Perceived Aggressive Instructor Communication and Student State Motivation, Learning, and Satisfaction.

Myers, Scott A.

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This study examined the relationship between perceived instructor aggressiveness (i.e., argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness) and student outcomes (i.e., state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, satisfaction). Participants were 96 undergraduate students enrolled at a small midwestern university. Results indicate that students' reports of instructors who are perceived as both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness were positively correlated with their own reports of state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, and satisfaction. Future research should continue to explore the role that perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness plays in the college classroom. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

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Perceived Aggressive Instructor Communication and Student State Motivation, Learning, and Satisfaction

METHOD
RESULTS
DISCUSSION

TABLE 1 Canonical Correlation Analysis of Perceived Instructor Aggressive Communication and Student State Motivation, Learning and Satisfaction

REFERENCES
This study examined the relationship between perceived instructor aggressiveness (i.e., argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness) and student outcomes (i.e., state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, satisfaction). Participants were 96 undergraduate students enrolled at a small midwestern university. Results indicate that students' reports of instructors who are perceived as both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness were positively correlated with their own reports of state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, and satisfaction. Future research should continue to explore the role that perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness plays in the college classroom.

- Instructional communication researchers have recently focused their attention on studying the effects of perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in the college classroom. Originally conceptualized as two of four communication traits (the other two traits are assertiveness and hostility) that form the core of an individual's aggressive personality (Infante, 1987), argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness are the prominent forms through which aggressiveness has been operationalized and studied across communication contexts (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Argumentativeness is conceptualized as the predisposition to defend one's position on controversial issues while simultaneously attempting to refute another person's position (Infante & Rancer, 1982) and is considered to be a positive communication trait (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984). Verbal aggressiveness is defined as a message behavior that attacks a person's self-concept to deliver psychological pain (Infante & Wigley, 1986) and is considered to be a negative communication trait (Infante et al.).

In the college classroom, a series of studies conducted by Myers and his colleagues has found that perceived instructor argumentativeness is positively correlated with student state motivation (Myers & Knox, 2000a; Myers & Rocca, 2001), student affect toward both course content and instructor evaluation, and student satisfaction (Myers & Knox, 2000b). Conversely, perceived instructor verbal aggressiveness is negatively correlated with student state motivation (Myers & Knox, 2000a; Myers & Rocca), student affect toward both course content and instructor evaluation (Myers & Knox, 2000b), and student satisfaction (Myers & Knox, 2000b). Instructors who use specific verbally aggressive messages (e.g., attacks on student competence, ridicule, threats) also negatively impact student perceived affective learning (Myers & Knox, 1999) and state motivation (Myers & Rocca, 2000a). In addition, Myers (1998) found that competent and aggressive instructors (in terms of their assertive and responsive behaviors) were perceived to be more argumentative than submissive instructors, and that noncompetent and aggressive instructors were perceived to be more verbally aggressive than either competent or submissive instructors. Most recently, Myers and Rocca (2000b) reported that some perceived instructor communicator style attributes (e.g., impression leaving, relaxed, attentive, animated) are positively correlated with perceived instructor argumentativeness, yet are negatively correlated with perceived instructor verbal aggressiveness.

To date, instructional communication researchers have limited their study of perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness to either (a) the examination of the relationship of one aggressive trait (primarily verbal aggressiveness) with one or more variables (e.g., Myers, 2001; Myers & Knox, 1999; Myers & Rocca, 2000a; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999; Teven, 2001) or (b) the examination of the effects of both traits singly on the same variable (e.g., Myers & Knox, 2000a, 2000b; Myers & Rocca, 2000b, 2001). This examination makes sense, given that the argumentative and verbally aggressive traits are considered to be empirically and conceptually distinct (Infante & Rancer, 1982; Infante & Wigley, 1986) as they are situated in different dimensions of an individual's personality (Infante, 1987). However, because argumentative and verbally aggressive behaviors do not occur in isolation from each another (Infante & Rancer, 1996), it is possible for an individual to be, for instance, high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness. Moreover, the combination of these two traits can result in various outcomes. For instance, Infante & Gorden (1985,1989) found that within the organization, superiors and subordinates who are perceived as being both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness are more satisfied with one another than with their organizational counterparts who are not perceived as being both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness. On the other hand, when superiors are viewed as being both high in verbal aggressiveness and low in argumentativeness, subordinates perceive these superiors as being less attentive and friendly (Infante & Gorden, 1987).

Because the instructor-student relationship is one type of superior-subordinate relationship, Infante and Gorden's (1985,1987,1989) findings may apply to college instructor-student interaction. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine whether instructors who are both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness positively impact student state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, and satisfaction. Motivation is recognized as students' attempts to derive academic benefits from classroom activities (Brophy, 1987). Affective learning is the positive value students attach to content in the course (McCroskey, 1994) and consists of affect toward the course content and instructor evaluation (Mottet & Richmond, 1998). Cognitive learning is based on students' estimates of how much they learned from an instructor (Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, & Plax, 1987). Student satisfaction is operationalized as the positive emotion students experience in the classroom (Frymier & Houser, 1998) as a result of instructor-student interaction (Prisbell, 1990). These variables were chosen for three reasons. First, these variables (with the exception of cognitive learning) are known to be correlated (either positively or negatively) in some way with both perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Second, these variables are considered as desired outcomes of any student's educational experience. Third, these variables are directly influenced by instructor communication. Generally, when instructors engage in prosocial communication behaviors (i.e., argumentativeness), student motivation,
learning, and satisfaction increases; when instructors engage in antisocial communication behaviors (i.e., verbal aggressiveness), student motivation, learning, and satisfaction decreases (Myers & Knox, 2000a). To investigate this idea, the following hypothesis is posited:

**H:** Students reports of instructors who are perceived as being both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness will be positively correlated with student reports of state motivation, affect toward the course content, instructor evaluation, cognitive learning, and satisfaction.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants were 96 undergraduate students (22 men, 74 women) enrolled in a variety of communication courses at a small midwestern university. The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 30 years (M = 21.79, SD = 1.63). Five (n = 5) respondents were sophomores, 21 respondents were juniors, and 70 respondents were seniors. No other demographic data were gathered.

**Procedures and Instrumentation**

Participants were asked to complete a series of instruments in addition to providing demographic data. These instruments included a modified version of the Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982), a modified version of the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986), the Student Motivation Scale (Christophel, 1990), the Affective Learning Measure (Mottet & Richmond, 1998), the Cognitive Learning Loss measure (Richmond et al., 1987), and a measure of student satisfaction (Frymier & Houser, 1998). Using the methodology advocated by Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, and Richmond (1986), participants completed the instruments in reference to the instructor of the course they attended immediately prior to the research session. Data were gathered during the fourteenth week of the semester.

The Argumentativeness Scale is a 20-item instrument that asks respondents to report perceptions of their own argumentative behaviors. Responses are solicited using a five-point Likert scale ranging from almost always true (5) to almost never true (1). In this study, two modifications were made. First, although the scale was originally designed as a self-report measure, respondents were asked to report their perceptions of their instructors’ argumentative behaviors. Second, a 10-item version of the scale was used (see Myers & Rocca, 2000b). Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .70 to .86 have been reported for the 10-item version (Anderson & Martin, 1999; Myers & Knox, 2000b; Myers & Rocca, 2001). In this study, a coefficient alpha of .86 (M = 34.39, SD = 7.43) was obtained for the 10-item scale.

The Verbal Aggressiveness Scale is a 20-item instrument that asks respondents to report perceptions of their own verbally aggressive behaviors. Responses are solicited using a five-point Likert scale ranging from almost always true (5) to almost never true (1). In this study, two modifications were made. First, although the scale was originally designed as a self-report measure, respondents were asked to report their perceptions of their instructors’ verbally aggressive behaviors. Second, a 10-item version of the scale was used (see Myers & Rocca, 2000b). Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .75 to .85 have been reported for the 10-item version (Anderson & Martin, 1999; Myers & Knox, 2000b; Myers & Rocca, 2001). In this study, a coefficient alpha of .85 (M = 19.60, SD = 6.70) was obtained for the 10-item scale.

The Student Motivation Scale is a 12-item, seven-point bipolar instrument that asks respondents to report their feelings of state motivation toward the targeted course and instructor. Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .91 to .95 have been reported for the scale (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Myers & Knox, 2000a; Myers & Rocca, 2000a). In this study, a coefficient alpha of .95 (M = 57.40, SD = 16.71) was obtained for the scale.

The Affective Learning Measure is a 32-item, seven-point bipolar instrument that asks students to report their feelings of affect toward the course and affect toward the instructor. Twenty-four items measure student affect toward the course content and eight items measure instructor evaluation. Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .96 to .97 have been reported for the two dimensions (Martin, Mottet, & Myers, 1999; Mottet & Richmond, 1998; Myers & Knox, 2000b). In this study, a reliability coefficient of .98 was obtained for both affect toward the course content (M = 125.00, SD = 36.09) and instructor evaluation (M = 43.12, SD = 14.46).

The Cognitive Learning Loss Measure is a two-item scale that asks respondents, using a scale ranging from 0–9 (“0” meaning “nothing” and “9” meaning “more than in any other class”), to rate how much they have learned from their instructor and how much they could have learned had they taken the course from an “ideal” instructor. In this study, cognitive learning was assessed by using the score obtained from the first item, which is considered a direct indicator of cognitive learning (Richmond et al., 1987). Because the computation of cognitive learning results in a single item, a
reliability coefficient could not be computed. In this study, a mean score of 5.71 (SD = 1.83) was obtained for the measure.

Student Satisfaction was measured using a three-item, seven-point bipolar instrument that asks respondents to report their feelings of satisfaction with their instructors. Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .95 to .97 have been reported for the measure (Frymier & Houser, 1998; Martin et al., 1999; Myers & Knox, 2000b). In this study, a reliability coefficient of .98 (M = 16.27, SD = 5.01) was obtained for the measure.

RESULTS
To test the hypothesis, canonical correlation analysis was employed. Perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness comprised the first set of variables and student state motivation, affect toward the course content, instructor evaluation, cognitive learning, and satisfaction comprised the second set of variables. One significant root was obtained (see Table 1), which supported the hypothesis. The canonical root, Rc = .58, Wilk's lambda = .56, F(10,178) = 5.96, p < .001, revealed that instructors who are perceived as being high in argumentativeness, but low in verbal aggressiveness, have students who are highly motivated, evaluate their instructors highly, report cognitive learning, are highly satisfied, and to a lesser degree, have positive affect toward the course content.

DISCUSSION
The purpose of this study was to examine whether instructors who are perceived as being both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness will positively impact student state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, and satisfaction. It was found that students' reports of instructors who are perceived as both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness were positively correlated with their own reports of state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, and satisfaction. Not only do these results echo Infante and Rancer's (1996) contention that argumentativeness leads to constructive outcomes and verbal aggressiveness leads to destructive outcomes, but these results corroborate Infante and Gorden's (1985,1989) findings that individuals who are perceived to possess a combination of high argumentativeness and low verbal aggressiveness results in perceived favorable evaluations and outcomes.

The results garnered in this study offer three implications for instructor-student communication in the college classroom. First, it appears that instructors who are both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness have a significant impact on student outcomes. This combination may not only be the result of attributions associated generally with argumentative and verbally aggressive individuals, but specifically with argumentative and verbally aggressive instructors. Highly argumentative individuals view an argument as a way to convey and acquire information (Rancer, Bauskus, & Infante, 1985), perceive an argument as an enjoyable experience (Rancer, Kosberg, & Bauskus, 1992), and hold a greater number of positive beliefs about arguing in general (Infante & Rancer, 1993) than individuals who are not highly argumentative. In the college classroom, these views and beliefs may be conveyed by argumentative instructors. As such, this may explain the positive relationship between instructor argumentativeness and instructor referent and expert power (Roach, 1995). When instructors are regarded as likable (i.e., referent power) and credible (i.e., expert power), they may be given latitude by students to engage in argumentativeness, which positively affects students' perceived state motivation, learning, and satisfaction. On the other hand, highly verbally aggressive individuals believe that the use of a verbally aggressive message is justified, even if there is a chance that the relationship will be damaged (Martin, Anderson, & Horvath, 1996). Verbally aggressive individuals are less likely to praise others (Wigley, Pohl, & Watt, 1989) and are less cognitively and communicatively flexible (Martin, Anderson, & Thweatt, 1998) whereas verbally aggressive instructors are rated as less interpersonally attractive (Rocca & McCroskey, 1999), less competent (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997), less credible (Myers, 2001), and less caring (Teven, 2001) by their students. Consequently, instructors who are lacking in verbal aggression will have more of a positive impact on their students. Infante (1989) noted that individuals have a preference for argumentative messages over verbally aggressive messages. This may very well be the case for college students. When the effects of instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness are jointly examined together, it appears that a preferential instructor is one who is perceived as being both high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness.

Second, these results parallel some of the research conducted on the joint effects of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness within the organizational communication setting, which implicitly support Chory and McCroskey's (1999) contention that the college classroom can be viewed as an organization. Richmond and Roach (1992) noted that the college classroom and the organization share several parallels, such as an established power structure, the presence of a communication climate, and a clearly defined superior-subordinate relationship. As such, results obtained in subsequent studies conducted within the organizational communication arena on the combined effects of perceived superior argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness (e.g., Infante, Anderson, Martin, Herington, & Kim, 1993; Infante & Gorden, 1991; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999) may be applicable to the instructor-student relationship. Future research should consider exploration of these topics within the instructional communication setting. Third, and perhaps most importantly, these results suggest that instructor communication behaviors do not occur, nor do they influence student outcomes, in isolation from one another. Instructional communication researchers should strive to examine how clusters of instructor communication behaviors affect students. By identifying these clusters and their effects, instructors can improve their performance, maximize student outcomes, and positively influence the classroom environment.
In sum, the results of this study indicate that perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness jointly have an effect on perceived student state motivation, affective learning, cognitive learning, and satisfaction. These findings extend the research conducted to date on perceived instructor aggressive communication, and provide another direction in which perceived instructor communication behaviors can be explored. Moreover, these results suggest that instructor communication behaviors do not operate in isolation from one another.

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**TABLE 1 Canonical Correlation Analysis of Perceived Instructor Aggressive Communication and Student State Motivation, Learning and Satisfaction**

Legend for Chart:

A - Variables  
B - Canonical Loading Root 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set 1:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
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<td>- .80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>- .80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy Coefficient</td>
<td>[.19]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set 2:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Motivation</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Toward Course Content</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Evaluation</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Learning</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy Coefficient</td>
<td>[.45]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R_c = .58$, Wilk's lambda = .56, $F_{[10,178]} = 5.96$, $p < .001$.

**REFERENCES**


By Scott A. Myers

Scott A. Myers (Ph.D., Kent State University, 1995) is an Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506, (304) 293-3905 office, (304) 293-8667 fax, smyers@mail.wvu.edu.

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