mode of communication. Participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Prior Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .90 for coherence and .89 for structure have been obtained (Bolkan, 2017). Cronbach's alpha for this study was .95 for coherence and .95 for structure. Following Bolkan (2017), structure and coherence were combined to create a single measure of clarity; the reliability was .96.

Rapport was measured using Frisby and Myers' (2008) measure of rapport, modified from Gremler and Gwinner's (2000) scale. The 11-item scale measures students' perceptions of their instructor. Sample items include "I could be comfortable interacting with this instructor" and "in thinking about this instructor, I could have a harmonious relationship with them." Instrument items were changed to reflect the mode of communication. Participants rated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Prior Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .94 and .91 have been obtained for the measure (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Myers, 2008). Cronbach's alpha for this study was .97.

Instructor credibility was measured using McCroskey and Teven's (1999) 18-item measure. Sample items on a 7-point semantic differential scale include "Informed – Uninformed" to measure competence, "Insensitive – Sensitive" to measure goodwill, and "Honorable – Dishonorable" to measure trustworthiness. Prior Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .85 and .90 for competence, .92 and .97 for goodwill, and .92 and .92 for trustworthiness have been found for these subscales (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Teven &

Hanson, 2004). A Cronbach's alpha of .96 was obtained for competence, .94 for goodwill, and .92 for trustworthiness in this study. Following McCroskey and Teven (1999), these subscales were summed to create a single measure of credibility; the reliability was .97.

Engagement was measured using a single item created for this thesis (i.e., "after reading this welcome email and seeing this instructor, how likely *do you think you would be* to stay engaged in this class?") to examine participant's likelihood to be engaged in a class with the instructor provided in their condition group.

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to running the main analyses, manipulation checks were conducted to determine whether these instructional factors (i.e., verbal immediacy, professionalism, clarity) were successfully manipulated. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test differences between manipulation groups. A MANOVA was appropriate due to the testing of multiple groups and multiple dependent variables that were all correlated.

The results of a MANOVA revealed significant differences between groups ($F(9, 292.20) = 15.30$, $p < .001$, Wilks' $\lambda = .39$). Follow-up ANOVAs indicated that students differed in their perceptions of professionalism ($F(3, 122) = 25.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.39$) and clarity ($F(3, 122) = 40.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .50$). A follow-up ANOVA indicated that students differed in their perceptions of immediacy ($F(3, 122) = 7.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$) in the high verbal immediacy, high professionalism, and high clarity condition compared to the low verbal immediacy, low professionalism, and low clarity condition; however, no significant differences arose between the high verbal immediacy, low professionalism, and low clarity condition compared to the low verbal immediacy, high professionalism, and high clarity condition. Means and standard deviations for each category are present in Table 3.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Manipulation Variables Across Conditions

	Condition 1		Condition 2		Condition 3		Condition 4	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Verbal Immediacy	5.35_{ab}	.75	5.06_{c}	1.00	4.39_{a}	1.23	4.29_{bc}	1.11
Professionalism	6.16_{ab}	.79	4.01_{ac}	1.86	5.52_{cd}	1.72	3.06_{bd}	1.72
Clarity	5.74_{ab}	.80	3.31_{ac}	1.74	5.86_{cd}	1.06	2.86_{bd}	1.50

Note. Means sharing subscripts differ at $p < .05$

Based on the results of the preliminary analyses, participants were clearly able to distinguish between high and low professionalism and high and low clarity across conditions; however, there were no differences in immediacy between the high immediacy/low professionalism/clarity condition and the low immediacy/high professionalism/clarity condition. Because of this, the decision was made to remove immediacy as a variable when testing for group differences and to collapse conditions to create one high professionalism/high clarity condition and one low professionalism/low clarity condition. The hypotheses were tested using these two groups.

Main Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables can be found in Table 4.

Research question one asked which condition would lead participants to perceive the most rapport. Results of an independent samples *t*-test revealed a significant difference between the two condition groups ($t(130) = 2.38$, $p < .05$). An examination of the means indicated that participants in the high professionalism and high clarity condition ($m = 4.78$, $sd = 1.46$) perceived more rapport than participants in the low professionalism and low clarity condition ($m = 4.13$, $sd = 1.65$).

Hypothesis seven predicted that perceptions of instructor credibility would be highest in the high professionalism and high clarity condition. Results of an independent samples *t*-test supported this hypothesis ($t(133.27) = 5.26$, $p < .001$). An examination of the means indicated that participants in the high professionalism and high clarity condition ($m = 5.67$, $sd = 1.07$) perceived more instructor credibility than participants in the low professionalism and low clarity condition ($m = 4.50$, $sd = 1.52$).

Hypothesis eight predicted that engagement would be highest in the high professionalism

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Two

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Engagement	4.72	2.04	—				
2. Verbal Immediacy	4.77	1.11	.63**	—			
3. Professionalism	4.55	2.00	.80**	.58**	—		
4. Rapport	4.41	1.60	.78**	.82**	.69**	—	
5. Clarity	4.27	1.92	.74**	.40**	.90**	.56**	—
6. Credibility	5.00	1.46	.81**	.71**	.85**	.82**	.75**

** $p < .01$

and high clarity condition. Results of an independent samples *t*-test supported this hypothesis ($t(133.97) = 5.08$, $p < .001$). An examination of the means indicated that participants in the high professionalism and high clarity condition ($m = 5.63$, $sd = 1.61$) felt that they would be more engaged than participants in the low professionalism and low clarity condition ($m = 4.03$, $sd = 2.07$).

Hypothesis 9 was tested using OLS regression (see Table 5 for unstandardized beta coefficients, standard error, and significance values). Hypothesis 9a predicted that instructors' use of verbal immediacy, professionalism, and clarity would predict rapport. The overall model was significant ($F(3, 118) = 122.17$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .76$). Verbal immediacy ($B = .89$, $p < .001$) and professionalism ($B = .20$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors of rapport. Clarity ($p = .29$) was not a significant predictor of rapport. Students who perceived an instructor as using prosocial verbal communication and demonstrating professional qualities were more likely to report a higher potential for rapport with the instructor.

Hypothesis 9b predicted that verbal immediacy, professionalism, along with clarity, would predict instructor credibility. The overall model was significant ($F(3, 122) = 159.44$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .80$). Verbal immediacy ($B = .45$, $p < .001$) and professionalism ($B = .38$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of instructor credibility. Clarity ($p = .12$) was not a significant predictor of instructor credibility. Students who perceived an instructor as professional and one that used verbal communication that enhanced immediacy were more likely to report a higher perception of credibility about that instructor.

Hypothesis 9c predicted that instructor verbal immediacy, professionalism, along with clarity, would predict student engagement. The overall model was significant ($F(3, 122) = 90.00$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .69$). Verbal immediacy ($B = .56$, $p < .001$), professionalism ($B = .35$, $p <$

Table 5

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Rapport, Instructor Credibility, and Student Engagement

	Rapport			Credibility			Engagement		
	B	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
Verbal Immediacy	.89**	.08	10.61	.45**	.07	6.56	.56**	.12	4.65
Professionalism	.20*	.09	2.15	.38**	.08	4.84	.35*	.14	2.62
Clarity	.09	.09	1.06	.11	.07	1.56	.33*	.13	2.59

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

.05), and clarity ($B = .33$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors of student engagement. Students who perceived an instructor as demonstrating professional qualities, using verbal immediacy behaviors, and displaying clarity with course instruction were more likely to be engaged in the class.

General Discussion

This thesis examined the role of instructors in the college classroom environment and how their behaviors can influence certain positive student outcomes. Specifically, Study One tested the relationships between instructor behaviors (i.e., verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors, rapport) and student responses to those behaviors (i.e., student-instructor communication apprehension, instructor credibility, instructional dissent). Advancing scholars' understanding about the instructor-student relationship in this way can be informative for how instructors can potentially encourage certain responses and attitudes in their students. Study One provides three contributions for the instructional communication discipline as well as tangible suggestions for professors.

First, specific instructor behaviors have implications for students' anxiety in communicating with their instructor. Instructors who use verbal immediacy behaviors -- engage students in a personable way such as addressing students by name, providing feedback and comments on assignments, and asking students to share their personal viewpoints and opinions -- reflect positive classroom outcomes (Christensen & Menzel, 1988; Christophel, 2009; Goodboy & Myers, 2009; Gorham, 1988). Additionally, instructors who use nonverbal immediacy behaviors that show interest in the class by making eye contact, smiling at the class as a whole, and seeming relaxed, also influence positive outcomes for students (Christensen & Menzel, 1988; Christophel, 2009; Gorham, 1988). The results of this study indicated that the effect of

immediacy behaviors may extend beyond student outcomes and influence student behavior by reducing communication apprehension with the instructor. This may be because when instructors use verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors in their class, their students in return feel less face-threatened and more comfortable interacting with their professor, which then may allow students to have less fear when communicating with their professor about the course. This finding has major implications on students in college due to the necessity for students to interact with and ask questions of their instructors in order to learn. Higher levels of instructor-student CA hinder students' ability to fully thrive in the course, making the use of immediacy behaviors important for instructors who are interested in maximizing student success (Jordan & Powers, 2007; Martin, Valencic, & Heisel, 2002). According to these results, instructors may carry some weight in terms of influencing students' level of communication apprehension specifically when conversing with their instructor.

Interestingly, however, the establishment of instructor-student rapport did not decrease student's communication apprehension with their instructors. This may be because, unlike immediacy behaviors -- which are specific behaviors that may be indicative of communication with the instructor -- rapport is reflective of the environment instructors create as a whole (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Myers, 2008). In addition, participants reported on face-to-face courses and it is probable that a main portion of their communication with their instructor would have been in a face-to-face scenario, in which the student may have relied more on physical stimuli gathered nonverbally and verbally during that interaction which impacted their CA, whereas their perceptions of the classroom atmosphere as a whole may have not had such a meaningful effect in that given communication situation. Thus, future research could explore what students specifically view about their instructors that cause a decline in their CA when

communicating with them.

Second, although rapport did not influence students' reported apprehension to communicate with their instructors, it did impact the way that students perceived the instructor's credibility. Specifically, this study found that increased rapport prompted students to view their instructor as more credible in their competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness. This may be because instructors who establish a warm classroom climate reflect aspects of care, concern, honesty, and, interestingly, intelligence. Instructors who wish to be viewed as credible with their students and receive high instructor/course evaluations may want to build strong rapport between themselves and their students. This finding builds upon other studies in identifying the positive effects rapport has in this given environment; rapport allows for positive instructor image construction (according to this thesis), positive student outcomes (e.g., cognitive, affective learning; Frisby, et al., 2014; Frisby & Martin, 2010), and positive classmate relationships (Frisby & Martin, 2010), which are three major factors during a classroom meeting. Thus, Study One further supports the importance rapport plays in creating a desirable, prosocial learning environment, in addition to prompting the need to further explore this concept within academia.

Third, Study One found further evidence of the importance of instructor-student rapport in that it can mitigate negative communication from students about their instructor or class. Students who felt a close, harmonious relationship with their instructor were less likely to engage in expressive dissent through complaints, criticism, and aggravated comments about their instructor and/or course with their friends or inner circle. Likewise, in environments of high rapport, students also expressed a lower likelihood to engage in vengeful dissent -- seeking revenge or attempting to ruin their instructor's reputation. Interestingly, rapport was significant in predicting dissent where immediacy was not; these results seem to suggest that immediacy and

rapport serve different functions -- while immediacy behaviors may decrease students' fear of communicating *with* the instructor, it is rapport that decreases the likelihood of students' venting or retaliating *about* the instructor to others.

This may indicate that just because instructors use certain behaviors does not inherently mean that students will perceive them as creating a warm environment as rapport does; students may observe their instructor engaging in certain behaviors, but the overall impact of the classroom environment influenced their perception of the instructor in a different way. This may also be because when students have positive "bonds", feelings of "warmth", and enjoy interacting with their instructor, they may just be less likely to have negative comments about their instructor and would not have a reason to express that type of discourse to others including their friends, family, and academic supervisors at the university. Through establishing rapport, instructors may be able to not only maintain and manage how students view them, but also how students communicate about them outside of the classroom setting. Further research can probe the differential effects of immediacy and rapport to learn why these instructor behaviors influence different aspects of students' behaviors.

Rhetorical dissent did not emerge as significantly related to any of the variables in Study One. Goodboy (2011b) suggested that rhetorical dissent may function differently compared to the other two forms of dissent, as rhetorical dissent is the only form of dissent that involves communicating directly with the instructor about a concern with the course (Goodboy, 2011b). Rhetorical dissent is more constructive in nature and could have the possibility of having either positive or negative outcomes depending on the given situation at hand; thus, further research is required to examine how students view and enact rhetorical dissent and the implications it has on instructional communication scholarship.

Study Two built on the results of Study One and probed further into the instructor-student relationship by extending this thesis into the online context and conducting an experiment to determine how instructors can generate the immediacy behaviors and rapport that emerged as important. Specifically, Study Two examined how instructors can intentionally manipulate and control their image and how those impression management attempts can lead to student perceptions of rapport, instructor credibility, and engagement. Of additional interest were the predicting relationships between instructor behaviors (i.e., verbal immediacy, professionalism, and clarity) and positive outcomes (i.e., rapport, instructor credibility, engagement). Two major findings emerged, which add understanding of how an instructor manages their impression and self-presentation in a computer-mediated course.

First, Study Two discovered that when instructors present themselves as demonstrating strong professional and clear traits, students have a stronger feeling of rapport, assign higher credibility to the instructor, and feel more likely to be engaged in the course. By manipulating specific characteristics of an instructor, results from RQ1, H7, and H8 indicated which type of instructor would maximize student's likelihood to experience these specific positive outcomes in online learning. When compared to an instructor who displayed low qualities of professionalism (e.g., causal clothing, sentence structure errors; Hammer, 2000) and poor clarity (e.g., went off topic, unorganized; Bolkan, 2017), the instructor who displayed more professionalism and more clarity in their photo and email impacted students to be more likely to feel a sense of rapport in class with that instructor, to perceive that instructor as being more credible, and to experience a higher likelihood to be engaged in that instructor's course. In other words, the instructor who dressed professionally, presented themselves in such a way that is consistent with what most students expect instructors to look like (e.g., business causal, nice background while conducting

a zoom meeting with the class) and purposefully displayed other qualities that are considered professional (i.e., proper written communication skills, well-prepared) impacted perceptions of these positive effects. In combination with professionalism were higher clarity characteristics of the instructor in this manipulation group. Staying on topic and being well-organized in the email also contributed to positive student perceptions. By managing the impression of the instructor to possess high professional and high clarity features -- compared to low professional and low clarity -- this study was able to determine which characteristics of instructors can result in the most positive implications for both students and instructors.

To apply this vignette study into a practical realm, when an instructor embodies professional and credible attributes, students may be more likely to assign those qualities back to the instructor's persona (i.e., instructor credibility), set a positive and productive tone for the class by establishing a sense of rapport, and leading students to stay engaged throughout the course. This may be because when instructors come across as professional and clear, students in return feel more comfortable and confident in the atmosphere the instructor will construct. Additionally, students may be more likely to take the instructor and course seriously -- leading to more successful and productive online learning. This has the ability to impact students to complete their course and degree when they feel like the classroom environment is harmonious, they have a knowledgeable professor, and feel more engaged in the course materials and assignments (Johnson, 2006). Conversely, participants in the low clarity/professionalism group reported feeling less confident in the instructor's ability to create a positive classroom climate, felt like the instructor was less credible, and believed they would be less engaged in that instructor's course. This demonstrates how instructor behavior has the potential to persuade and encourage efficacious implications for students in their class, in addition to the possibility to set

unprofitable standards in online college learning. Based on these results, instructors play a vital role in influencing students' perceptions of the course before it even begins, which may position students for greater success in the course.

Interestingly, an additional finding emerged while conducting manipulation checks with the original four condition groups. Participants were able to discern high and low verbal immediacy behaviors in the instructor's email when it corresponded with the same level of professionalism and clarity (i.e., participants recognized high verbal immediacy alongside high professionalism and high clarity and the same in the low condition). However, students seemed to become confused when viewing an instructor that displayed clarity and professionalism but did not display immediate building behavior and vice-versa (i.e., viewing an instructor that did not display clarity and professional characteristics, but did display verbal immediacy). This may suggest that students are not quite sure how to distinguish between professionalism/clarity and verbal immediacy in the online context. When instructors are professional and clear online, students may be more likely to perceive that as being immediate or expect that kind of instructor to use verbal immediacy due to potential expectancy violations of the perceived social norms. When the instructor was professional and clear, but not immediate, participants were not quite sure how to interpret it, potentially because it may have gone against their expectations for the norm of the instructor based on the other observable qualities she displayed. Additional research is required to determine how students perceive instructor verbal immediacy in the online context and how it corresponds with other instructor variables.

Second, the design of Study Two allowed predictions to be made between certain instructor behaviors and specific outcomes. The overall model of verbal immediacy behaviors, instructor professionalism, and instructor clarity worked together to significantly predict rapport,

instructor credibility, and engagement. Within all three regression models, verbal immediacy and professionalism emerged as the two largest predictor variables, verbal immediacy being the first. Verbal immediacy emerged as predicting the most variance on all three outcome variables (i.e., rapport, instructor credibility, engagement), suggesting that when instructors manage their verbal communication with their students to be positive and affirming in the instructor-student relationship, by communicating inclusivity, and by verbally expressing interest in students' opinions and contribution to the course, students were far more positive in their perception of the online learning experience. When students observed an instructor making effort to portray behaviors that enhanced closeness through an email, students then had better perceptions of the classroom experience and viewed the instructor in a more positive light, despite not yet having begun the class.

Professionalism also emerged as a significant predictor of higher perceptions of rapport in the class, higher perceptions of instructor credibility, and higher likelihood to be engaged in the class, in addition to the presence of verbal immediacy. This suggests that it is not only the way in which instructors communicate with students verbally, but it is also the quality of the presence of an instructor who is appropriately dressed, observability prepared, and seems well-versed in the subject of the course that predicts these positive outcomes. Based on the results of the instructor professionalism scale, students are not only recognizing the degree of professionalism an instructor appears to be showing online, but students are also making assessments of their instructor based on these observations. When students do not have face-to-face interactions, as they would with in-person courses, they rely more heavily on characteristics of the instructor that are more obvious to make assessments in a computer-mediated platform where communication is less frequent and often briefer.

In addition to verbal immediacy and professionalism, instructor clarity predicted student's expected engagement in a course. This means that in determining whether a student would be intentionally involved in a class or decide to check out and be less devoted was dependent upon all three of these instructor behaviors (i.e., verbal immediacy, professionalism, and clarity). Interestingly, clarity did not emerge as a significant predictor for rapport nor instructor credibility. Students seem to recognize a clear instructor -- as indicated by preliminary analyses -- but those qualities displayed in a welcome email seem to have less of an effect on student's initial perception of how close their relationship with the instructor will be and how competent, caring, and trustworthy the instructor is. This may be because students need more stimuli from instructor's (e.g., their personalities, how they come across verbally and nonverbally) to make decisions of how the instructor is going to treat students in the classroom and if the instructor is authentically credible, compared to basing those perceptions on the amount of structure and coherence the instructor uses in an introductory email. Clarity is rooted more in knowledge and the ability to communicate that with students (Bolkan, 2017); whereas, rapport and two of the three subscales of instructor credibility (i.e., goodwill, trustworthiness) are more relational based (Frisby & Myers, 2008; McCroskey & Teven, 1999), suggesting that clarity would have less of an effect on increasing the relational quality between students and instructors initially and would have more of an impact on other student outcomes, like grades or test scores (Bolkan et al., 2017). In light of this, clear instruction is likely to play a more vital role in the college environment later on in the semester during lectures and while discussing assignment details, rather than during the first email to the class. Overall, results from Study Two revealed specific behaviors instructors can use in their impression management attempt to help impact and predict positive outcomes for their online students.

Recommendations

In combination, Study One and Study Two draw attention to the meaningfulness of instructor behavior in the college environment, particularly in terms of how certain behaviors impact students. No instructor behavior examined in this thesis emerged as being *not* significantly associated to a positive student or instructor result, meaning that instructors cannot go wrong when implementing appropriate prosocial behavior in their courses, both face-to-face and online. However, this thesis did reveal how certain instructor behaviors elicit *different* responses and implications. From Study One, if an instructor aimed to decrease students' likelihood to be afraid while communicating with them (e.g., fear asking questions) instructors may want to increase their use of verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors. However, if instructors want to decrease their students' likelihood to enact expressive and vengeful dissent (e.g., reduce negative communication about them as an instructor), and increase perceptions of instructor credibility, instructors should consider creating an enjoyable classroom climate that establishes a feeling of "warmth" in the class. From Study Two, if an instructor wants their students to have those harmonious perceptions of rapport in their online class, to perceive them as a credible instructor, and have their students more engaged, the instructor should consider displaying qualities that communicate professionalism (e.g., coming to virtual class well-dressed and organized) and clarity (e.g., clear structure and coherence) to the class, and should even be making these considerations prior to the start of the course. Alongside professionalism and clarity, an instructor should consider using verbal immediacy behaviors through online communication with students (e.g., emails) to predict increased feelings of rapport, higher perceptions of instructor credibility, and increased likelihood for engagement from students in the online class. All of these variables are intertwined and work together to construct the

classroom environment, but individually, they play a different role in how they impact students.

Conclusion

In closing, this thesis demonstrates the relationships between specific instructor behaviors (i.e., immediacy behaviors, instructor-student rapport, professionalism, clarity) and positive outcomes for students (i.e., lower student-instructor communication apprehension and more rapport, engagement) and instructors as well (i.e., lower expressive and vengeful dissent and higher instructor credibility). The implications of these results speak to the weight instructors have in setting the tone and direction for a course. Instructors have the ability to manipulate their behaviors and manage the impression they have on students, especially in the online context, to set a positive trajectory for the students in the class.

Study One adds to the understanding of how instructors may mitigate potentially negative characteristics of the learning environment and maximize positive student perceptions through implementing prosocial behavior in the face-to-face classroom. Study Two demonstrated the importance of utilizing those positive behaviors in making a meaningful first impression with students to augment student success in online courses. Results suggest that if instructors wish to set a positive tone in the course, they must display instructor professionalism and clarity immediately during their first email to the class, in addition to the first time they see their students visually. Even though instructors have more freedom over their impression management online, they do lack some nonverbal cues that would be present face-to-face, adding to the importance of making the first interaction count in ways that will impact students positively. Because of this, strategic online instructor behaviors become more important as instructors work towards being more intentional and conscientious with how they come across to their students in a mediated context. Additionally, this thesis utilized a new instructor

professionalism scale created specifically for this study. This scale emerged as reliable, professionalism was a distinguishable characteristic by participants, and was a significant predictor in the regression models from Study Two. Future research is recommended to further explore professionalism in the academic context and to identify more implications of a professional instructor.

This thesis sought to continue the exploration of rapport, and the results support rapport as an emerging vital classroom concept, following Frisby and Martin's (2010) direction. Future studies should further explore this concept qualitatively to gain more insight to how rapport is built in the instructional climate (Frisby & Martin, 2010). This thesis also conducted an experiment to explore which instructional factors lead to specific beneficial outcomes in students, following Bolkan et al.'s (2017) study. Future research should manipulate different instructor behaviors in the online context to determine more advantageous student outcomes that have not been explored in extensive detail. Taken together, these findings support the notion that an instructor's behavior directs the quality of the instructor-student relationship, the classroom learning environment, and the type of experience a student has in college. Overall, this thesis adds to the literature in instructional communication more insight into the power instructors hold in impacting student perspectives.

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Appendix A

Study One Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: Student's perception of self and instructor in college classrooms
Principal Investigator: Emily Napier
Principal Investigator's Contact Information: (email) napiere@etsu.edu
Faculty Advisor Contact Information: (office) 423-439-8108 (email) anzurc@etsu.edu
Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

INFORMED CONSENT

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to voluntarily participate.
Purpose: This research study is about learning how students feel about their instructors. We also want to learn about how this influences the college student. This will give us a better understanding of instructor-student relationships.
Duration: One survey lasting approximately 25 minutes.
Procedures: You are asked to fill out a survey. During the survey you will be asked questions about an instructor from one of your classes. Questions will discuss how you view your professor and your opinion of yourself as a student. Your responses will be used for research. Your name will not be used.
Possible Risks/Discomforts: Participation in this study is not known to cause distress.
Possible Benefits to Participant: You may not receive a benefit.
Possible Benefits to Society: Everyone will benefit by learning more about teaching in college.
Financial Costs: No cost.
Compensation in the Form of Payments to Participant: You will not be paid for taking part in this study.
Voluntary Participation: Taking part in this research is voluntary. ***You can choose to not take part in it.*** You can pass on any question. You can pause or discontinue the survey at any time. You can also remove yourself from the research.

Title of Research Study: Student's perception of self and instructor in college classrooms
Principal Investigator: Emily Napier
Contact for Questions:
Primary:
Emily Napier (napiere@etsu.edu)
Dr. Christine Anzur (423-439-8108)
Secondary:
IRB Coordinators (423-439-6055) or (423-439-6002)
Questions about your rights:
Chairperson of the ETSU Institutional Review Board (423-439-6054)
Confidentiality: We will try our best to keep your information secret. Your name will not be included in the research. After this research is finished, ETSU is required to keep a copy of everything for at least 6 years. Your information will not be used for any future studies. The

results may be published and/or presented at meetings, but your name will not be used. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, myself, my research team, and the ETSU IRB have access to the study records.

By agreeing to participate, I confirm that I have read and understand this Informed Consent Document and that I had the opportunity to have it explained to read this informed consent statement. I attest that I am an adult, above the age of 18, and a college student. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that all my questions have been answered. By clicking "I consent," I confirm that I voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

Appendix B

Study One Survey Instrument

First, we would like you to think about the instructor who you had most recently for an in-person class. Please keep this instructor in mind as you complete the survey. Enter this instructor's initials in the box below ___.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following items concerning your instructor. Strongly agree, 7; Agree, 6; Somewhat agree, 5; Neither agree nor disagree, 4; Somewhat disagree, 3; Disagree, 2; Strongly disagree, 1.

___ In thinking about this instructor, I would enjoy interacting with them.

___ This instructor would create a feeling of "warmth" in our relationship.

___ This instructor relates well to me.

___ In thinking about this instructor, I could have a harmonious relationship with this instructor.

___ This instructor has a good sense of humor.

___ I would be comfortable interacting with this instructor.

___ I feel like there could be a "bond" between this instructor and myself.

___ I would look forward to seeing this instructor in class.

___ I could strongly care about this instructor.

___ This instructor seems to have taken personal interest in me.

___ I could have a close relationship with this instructor.

___ I become nervous when talking with my instructors about my schedule.

___ I find that I am very reluctant to seek out counseling from my instructors.

___ I am comfortable in developing in-depth conversations with my instructors.

___ I am hesitant to develop a deep conversation with my instructors.

___ I am hesitant to develop a casual conversation with my instructors.

___ I feel I am an open communicator with my instructors.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning your instructor. Very Often, 5; Often, 4; Occasionally, 3; Rarely, 2; Never, 1.

___ Use personal examples or talk about experiences she has had outside of class.

___ Ask questions or encourage students to talk.

___ Get into discussions based on something a student brings up even when it didn't seem to be part of her lecture plan.

___ Use humor in class.

___ Address students by name.

___ Get into conversations with individual students before or after Zoom.

___ Initiate conversations with me before, after or outside of Zoom.

___ Refer to class as "my" class or what "I" am doing.

___ Refer to class as "our" class or what "we" are doing.

___ Provide feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, oral discussions, etc.

___ Call on students to answer questions even if they have not indicated that they want to talk.

___ Ask how students feel about an assignment, due date or discussion topic.

___ Invite students to email or Zoom with her outside of class if they have questions or want to discuss something.

___ Ask questions that have specific, correct answers.

___ Ask questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions.

___ Praise students' work, actions or comments.

___ Criticize or points out faults in students' work, actions or comments.

___ Have discussions about things unrelated to class with individual students or with the class as a whole.

___ Sits behind desk while teaching.

___ Gestures while talking to class.

___ Uses monotone/dull voice when talking to class.

___ Looks at class while talking.

___ Smiles at the class as a whole, not just individual students.

___ Has a very tense body position while talking to the class.

___ Moves around the classroom while teaching.

___ Sits on a desk or chair while teaching.

___ Looks at the board or notes while talking to the class.

___ Stands behind podium or desk while teaching.

___ Has a very relaxed body position while talking to the class.

___ Smiles at individual students in the class.

___ Uses a variety of vocal expressions while talking to the class.

___ I complain to others to express my frustrations with this course.

___ I express my disappointment about this course to other people because it helps me feel better.

___ I talk to other students to see if they also have complaints about this teacher.

___ I complain about my teacher and course because it makes me feel better.

___ I attempt to feel better about my frustrations in this class by communicating with other people.

___ I talk to other students when I am annoyed with my teacher in hopes that I am not the only one.

___ I try to feel better about this course by explaining my aggravations to others.

___ I complain about my teacher to get my frustrations off of my chest.

___ I criticize my teacher's practices to other students because I hope they share my criticism.

___ I talk to other students so we can discuss the problems we have in class.

___ I tell my teacher when I disagree with him/her so I can do better in the course.

___ I voice my concerns to my teacher to make sure I get the best grade possible.

___ If want my teacher to remedy my concerns, I complain to him/her.

___ I voice my opinions to my teacher when there is a disagreement because I want to do better in the course.

___ I express my disagreements with my teacher because I want something to change in the course for the better.

___ I have no problem telling my teacher what I need him/her to do for me to succeed in the course.

___I hope to ruin my teacher's reputation by exposing his/her bad practices to others.

___ I talk to other teachers and let them know my current teacher is inferior.

___ I hope one day my teacher gets fired as a result of my criticism of him/her.

___ I spread negative publicity about my teacher so that everyone knows how bad he/she is.

___ I make sure that everyone knows how awful my teacher is to get revenge for the bad semester I had.

___ I seek revenge on my teacher by trying to get him/her in trouble.

Please rate your instructor by selecting the appropriate choice between the pair of adjectives below. The closer the choice is to an adjective, the more certain you are of your evaluation.

Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
Not Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Understanding
Phony	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Genuine
Bright	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Stupid
Inexpert	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Expert
Unethical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ethical
Self-centered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not self-centered
Untrustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Untrained	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trained
Moral	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Immoral
Cares about me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn't care about me
Informed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninformed
Honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonest
Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Competent
Concerned with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unconcerned with me
Honorable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonorable
Insensitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sensitive
Has my interest at heart	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn't have my interest at heart

---

Next, we would like to gather some information about you and your university.

___ What is your age?

What is your sex?

___ Male

___ Female

___ Other

What year in school are you?

___ Freshman

___ Sophomore

___ Junior

___ Senior

___ Other

Which of the following best describes the region in which *your university* is located?

___ West

___ Midwest

___ South

___ Northeast

___What subject does your instructor teach?

Appendix C

Study Two Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: Implications of Instructor Behaviors and Professionalism in Online Courses
Principal Investigator: Emily Napier
Principal Investigator's Contact Information: (email) napiere@etsu.edu
Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

INFORMED CONSENT

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to voluntarily participate. If you are interested in volunteering for this research study, please read the rest of this document.
What is this study about? This research study is about learning how students feel about their instructors in online classes. We also want to learn about how different perspectives influence college students. This will give us a better understanding of the instructor-student relationship in an online context. Additional information concerning the purpose of this study is not being disclosed.
How much of my time will it take? One survey lasts approximately 15 minutes.
What are you asking me to do? You are asked to fill out a survey. During the survey you will read an email from an instructor, you will also see an image of this instructor, and then you will be asked questions about how you feel about this instructor if you were to have them in class. Your responses will be used for research. Your name will not be used. Alternative information is chosen to not be provided.
Are there any benefits for me? There is no direct benefit.
Are there any possible risks or discomforts? There are no foreseeable risks.
Will I be identified? How are you keeping my information safe? Your name will not be collected, and your responses will be used in combination with all other participant responses.
Will any of my data be used in the future? No, this will not be used in future studies.
Do I have to pay for anything? There is no cost to you if you decide to be in this study.
Will I be paid for participating? You will not be paid for joining this study.
Do I have to join this study? No, this study is voluntary.
Who should I contact for questions? If you have any questions or research-related problems at any time, you may email Emily Napier, Principal Investigator, at napiere@etsu.edu. This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may also contact the ETSU IRB at 423.439.6054 or irb@estu.edu for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant.

By clicking 'I consent', I confirm that I have read and understand this Informed Consent Document. I attest that I am an adult, above the age of 18, and an undergraduate college student. By clicking 'I consent', I confirm that I voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

Appendix D

Experimental Conditions

Condition 1: High Professionalism, High Clarity, High Verbal Immediacy

Good morning, and welcome to COMM 2090 -- Interpersonal Communication!

My name is Dr. Smith and I'll be your instructor this semester. Our course is focused on exploring interactions between people and is meant to be an introduction to the types of experiences that occur within relationships.

Our class is a **synchronous, online class**, meaning we will "meet," via Zoom each week. Our meetings will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:45 - 2:05 pm.

Our first meeting will be **August 24th at 12:45 pm**, and we will go over the syllabus and course objectives. Our class website has all materials uploaded for you in separate sections for each week of the semester.

I look forward to interacting with you in our class. Please feel free to contribute your personal experiences and comments related to our discussions. If you have questions or want to discuss something outside of class, please email me and I am available to you over Zoom individually as well.

I'm looking forward to getting to know you all and working with you this semester! We might hit some speedbumps, but we'll get through it together!

Best,

Dr. Smith

Olivia A. Smith, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Communication
Western University
202.555.0141

Condition 2: Low Professionalism, Low Clarity, High Verbal Immediacy

Good morning and welcome to class!

My name is Dr. Smith and I'll be your instructor. Our course is focused on many different things. Personally, I enjoy going on trips and being outdoors. I also have three dogs. My favorite part about this class is exploring different types of behaviors.

Our class is online, meaning we will "meet," via Zoom each week. We may not meet for the entirety and some weeks we will not meet together at all. I just bought a new desk and am excited to give it a try. Our first meeting will be August 24th, and we will see how it goes. Our class website does not have materials uploaded yet, but I'll add items throughout the semester.

I look forward to interacting with you in our class. Please feel free to contribute your personal experiences and comments. If you have questions or want to discuss something outside of class, please email me.

I'm looking forward to getting to know you all this semester! We might hit some speedbumps, but we'll get through it together!

TTYL,

Dr. Smith

Condition 3: High Professionalism, High Clarity, Low Verbal Immediacy

Welcome to COMM 2090 -- Interpersonal Communication.

My name is Dr. Smith and I'll be your instructor this semester. This course is focused on exploring interactions between people and is meant to be an introduction to the types of experiences that occur within relationships.

This class is a **synchronous, online class**, meaning I will "meet," via Zoom with you each week. My meetings with you will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:45 - 2:05 pm.

My first meeting will be **August 24th at 12:45 pm**, and I will go over the syllabus and course objectives. **This meeting is not optional.** You will find all materials uploaded in separate sections for each week of the semester on my website. I will also put a link to my Zoom session on my course page.

I look forward to class this semester.

Best,

Dr. Smith

Olivia A. Smith, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Communication
Western University
202.555.0141

Condition 4: Low Professionalism, Low Clarity, Low Verbal Immediacy

Hey class,

My name is Dr. Smith and you in my class this semester. This course is focused on many different things.

This class is online, and I will "meet," with you via Zoom each week. I may not meet with you for the entirety and some weeks I will not meet with you at all. A random fact for you before the class starts is that a language dies approx. every two weeks and the national animal of Scotland is a unicorn.

My first meeting with you will be August 24th and I'll see how it goes. The class website does not have materials uploaded yet, but I'll add items throughout the semester.

TTYL,

Dr. Smith

Appendix E

Study Two Survey Instrument

Think about the communication you received from your "instructor," and continue to imagine that you will have this instructor for the rest of the semester.

Please indicate the degree to which the statement below represents what you believe will be true of the instructor throughout the semester. The closer a number is to an adjective, the more certain you are of this belief.

Competence Factor

Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
Untrained	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trained
Inexpert	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Expert
Informed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninformed
Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Competent
Bright	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Stupid
Cares about me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn’t care about me
Has my interest at heart	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn’t have my interest at heart
Self-centered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not self-centered
Concerned with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unconcerned with me
Insensitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sensitive
Not Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Understanding
Honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonest
Untrustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Honorable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonorable
Moral	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Immoral

Unethical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ethical
Phony	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Genuine

Think about the communication you received from your "instructor," and continue to imagine that you will have this instructor for the rest of the semester.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following items concerning that instructor. How likely do you think this instructor would be to engage in the following items? Extremely likely, 7; Moderately likely, 6; Slightly likely, 5; Neither likely nor unlikely, 4; Slightly unlikely, 3; Moderately unlikely, 2; Extremely unlikely 1.

___ Get into discussions based on something a student brings up even when it didn't seem to be part of her lecture plan.

___ Use humor in class.

___ Get into conversations with individual students before or after Zoom.

___ Initiate conversations with me before, after or outside of Zoom.

___ Use personal examples or talk about experiences she has had outside of class.

___ Refer to class as "my" class or what "I" am doing.

___ Provide feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, oral discussions, etc.

___ Call on students to answer questions even if they have not indicated that they want to talk.

___ Ask questions or encourage students to talk.

___ Address students by name.

___ Invite students to email or Zoom with her outside of class if they have questions or want to discuss something.

___ Ask questions that have specific, correct answers.

___ Ask questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions.

___ Praise students' work, actions or comments.

___ Ask how students feel about an assignment, due date or discussion topic.

___ Refer to class as "our" class or what "we" are doing.

___ Criticize or points out faults in students' work, actions or comments.

___ Have discussions about things unrelated to class with individual students or with the class as a whole.

Continue thinking about the communication you received from this instructor.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following items concerning this instructor. Strongly agree, 7; Agree, 6; Somewhat agree, 5; Neither agree nor disagree, 4; Somewhat disagree, 3; Disagree, 2; Strongly disagree, 1.

___ This instructor's attire is professional/This instructor dresses professionally.

___ This instructor displays effective written communication skills.

___ This teacher goes off topic in this email.

___ This class email is organized into specific, manageable content blocks.

___ This instructor is well-organized.

___ This instructor makes class material easier to learn by teaching us one step at a time.

___ There is a lot of unnecessary information in this email.

___ In thinking about this instructor, I would enjoy interacting with them.

___ This instructor is well-prepared with course material.

___ This instructor would create a feeling of "warmth" in our relationship.

___ In this email, I received information that is not essential to learning course concepts.

___ This instructor relates well to me.

___ In thinking about this instructor, I could have a harmonious relationship with this instructor.

___ It is easy to follow along with the structure of this teacher's email.

___ This instructor has a good sense of humor.

___ This teacher goes on unrelated tangents.

___ I would be comfortable interacting with this instructor.

___ I feel like there could be a "bond" between this instructor and myself.

___ I would look forward to seeing this instructor in class.

___ This teacher's email is well organized.

___ I could strongly care about this instructor.

___ This instructor seems to have taken personal interest in me.

___ This instructor is focused on the success of the course.

___ I could have a close relationship with this instructor.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement about this instructor.

After reading this welcome email and seeing this instructor, how likely *do you think you would be* to stay engaged in this class?

___ Extremely likely

___ Moderately likely

___ Slightly likely

___ Neither likely nor unlikely

___ Slightly unlikely

___ Moderately unlikely

___ Extremely unlikely

___ What is your age?

What is your sex?

___ Male

___ Female

___ Other

What year in school are you?

___ Freshman

___ Sophomore

___ Junior

___ Senior

___ Other

___ How many online courses have you completed (excluding ones that were transitioned online during Spring 2020)?

Appendix F

Professionalism Measure

Participants indicated their agreement with the following items using a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

1. This instructor's attire is professional.
2. This instructor displays effective written communication skills.
3. This instructor is well-organized.
4. This instructor is well-prepared with course material.
5. This instructor is focused on the success of the course.