College students and the rhetorical dissent goal: Associations between dissent goal, dissent target, and perceptions of instructor power

Martin Glenn Heator

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College Students and the Rhetorical Dissent Goal: Associations Between Dissent Goal, Dissent Target, and Perceptions of Instructor Power

by

Martin Glenn Heator

Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Education
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
Educational Leadership

Dissertation Committee:
James E. Berry, Ph.D., Chair
Elizabeth A. Broughton, Ph.D.
Robert D. Carpenter, Ph.D.
G. Russell Merz, Ph.D.

July 13, 2018
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

To my daughters Megan and Olivia, who cheered me on and who themselves have demonstrated that “anything’s possible if you’ve got enough nerve” (Rowling, 2003, p. 655).

To my wife Cheryl, who proves that when you have someone to believe in who also believes in you, you are given a gift that cannot be priced but can be opened with every new day.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my dissertation committee for guiding me as I have transitioned from practitioner to practitioner-researcher. I would not have been capable of this change without their expertise, guidance, and encouragement. They set the bar high and gave me what I needed to get up and over. To Dr. Elizabeth Broughton, Dr. Russ Merz, and Dr. Robert Carpenter, thank you for teaching me, and pushing me, both in the classroom and as members of my committee. And to committee chair Dr. James Berry, a special thank you for being there with me from the beginning. You served as advisor for my master’s degree and reprised the role for this doctoral program. Our conversations broadened my thinking about my future in higher education and led to new career opportunities and to this latest educational milestone.

I am also grateful to Schoolcraft College, and particularly to Dr. Conway Jeffress and Dr. Cheryl Hagen, for supporting my pursuit of this degree. You have created an organizational culture that values advanced study and professional growth.

And finally, I wish to acknowledge the many family members, friends, and colleagues who inquired about my progress and offered words of encouragement, providing the boost I needed to keep at it for another day.
Abstract

Some college students who experience discontent with the instructional experience engage in a complaining and problem-solving behavior called *instructional dissent*. Three types of dissent have been identified: rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful. Student perceptions of *instructor power* influence if and how students dissent. This study explored the relationship between instructor power and rhetorical dissent. Previous studies measured rhetorical dissent as a single variable incorporating the goal for dissenting and the target for dissent expression, using the instructor in the class as the only target. This study measured dissent goal and dissent target as separate variables and included the instructor in the class and other targets for dissent expression. University undergraduates (*N* = 713) completing an online survey were asked to recall a very disappointing instructional experience and then asked questions that measured their perceptions of instructor power, their goal(s) for pursuing dissent, and the individuals they targeted with their expressions of dissent. French and Raven’s (1959) five bases of social power were used to measure instructor power. Reward and legitimate power were negatively associated with the rhetorical dissent goal while coercive power was positively associated with this goal. The rhetorical dissent goal was positively associated with the dissent targets *this professor*, *administration*, and *another professor*.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite the best efforts of everyone involved, some college students will experience dissatisfaction, conflict with the instructor, or other forms of discontent with the instructional experience. Some keep their feelings to themselves while others engage in a form of complaining and problem-solving behavior known as instructional dissent (Goodboy, 2011; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013). Students who dissent have unmet expectations related to the instructional experience and a willingness to share their concerns with others. Dissenting students target one or more individuals with their expressions of dissent. These individuals might be internal to the institution, such as instructors and fellow students, or external, such as family and friends.

Students express dissent for a variety of reasons. They might want to improve their performance in the class, vent their frustrations, or get an instructor into trouble.

Researchers have identified three types of instructional dissent: rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful (Goodboy, 2011; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013). When pursuing rhetorical dissent, the student hopes to improve the instructional experience and/or their performance in the class. In the literature, rhetorical dissent is described as the student communicating directly with the instructor. With expressive dissent, the student’s focus is on expressing their emotions and venting their frustrations. Studies have documented this expression of dissent as being directed toward other individuals and/or toward the instructor. Vengeful dissent is focused on harming the instructor’s reputation and/or getting the instructor into trouble. In the literature, vengeful dissent is characterized as being directed at others who have power over the instructor or are in the position to do professional harm to the instructor.
This conceptualization of dissent includes two components: dissent goal and dissent target. The dissent goal reflects what the student hopes to achieve by expressing their dissent. This goal is reflected in the rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful intentions described above. The dissent target refers to the person or other target, such as a website, on the receiving end of the student’s dissent expression. Dissent targets can be thought of as resting on one of three paths for dissent. The dissent path describes where the target for dissent expression is situated relative to the student and to the institution.

One conceptualization of dissent path comes from research on dissent in companies and organizations (Kassing, 1998). Kassing (1999) identified three paths for dissent: upward, lateral, and displaced. This model is used in the present study. Upward dissent is expressed to a person of authority within the organization. In a company, this involves an employee expressing their concern to their supervisor or someone else of authority. In higher education this is a student expressing concerns to the instructor or someone else at the institution who can address the concern. Lateral dissent is aimed at people on the same level in the hierarchy as the dissenter. At work this means dissenting to coworkers. At college it means dissenting to fellow students. The third type of dissent, displaced, involves communicating with people who are external to the organization, such as family members, friends, or oversight/regulatory third parties.

**Dissent’s Impact on Instructors, Students, and Institutions**

The matter of who students dissent to, and how they express their dissent, is important to colleges and universities. Depending on where they direct their expressions of dissent, and on the rhetorical, expressive and/or vengeful nature of those expressions, dissenting students can create
negative effects. Such student behavior can adversely impact the instructor-student relationship, instructor self-efficacy, and instructor job satisfaction (Frisby, Goodboy, & Buckner, 2015); can cause other students to avoid taking classes with the instructor (Mukherjee, Pinto, & Malhotra, 2009); and harm the institution’s reputation by spreading negative word-of-mouth (Su & Bao, 2001; Cronin, 2003; Barlow & Møller, 2008).

This is not to say that all forms of instructional dissent are destructive. Kassing and Avtgist (1999) describe dissent as a constructive behavior focused on informing someone in the organization that there is a need for change. Rhetorical dissent can lead to a constructive dialogue between instructor and student (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013). Such positive interactions enhance the instructor-student relationship, instructor self-efficacy, and instructor job satisfaction (Frisby et al., 2015). Even expressive complaints can be helpful if they are directed to those in a position to address the concern. At the classroom level, expressive dissent directed to the instructor could open the door for productive conversation, after the student has been de-escalated. At the institutional level, such dissent could alert the organization to small problems before they grow into big problems.

Most dissatisfied students do not complain to the institution; instead they complain to others on and off campus (Su & Bao, 2001). This means that most dissatisfied students pursue lateral or displaced dissent. This does not give the instructor or the institution an opportunity to address the student’s concerns.

It is in the best interest of instructors and their institutions to encourage students to express their concerns toward the upward dissent path, and to do so with rhetorical intentions.
This requires an understanding of dissent behavior and of the factors that influence this behavior. One such factor is student perception of instructor power. The present study explored relationships between instructor power and dissent targets, instructor power and the rhetorical dissent goal, and the rhetorical goal and dissent targets.

**Measuring instructional dissent and its relationship to instructor power.** College students perceive that their instructors hold power over them (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974; Mukherjee et al., 2009). Five types of instructor power have been identified: reward, expert, referent, coercive, and legitimate. These have been shown to influence if, and how, students pursue instructional dissent (Su & Bao, 2001; Mukherjee et al., 2009; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013).

In previous studies, instructional dissent was measured with survey items that contained both a dissent goal and a dissent target. For example, an item would read, “I talked with my professor to find out what I needed to do to improve my grade in the class,” and the respondent would be asked to agree or disagree with this statement. The statement included a goal for dissenting (i.e., “to improve my grade in the class”) and a target for the dissent expression (i.e., “I talked with my professor”).

In these studies, instructional dissent was treated as a dependent variable influenced by the independent variable, instructor power. The present study extends the literature by isolating the rhetorical dissent goal as one separate variable and dissent target as another. This created the opportunity to test relationships not previously tested, including those involving power-goal and goal-target.
Rhetorical dissent warrants attention because from both the instructor and institutional standpoint, it is more desirable than the other forms of dissent. Rhetorical dissent directed to the instructor in the class creates the opportunity for instructor-student interactions that are focused on the teaching and learning process. Unfortunately, previous research indicates that students are less likely to take their instructional concerns directly to the professor teaching the class in question. They are more likely, whatever dissent goal(s) they have, to express their dissent to people other than the instructor (Su & Bao, 2001).

Survey items represented in the current literature represent rhetorical dissent in a manner that combines goals for dissenting and the target for dissent, and the target is always the instructor teaching the class in question.

One example is the survey item asking for a scaled response, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to this statement: I tell my teacher when I disagree with him/her, so I can do better in the course (Goodboy, 2011). This single survey item encompasses a dissent goal (i.e., rhetorical) and a dissent target (i.e., the instructor). This target is situated on the upward dissent path.

This approach is well represented in the instructional dissent literature (Goodboy, 2011; Goodboy & Myers, 2012; Buckner & Finn, 2013; Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011; Goodboy & Frisby, 2014; Labelle, Martin, & Weber, 2013; Labelle & Martin, 2014; Buckner & Frisby, 2015; Vallade, Martin, & Vela, 2015; Kennedy-Lightsey, 2017; Tatum, Olson, & Frey, 2018).

This method of measuring rhetorical dissent does not allow for the possibility that some students with a rhetorical goal express their dissent to targets other than the instructor for this class. Do
students with this goal express dissent to other people on the upward dissent path? Do they express to fellow students, or to family and friends?

The present study sought to address these questions by creating separate measures for dissent goal and dissent target, respectively. It did this by adapting survey items that are well established in the literature so that the impact of an independent variable, instructor power, could be measured separately for its relationship to rhetorical dissent goal and to dissent target as dependent variables. This approach also allowed for dissent goal, acting as an independent variable, to be tested for impact on dissent target.

**Sources of Instructor Power**

Students and instructors attempt to influence each other in the classroom, creating a power dynamic that has received scholarly attention (e.g., Jamieson & Thomas, 1974; Su & Bao, 2011; Goodboy, Bolkan, Myers & Zhao, 2011; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013). The literatures in instructional communication and classroom power contain multiple constructs for instructor power. Among those frequently used in research are the five bases of social power articulated by French and Raven (1959). Mukherjee et al. (2009), among others, adapted the five bases into the following definitions of instructor power.

*Reward power* is the student’s perception of the instructor’s willingness and ability to reward good work and compliance. *Expert power* is the student’s perception of the instructor’s expertise in his or her field. *Referent power* is the extent to which the student personally identifies with the instructor. *Coercive power* is the student’s perception of the instructor’s willingness and ability to punish the student for inadequate work and non-compliance.
Legitimate power is the student’s perception of how much professional and institutional authority is granted to the instructor how likely the department and/or institution are to back the instructor in a dispute with the student.

Conceptual Framework

Students’ perceptions of instructor power factor into their decision making about instructional dissent (Su & Bao, 2001). Power is a factor because it has the potential to influence psychological movement or change (Lewin, 1951a; French & Raven, 1959). A student who is considering engaging in instructional dissent might move toward the decision to not dissent at all. Or, he or she could move toward the act of expressing dissent. This leads to intentions for dissenting (i.e., rhetorical, expressive, vengeful goals) and decisions about who should be the target(s) for dissent expression. These targets are situated on dissent paths (i.e., upward, lateral, displaced).

As seen in Figure 1, instructor power influences the development of the dissent goal and goal influences the choice of dissent target(s). At any point in the process, the student may decide to not dissent at all. Even if a student has dissent goals, he or she may decide to keep them to themselves. Su and Bao (2001), for example, found that 31% chose to not express their dissent. The present study concerns itself with the balance of students who develop dissent goals and act on them. The focus of the study is evident by the horizontal arrows represented in Figure 1. These represent the independent-dependent variable relationships that were explored: power-goal, power-target and goal-target. The downward arrows represent the fact that not all students
who experience instructional disappointment share their concerns with others.

*Figure 1. Conceptual framework. This figure represents the associations explored in the present study, including those between instructor power and the dissent goal, power and dissent target, and goal and target.*

**The Case for Studying Instructional Dissent and Instructor Power**

Borrowing a term from Hirschman (1970), Su and Bao (2001) described higher education as a “loose monopoly” (p. 49) in their discussion of the inherent power imbalance between students and colleges. A student might feel empowered when shopping for colleges. After enrolling and becoming established at the institution, however, they face the reality that switching colleges can be costly in terms of time, money, inconvenience, and emotional
stress. Thus, some students conclude that they have no channels for seeking redress when they are dissatisfied or disagree with their instructor (Su & Bao, 2001). Facing high switching costs, they remain at the institution while the underlying issues go unresolved.

This power balance becomes a source of friction when students see themselves as customers (Mark, 2013). An early documenter of this trend was Morrow (1994), who noted the increasing commoditization of higher education in North America and predicted that it would lead to a heightened sense of entitlement among students and a corresponding rise in student incivility. Mark (2013) suggested that higher education faculty and administrators should not give in to the pressure to treat students as customers first and learners second. At the same time, he cautioned them against clinging to what he termed an “outdated conception” of the role that customers play in the buyer-seller relationship.

Mark asserted that buyers and sellers are co-creators of value and satisfaction. This idea is aligned with the learning relationship posited by Peppers and Rogers (2011) and the transactional/relational continuum offered by Britton (2011). These concepts are considered fundamental to the development of mutually beneficial, long-term relationships between brands and their customers. In the learning relationship, both consumer and company share information with the other, building trust over time (Peppers & Rogers, 2011). As the consumer shares more information about their preferences, the company steps up its education of the consumer about its products and services. Britton’s (2011) continuum shows a transactional relationship at one end and a collaborative relationship at the other. The idea is that over time, as the learning
relationship progresses, the customer-company relationship moves from the transactional to the collaborative end of the continuum. In time, consumer and company are co-creating value and satisfaction.

A similar struggle over the balance of power is playing out between higher education institutions and their students. The latter are more likely to see themselves as customers with the entitlements that come with that role (Mark, 2013). Taking a more proactive and intentional approach to the matter of instructional dissent is one way that higher education instructors and administrators can begin to address this power imbalance in a reasoned manner.

**Power in the classroom.** Power in the classroom has been the subject of a program of research since the early 1980s (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1982, 1983; Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984a, 1984b, 1985). This work has documented the presence of power in the classroom; the use of power by both teachers and students; the relationship between power use by teachers and student learning; and the role that power plays in attempts by teachers at gaining compliance from their students (Richmond & Roach, 1992).

Attention has also been given to the relationship between instructor power and instructional dissent (Su & Bao, 2001; Mukherjee et al., 2009; and Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013).

In the existing literature, the student’s perception of instructor power has been shown to influence the student’s choices of targets for dissent. As one might expect, a student who perceives high coercive power may be less inclined to approach the instructor directly and more inclined to go to a third-party for assistance (Su & Bao, 2001; Mukherjee et al., 2009).
Conversely, a student who perceives low coercive power and high referent power might be more comfortable approaching the instructor directly (Su & Bao, 2001). In a similar vein, a student who perceives high legitimate power might feel it is a waste of time and energy to launch a formal complaint about the instructor with the institution (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013).

As already stated, previous studies measured rhetorical dissent with survey items that contain both a dissent goal (rhetorical) and a dissent target (the instructor). One limit of this approach is that it assumes that students with a rhetorical goal only express dissent to the instructor. Another limit is that it does not produce data that indicates the extent to which the respondent agreed/disagreed with the goal relative to the target. A third limit is that it does not produce data that allows for the exploration of relationships between dissent goal and other variables, and between dissent target and other variables.

To overcome these limitations, the present study used separate survey items for dissent goal and dissent target. This allowed for the testing of previously unexplored relationships between instructor power and dissent goal, and dissent goal and dissent target.

Consider, for example, the student who perceives high coercive power and has a rhetorical goal. This student wants to improve the classroom experience and their own performance in the class. The student may choose to avoid direct communication with the instructor. This same student may turn to others, such as another instructor, who is on the upward dissent path; fellow students, part of the lateral path; or non-college friends, who rest on the displaced path. They might turn to one or more of these individuals to seek advice or support in
achieving their rhetorical goal. They may do this without engaging in emotional venting through expressive dissent or attempting to harm the instructor’s reputation with vengeful dissent. This student has a rhetorical goal but is pursuing it with targets that are not represented in the current definition of rhetorical dissent.

The Research Problem and Hypotheses

As previously stated, the literature conceptualizes dissent by combining goal and target into a dissent type. This approach, represented in Table 1, has established that there is a relationship between instructor power acting as the independent variable and instructional dissent acting as the dependent variable. The measures used in previous studies, however, have limited

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissent Type</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>View in the literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>Student wants to improve their classroom experience and/or their performance in the class</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Considered the most constructive form of instructional dissent because it sets the stage for conversation, student-instructor engagement and problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>Student wants to express their feelings and vent their frustration</td>
<td>Most frequently someone other than the instructor</td>
<td>Considered less constructive than rhetorical dissent; emotions need to be dealt with and de-escalated before conversation and problem-solving are pursued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vengeful</td>
<td>Student wants to damage the professor’s reputation and/or inflict psychological harm on the professor</td>
<td>Most frequently someone other than the instructor</td>
<td>Considered the least constructive form of instructional dissent; does not promote a healthy instructor-student relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

researchers’ ability to separate the influence that power has on dissent goals from the influence that it has on dissent targets. In addition, the existing literature does not address the influence that goals may have on targets. To address these issues and extend the existing literature, the following problem statement was developed to guide the present study:

Researchers and practitioners would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between student perception of instructor power and student instructional dissent intentions and behaviors. An approach that isolates the influence of instructor power on dissent goals, instructor power on dissent targets, and dissent goal on targets, would help to clarify and extend the existing research by uncovering previously undetected relationships.

The research problem was explored through three research questions, which were tested using null and non-directional alternative hypotheses:

RQ1: Are perceptions of instructor power associated with rhetorical dissent?

H1 (null): There is no association between student perception of instructor power as independent variable and student rhetorical dissent goal as dependent variable.

H1a (non-directional) alternative: Student perception of instructor power as independent variable is associated with student rhetorical dissent goal as dependent variable.

RQ 2: Are perceptions of instructor power associated with dissent targets?

H2 (null): There is no association between student perception of instructor power as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.
H2a (non-directional) alternative: Student perception of instructor power as independent variable is associated with dissent target as dependent variable.

RQ3: Is the rhetorical dissent goal associated with dissent targets?

H3 (null): There is no association between student rhetorical dissent goal as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.

H3a (non-directional) alternative: Student rhetorical dissent goal as independent variable is associated with dissent target as dependent variable.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literatures related to instructional dissent and instructor power. It explores the foundational work for each literature. It also places each within the broader context of instructional communication, a field of inquiry that lives at the intersection of pedagogy, educational psychology and communication studies. In this way, the literature review illustrates how research into instructional dissent and instructor power grew out of efforts to improve the educational process (Mottet & Beebe, 2006).
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The present study treated student perception of instructor power as an independent variable that influences a dependent variable, instructional dissent goal, in this case, the rhetorical goal. It also explored how that dissent goal influences dissent target. This chapter begins with a review of the power construct. This includes a discussion of the sources of interpersonal and social power, and the role of power in psychological change. The literature review then moves into a discussion of how instructor power is conceptualized.

Next is a summary of the origins and progress of scholarly inquiry into instructional power and instructional dissent. The review then shifts into an exploration of the dissent construct, beginning with its origins in work on employee dissent in organizations and concluding with its current understanding as instructional dissent.

From this review emerge constructs relevant to the present study. These include the bases of social power (i.e., reward, expert, referent, coercive, legitimate) as articulated by French and Raven (1959); types of instructional dissent as described by Goodboy (2011) and Bolkan and Goodboy (2013), including expressive, vengeful and the type that serves as the focus for the present study, rhetorical dissent; targets for instructional dissent (Goodboy, 2011); and paths for dissent, including upward, lateral, and displaced (Hirschman, 1970; Singh 1998, 1990; & Kassing, 1998).

These constructs inform the literature and provide a foundation for the present study.

Power: Four Key Ideas

Power is described as the capacity to influence another person to do something (Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980). An extensive body of literature has developed
around power in interpersonal relationships and social environments. This literature has helped to shape what we know about power in the classroom, including instructor power. The power literature offers four key ideas that are relevant to the present study.

The first idea is that power requires a relationship. For power to be present, there must be an actor with the capacity to influence and an actor who is willing to be influenced (French & Raven, 1959; Etzioni, 1961; Emerson, 1962; Hartnett, 1971). The present study examines the relationship between the instructor in the role of influencer and the student in the role of the one being influenced.

The second idea is that power is a property of that relationship (Hartnett, 1971; Mottet & Beebe, 2006). A common misconception is that power is an attribute belonging to an actor in a relationship (Hartnett, 1971). This conception of power is limited in its ability to explain how power operates. Such an understanding requires knowing where power comes from.

Power is understood to have multiple sources, or bases (French & Raven, 1959). These bases of power are detected, not by assigning attributes to the actors, but by delving into the actors’ perceptions. Bases of power are found in these perceptions; this is where the influencing effect of interpersonal power is rooted. The present study used the power bases construct to measure students’ perceptions of their instructors’ use of power.

The fourth idea is that the effects of power may contribute to psychological movement. This movement can be detected in the influenced person’s behavior, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values, and other aspects of the person’s psychological field (Lewin, 1951a; French & Raven, 1959). The present study measured why students pursued instructional dissent (i.e.,
goals) and who they expressed their dissent to (i.e., behavior). It also explored how these movements were, or were not, influenced by the student’s perceptions of instructor power. What follows is an expanded discussion of each of the four key ideas.

**Power requires a relationship.** Power has been characterized as a relational phenomenon (e.g., Hartnett, 1971; Kanter & Stein, 1979; Richmond et al., 1980; Richmond & Roach, 1992). For their book *Life in Organizations: Workplaces as People Experience Them*, Kanter and Stein (1979) used case studies to get an inside look at work life in a range of settings, from manufacturing, retail and government to sales and office work. They observed, “One of the great insights of classical social and political theory was that power always involves a relationship, it always consists of interaction and, therefore, can never be one-sided or unilateral” (p. 6).

The book *Power in the Classroom: Communication, Concern and Control* (Richmond & McCroskey, 1992) described the development of the classroom power branch of the instructional communication literature. The book summarized key research findings from multiple perspectives on power, including social science, classroom management, communication, teacher influence and student resistance, to name some. In their chapter on seminal studies on power in the classroom, Richmond and Roach (1992) offer this summation of their understanding of classroom power:

There are three conclusions that can be drawn from the previous chapters on power and communication. First, there is a certain amount of power rooted in most relationships. That power can be established in any relationship (e.g., teacher-student, supervisor-
employee, opinion leader-follow, wife-husband, husband-wife). Second, power is a perception. One grants the other power over her or him. If power is not perceived, power cannot be exerted by another. Third, power and communication are inextricably related. For example, in almost all relationships there is a point when one person will try to exert power over another through communication (pp. 46-47).

Richmond and Roach (1992) assert that teacher power cannot exist unless the student grants it. All that the teacher hopes to accomplish with students in the classroom depends upon “students’ willingness to grant teachers the right of power” (p. 58). Their conclusions were based on a series of studies, the first being McCroskey and Richmond (1983), which revealed that teachers’ perceptions of their own power differ from their students’ perceptions of the that power. This program of research (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1983) showed that while instructors believed that they were exhibiting and using power in one way, their students saw something else.

Not surprisingly, people tend to see themselves in the best possible light (Richmond & Roach, 1992). In keeping with this, agents, in this case teachers, tend to see their own exercise of power more positively than their targets, in this case their students (Richmond & Roach, 1992).

The previous passages support the rationale for the design of the present study. It assesses instructor power by measuring students’ perceptions of instructor power through both verbal and non-verbal communication.
Power is a property of the relationship. It is a common misperception of power that it is an attribute of an individual or a group (Hartnett, 1971). This view of power is too narrow; it does not lead to an understanding of how power functions in a relationship. As Hartnett (1971) articulated the problem, the conception of power as attribute leads to a question: “Who are the power holders?” This question “is vacant” unless one asks the next question: “Over whom?” Citing Emerson (1962), Hartnett asserts that power is not an “attribute of the actor” but is instead a “property” of the relationship between actors (pp. 27-28).

In their Handbook of Instructional Communication, Mottet, Richmond, and McCroskey, (2006) summarized the body of research to-date on power in the classroom, as studied through the communication lens. They concluded that “from a communication perspective, power is a product that emerges from a relationship” (p. 118-119). They characterize power as the capacity for one person to influence another to action. They do not assign 100% of this capacity to the person attempting to influence; that would be the same as viewing power as an attribute of that person. They acknowledge that the capacity draws its strength from both the person doing the influencing and the person who is being influenced. This capacity is not a “commodity” possessed by one or the other, nor is it found within the messages they communicate to each other (Barraclough & Stewart, 1992). The messages are important; they are used to exercise power. But the power itself is separate from the messages. The capacity to influence is expressed in the relationship between these two people.

This leads to the question of where this capacity comes from. What is its actual source within the relationship?
**Bases of power.** As previously stated, power is understood to have multiple sources, or bases. An appropriate place to begin an exploration of these bases is through the work of French and Raven (1959). In their influential chapter in *Studies of Social Power* (Cartwright, 1959), French and Raven made a case for how power, influence, and change should be conceptualized and measured. Their conceptualization of the five bases of social power—reward, coercive, referent, expert, and legitimate—and their stance that power is a measurable psychological change continued to inform research on instructor power (e.g., Su & Bao, 2001; Mukherjee et al., 2009; Goodboy et al., 2011; Finn, 2012; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013).

The perspective of power being represented by psychological change is crucial to the understanding of French’s and Raven’s work. From their chapter in Cartwright (1959):

> Since we shall define power in terms of influence, and influence in terms of psychological change, we begin with a discussion of change. We want to define change at a level of generality which includes changes in behavior, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values, and all other aspects of the person’s psychological field. (p. 151)

The term “psychological field” is from Lewin (1951b). He also referred to the field as an individual’s “life space.” In their work, French and Raven follow Lewin’s approach but use the word “system” to refer to any part of the individual’s life space. They define psychological change as any “alteration” of that system over time (p. 151). Their approach to envisioning this change, and the forces behind the change, draw from Lewin.

**Psychological movement/change.** Lewin (1951b) helped to advance psychological research in many ways. Two that are relevant to the present study are his approach to visualizing
psychological phenomena as occurring in a life space, and his advancing of the notion that phenomena in psychology can be quantified and measured in a manner like that used in physics and other physical sciences.

An individual’s life space can be approximated with a map that shows different regions. For the individual, each region has a positive or negative attraction, based on the individual’s subjective evaluation of that region (Lewin, 1951c). The following key terms describe how psychological phenomena, including psychological change, are mapped in Lewin’s envisioning of the life space.

**Regions.** A person’s life space consists of a multitude of regions. Each region indicates a life experience, behavior, or state of being which the individual wishes to attain. It might be that the individual has never been there before. Or it could be that the person has been to that region and wishes to return. A student enrolled in college for the first time experiences an expansion of their life space, one that (hopefully) will continue throughout their educational experience.

**Psychological position.** An individual’s psychological position shows the spatial relation of different regions within the individual’s life space. Depending on the individual’s current position, some regions will be closer, some farther away. Some regions may be accessible and some inaccessible. For example, the life space of the child looks different than that of an adult. Certain regions are off-limits to a child, such as driving a car. Adults have more freedom of movement into more regions of their life space.
Some students may experience an increase in this freedom when they transition from high school to college. They suddenly have more freedom of movement and with it more responsibility for structuring their day.

**Locomotion.** In Lewin’s conceptualization, psychological movement is represented as locomotion, within the life space and toward some regions and away from others. Locomotion is a way to represent a person’s relative psychological position at different times. He calls locomotion a “psychological phenomenon” (Lewin, 1951b, p. 39). An example of locomotion relevant to the present study is the student who starts the semester being afraid of approaching the instructor individually before or after class. This region is in the student’s life space, but the student does not want to go there. As the term progresses, however, the student becomes more comfortable with the instructor and in time the student locomotes toward that region.

**Force.** Force is a “tendency to locomotion” (p. 39). Lewin envisions a “constellation of forces” that either push or pull an individual toward or away from regions of the life space. Some of these forces have their source in the field itself while others stem from the individual’s needs and/or motivations.

Consider the previous example of the student who grew increasingly comfortable approaching the instructor. A constellation of forces had a combined effect that nudged the student in that direction. Some forces were from within the field. For example, fellow students sharing their experiences with the instructor and encouraging this student to approach the instructor would have been a positive force pushing the student toward that region. A force from
within the student would be the student’s internal motivation to do well in the class. Perhaps this motivation helped the student overcome fears about approaching the instructor.

**Valence.** Some regions are more attractive than others, based on the person’s subjective evaluation of regions and the benefits they may offer. A constellation of forces may have the net effect of pushing the individual toward a region with a positive valence and away from a region with a negative valence. In our example of the student approaching the instructor, the constellation of forces affecting this student resulted in a net positive valence toward that region in the life space.

Based on Lewin’s framework (1951c) and subsequent research on instructional communication and instructional dissent, it can be assumed that students who dissent are driven to do so by one or more forces, perhaps a constellation of them. Lewin did not count power as one of these forces, but he clarified how power relates to them. “Power does not have the same dimension as psychological force. The concept of power refers to a ‘possibility of inducing forces’ of a certain magnitude on another person” (Lewin, 1951c, p. 40). Power is the potential for inducing, force is the actual inducing.

**French and Raven’s Bases of Power**

French and Raven (1959) envisioned a relationship between two people, with one (person A) attempting to exert power over the other (person B). As stated previously, power is not conceptualized as an attribute belonging to A, acting as one who holds and exerts
power. Nor is it conceptualized as an attribute belonging to B, acting as one who receives and responds to power. As Hartnett (1971) expressed the idea, power is a “property” of the relationship between A and B.

French and Raven (1959) chose the label “base” as the name for the source/basis of this power. Following this lead, researchers discussing power in interpersonal, social, cultural, and political contexts have continued to use the “bases of power” label; this is reflected in scholarly work related to instructor power. These scholars drew from French and Raven. French and Raven, in turn, drew from Weber (1947) for their discussion of the bases concept.

**Weber and imperative control.** How scholars think about power in the classroom owes much to the work of German sociologist and political economist Max Weber. He wrote and lectured on political, economic, and social systems. He favored a rigorous and scientific approach to the study of causal relationships in human, social and cultural contexts, believing that such an approach was as essential to these fields as it is to those in the natural sciences (Weber, 1947).

In the book *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1947), edited by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons and with an introduction by Parsons (1947), Weber explored the forces at work within economies, governments, political systems, bureaucracies, and corporations. Weber devoted considerable attention to the concept of imperative control and to understanding the legitimacy that underlies authority.

Weber (1947) defined imperative control as the probability that a command will be obeyed. Imperative control is a one-to-one phenomenon: person A issues the command and
Person B either will, or will not, obey the command. Imperative coordinated control, or imperative coordination, is a one-to-many phenomenon: A issues a command to one or more intermediaries, such as operatives, administrators, or supervisors, who in turn pass the command along to others. Both concepts, imperative control and imperative coordination, were valuable to Weber’s discussion of how individual actors and groups of actors behave in economic, political, and bureaucratic contexts.

In discussing imperative control, Weber was, in fact, discussing power. In his introduction, Parsons (1947) wrote that Weber recognized power as a comprehensive concept in a sociological context and sought a more precise way to conceptualize power in his discussions of economies, politics, and bureaucracy. Weber offered imperative control, and its probability of commands being obeyed or not obeyed, as this more precise conceptualization (Parsons, 1947).

Weber also offered the concept of an ideal type. Weber described the ideal type as a tool for advancing the empirical study of social phenomena. In Weber’s time, the German philosophical tradition held that human knowledge “fell into these two radically different categories, the natural sciences and the studies of culture and human behavior” (Parsons, 1947, p. 9). It was believed that the natural sciences were more suited to the development of “generalized conceptual schemes, of theory” (p. 9) while culture and human behavior were not.

Weber disagreed. One way that he countered was by advocating for the use of ideal types (Weber, 1947). He called on scholars to apply what they know and can assume about human beings and the human experience, based on their own lives, observations, and common sense,
to the creation of subjective categories. Weber called these categories “ideal types” and suggested that they should serve as the starting point for inquiry. Once established, an ideal type can be subjected to empirical analysis and testing. Such a type might be validated through further testing or it might be disproven. Either of these outcomes, however, advances the field of inquiry and contributes to knowledge.

One example can be seen in Weber’s exploration of the basis for legitimate authority in economic, political, and corporate systems. Weber described three different types of legitimate authority: legal, traditional, and charismatic. He posited that imperative control and imperative cooperation—the likelihood of commands being obeyed—depended on people perceiving these types of authority as having legitimacy. He went further, proposing specific beliefs upon which their legitimacy is grounded.

This idea of perceptions being grounded in, or based upon, a person’s beliefs is echoed in later works by other scholars and resonates in the current literature. For example, the book chapter by French and Raven (1959) that would become so influential in the conceptualization of power references Weber and is titled “The Bases of Social Power” (Cartwright, 1959). This “bases of power” concept continues to be employed throughout the literature on instructor power (e.g., Jamieson & Thomas, 1974; Tauber, 1985; Richmond & McCroskey, 1990; Su & Bao, 2001; Mukherjee et al., 2009; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013).

Weber (1947) posited that each authority type, legal, traditional, and charismatic, is based on specific grounds:
Rational grounds rest on one’s belief in the legality of rules and the rights of leaders. It is on these grounds that people grant others legal authority.

Traditional grounds rest on one’s belief in the “sanctity of traditions” and the legitimacy of those who exercise authority under them. It is on these grounds that people grant others traditional authority.

Charismatic grounds rest on one’s devotion to the “exemplary character” or “heroism” of an individual. It is on these grounds that people grant others charismatic authority.

Different Approaches to Conceptualizing Power

Barraclough and Stewart (1992) credit Weber with beginning efforts to “conceptualize power as a complex phenomenon” (p. 4). Later scholars identified and tested different bases of power, and explored other ways to conceptualize power, expanding on Weber’s ideal type. Weber’s approach and the others have informed the research on instructor power by offering a broad range of themes and ideas which have been tested over time and synthesized into the conceptualizations of power that persist in the current literature. What follows is a discussion of these approaches, presented in chronological order of publication.

Five bases of social power (French & Raven, 1959). Drawing from Weber (1947) and others (e.g., Goldhammer & Shils, 1939; Lippit, Polansky, & Rosen, 1945; Asch, 1952), French and Raven (1959) articulated five bases of social power: reward, coercive, referent, expert, and legitimate. Each base of power is perceived on a scale from low to high. For example, reward power is based on person B’s perception that person A has the ability and willingness to provide
B with positive outcomes. If B perceives that A is very unlikely to provide these outcomes, it can be said that B perceives low reward power with regards to A.

**Coercive power** is based on B’s perception that A is able and willing to punish B by creating negative consequences for B, or by withholding positive outcomes from B. If B perceives that A is very likely to punish B for not meeting A’s expectations, not complying with A’s directives, or some other reason, then B is said to perceive high coercive power in A.

Reward and coercive power share a common characteristic; both are based on perceptions about A’s ability and willingness to provide or withhold positive and negative outcomes. They hinge on the perceived likelihood that A will take, or not take, some action. They also involve A’s control over resources important to B.

**Referent power** is more focused on B’s perceptions of A as a person. This type of power is based on the extent to which B personally identifies with A. If B likes A and perceives a match in personality, values and outlook, it can be said that B perceives high referent power in A.

**Expert power** is based on B’s perception that A has specialized knowledge and is an expert in his or her field. Early in the A-B relationship, B might have no real opinion on A’s expertise. As the relationship progresses and B gains more exposure to A’s knowledge and expertise, B’s regard for A might grow, and with it, perceptions of expert power will grow as well.

**Legitimate power** looks beyond A the person to consider the context surrounding both A and B. With legitimate power, B considers these questions: Does A have a legitimate right to
direct my behavior? To what extent will the organization support A in a disagreement or dispute between A and me? Will taking my grievance about A to the organization do me any good?

Scholarship on instructor power has relied heavily on the five bases of social power described by French and Raven (1959). Examples include Jamieson and Thomas (1974); McCroskey and Richmond (1983); McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, and Kearney (1985a, 1985b); Richmond and McCroskey (1984); Kearney, Plax, Richmond, and McCroskey (1984a, 1984b, 1985); Tauber (1985); Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, and Richmond (1986); Roach (1999); Su and Bao (2001); Mukherjee et al. (2009); Goodboy et al. (2011); Finn (2012); and Finn and Ledbetter (2013).

French and Raven’s (1959) five bases are used in the present study because the study is intended to extend the existing literature. However, it is instructive to review how others have conceptualized power. This review serves as a reminder of the complexity of power as a phenomenon and provides different perspectives on how power dynamics might play out in a classroom. A review also demonstrates how different conceptualizations overlap and how some serve as variations on themes offered by French and Raven.

**Etzioni’s (1961) three general kinds of power.** In Etzioni one can see overlap with the five power bases from French and Raven (1959). Etzioni’s power types are:

- **Coercive power,** which is achieved through threats.
- **Remunerative power,** achieved through control over material resources for services and benefits.
- **Normative power,** achieved through control of symbolic rewards and deprivations.
Table 2

*Dimensions of Student Perceptions of Instructor Power*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power dimension</th>
<th>What the student perceives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>The professor has the ability to punish the student by grading the student down, embarrassing the student in front of other students, withholding support (e.g., reference letter, recommendation for internship), or creating other negative consequences for the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate power</td>
<td>The institution has placed power and authority with the professor and will support him/her in the event of a complaint or dispute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>The professor has the ability to reward the student through grades or by complimenting the student in front of other students, providing support (e.g., reference letter, recommendation for internship), or creating other positive outcomes for the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td>The student identifies with the professor, can relate to him/her, and believes he/she is worthy of respect as a person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>The professor is an expert in his or her field and should be respected for his/her knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Etzioni’s (1961) focus was on the study of organizations and how they function. Looking to establish a basis for the comparative analysis of complex organizations, Etzioni sought to create a definition of compliance. He argued that compliance is present in all social relationships including those involving the exercise of power. He considered compliance to be “a central element of organizational structure” (p. 59). He conceptualized power within the context of organizations where there is a hierarchy and where there is an expectation that some groups within the organization are subject to the power of other groups.

In addition to classifying three kinds of power, Etzioni (1961) identified three kinds of involvement. He then explored the association between types of power and kinds of involvement, labeling these associations compliance relationships. Alienative involvement suggests an intense, combative, and possibly hostile relationship, like what is seen among slaves and masters and prisoners and their captors. Calculative involvement is lower in intensity and can be positive or negative. This kind of involvement is seen in continuous or long-term relationships, both business and personal, where parties have established a pattern of interaction with predictable outcomes. Moral involvement is seen in relationships where the individual has a highly intensive and strongly positive feeling toward the leader. Examples offered by Etzioni include a parishioner in a church or devoted member of a political party. A popular and influential professor is an example relevant to the present study.

Etzioni articulated the relationship between the type of power being employed and the type of involvement most likely to result from this employment of power. His point was that some types of power and some types of involvement are more congruent and therefore are more
likely to occur. For example, a leader who uses coercive power is more likely to encounter alienative involvement. An emphasis on remunerative power is often answered by calculative involvement. The use of normative power is likely to bring about moral involvement.

Returning to Etzioni’s (1961) three types of power—coercive, remunerative, and normative—it is worth noting that he distinguished between two types of normative power. Pure normative power involves the manipulation of esteem, prestige, and ritual. These concepts resonate strongly with the higher education context. Social normative power involves a manipulation of how acceptance and positive responses are allocated. With pure normative power, one can detect ideas like Weber’s (1947) traditional authority and French and Raven’s (1957) legitimate power. Social normative power is also an example of a resource dependency perspective on power.

**Pfeffer & Salancik’s (1978) resource dependency.** This view of power focuses on resources, including which resources are available, who gets access to resources, and how resources are used. It is understood that control over resources is a source of power for organizations and for the individuals within organizations.

If it is to survive, an organization must obtain resources; some of these resources must be acquired from entities external to the organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). This puts the organization in a position of interdependence with these entities. As Pfeffer and Salancik and others have articulated, power is a property of such interdependent relationships.

As resources flow into the organization, they are collected, distributed, and managed by the people within the organization. As a result, another layer of interdependent relationships
develops. These are inside the organization and involve those who control resources and those who need access to resources.

It is important to note that organizations do more than take in and consume resources. They also create resources. Organizations convert inbound resources into products, services, and added value. They use these resources to create opportunities for the people who work there. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) note that in this way, organizations produce their own energy which is itself a resource for which people inside of the organization compete.

Through their analysis of how organizations function in their environments and how they function internally, Pfeffer and Salancik offered a perspective on power based on the idea of resource dependency. The importance of a resource, and its scarcity, are central components in this perspective:

Participants attempt to exchange their own resources, their performances, for more control over the collective effort, and then, they use that control to initiate actions for their own interests. In organizations as in other social systems, power organizes around critical and scarce resources. To the extent participants furnish resources that are more critical and scarce, they obtain more control over the organization. Of course, the determination of what is critical and scarce is itself open to change and definition. Power is, therefore, determined by the definition of social reality created by participants as well as by their control over resources. (p. 48)

Relevant to the present study, a portion of the above passage bears repeating, with emphasis added: “Of course, the determination of what is critical and scarce is itself open to
change and definition. Power is, therefore, *determined by the definition of social reality* created by participants as well as by their control over resources” (p. 48).

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) were not writing about the college classroom and the instructor-student relationship. This perspective on power, however, is relevant to the classroom context and it relates to what was written earlier about the imbalance of power between students and faculty and students and institutions.

Colleges and universities produce resources that are critical and scarce. Examples include, but are not limited to, knowledge, skills, academic and professional credentials, institutional prestige that accompanies credentials, and the approval of professors and administrators who are the gatekeepers of benefits and positive outcomes associated the college experience. These gatekeepers influence how students’ social reality is defined, and they control resources, giving gatekeepers a substantial base for power.

From a resource dependency perspective, there are two primary sources of power: resource importance and discretion over resource allocation. The more important a resource is to someone, the more power likely to be present in the relationship between those who control access to the resource and those who need access. As for discretion, there are four primary sources of control: possession of the resource, access to the resource, control over how the resource is used, and the ability to make rules and regulations governing use of the resource (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Instructors and their administrators possess each of these sources of resource control.
Kelman’s (1961, 1974) three types of social influence. Kelman summarized the three research traditions in the study of social influences: social influences on judgments, social influences in small groups, and social influences in persuasive communications. According to Kelman, there has been some convergence of the three, leading to the development of general principles regarding social influence. Along these lines, Kelman distinguished three processes of social influence. Each one has distinct antecedents which act as a source of fuel for power in the relationship, and each has consequences that result from a person’s responding to the influence (Kelman, 1961, p. 67).

Compliance involves accepting another’s influence in the hope of receiving a favorable reaction from the other. Person A, the person with power—the “influencing agent” in Kelman’s terminology—is in control of the means of compliance while the person seeking to comply, person B, is concerned with the social effect of their behavior. The consequences of compliance for B include falling under A’s observation and demands, as well as experiencing changes in the conditions related to rewards.

Identification involves adopting behavior from another to strengthen one’s relationship with the other. The sources of person A’s power include their attractiveness to B and their ability to spell out role requirements of the relationship. B is concerned with solidifying their position within the relationship. Consequences of identification for B include changes in the importance of the relationship with A and changes in their understanding of what it will take to develop a satisfying relationship.
Internalization involves allowing another’s influence because it is a match with one’s own values. For B, the main concerns are behaving so that their values are aligned with A’s values. A’s power stems from their credibility and their ability to control the means to ends in the relationship. The consequences of internalization for B involve the clarification and/or shifting of their value systems as they try to align their values with those of A and the organization.

Parson (1963) and the four modes of power or influence. Parsons focused on situations where one person uses communication to apply pressure on another person to get results. The person attempting to influence, person A, uses one of four approaches, or “modes of power or influence.” Each mode has two characteristics. The first characteristic is the relative positivity or negativity of A’s approach to communication. A may offer positive consequences or outcomes, negative consequences. The second characteristic is what, exactly, A is trying to influence. Person A might be trying to affect person B’s intentions. Or, A could be trying to control the situation.

Parson’s (1963) four modes are persuasion, inducement, activation of commitments, and deterrence. With persuasion, person A takes a positive approach to influencing person B’s intentions (“this is the right thing to do”). With inducement, A remains positive in trying to control the situation (“it’s to your advantage to do it this way”). Activation of commitments threatens negative consequences to change B’s intentions (“that is the wrong thing to do”). Deterrence, also a negative approach, attempts to control the situation (“it is not to your advantage to do it this way”).
The present study sought to extend an existing literature that relies heavily on the five bases approach offered by French and Raven (1959). The study is based on the premise that the student’s perceptions of instructor power, as operationalized in terms of the five bases, will influence the student’s decision to dissent or not dissent, and will influence the dissenting student’s development of dissent goal and choice of dissent target. The next section of this chapter provides an overview of the early research that conceptualized instructor power and documented some of its effects on students.

**Foundational Research on Instructor Power**

Using French and Raven’s (1959) bases of power, Jamieson and Thomas (1974) surveyed students at the high school (105), undergraduate (61), and graduate (41) levels to explore how students’ perceptions of their teachers’ power influenced how the students handled conflicts with the teacher. The power bases differed across levels of schooling, with coercive and legitimate being the dominate bases at high school and undergraduate, with expert ranking number three. There was a drop in coercive at the graduate level and an increase in expert. Despite these power differences, the scores for conflict styles were consistent across levels.

The five styles measured were accommodating, avoiding, competing, compromising, and collaborating (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Avoiding scored the highest for high school, undergraduate and graduate students. The study also demonstrated that the use of coercive power was shown to have a negative impact on student learning and satisfaction. Coercive power also had a negative impact on the teacher’s influence on students’ out-of-class attitudes and behaviors. The findings by Jamieson and Thomas (1974) that prosocial approaches to power
have positive effects on students while antisocial approaches have negative effects has been replicated in subsequent studies (e.g., Richmond, Davis, Saylor, & McCroskey, 1984; Richmond, McCroskey, & Davis, 1986; Richmond & Roach, 1992).

Richmond (1977) studied opinion leaders and found that their acquisition of information provides insight into how they were able to influence their followers. The opinion leader’s ability to acquire and process information helps to give them what Richmond referred to as an “edge” over other people in an organization or community. This edge is based in expert and referent power. They gain expert power by gathering more information and communicating more effectively than others. They establish referent power through strong interpersonal skills. In a follow up project, Richmond (1980) demonstrated that in a relatively closed system, such as the campus of a residential college, an opinion leader who is seen as having high expertise on a single topic can also serve as an opinion leader on other topics.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Richmond and others engaged in a series of studies of management communication styles in a variety of organizational environments, including business and education (e.g., Richmond et al., 1980). Communication style use by managers was influenced heavily by the management culture and was found to be associated with employees’ satisfaction with supervision. The more employee-centric the communication style, the more satisfied the employees.

Other studies explored the links between the managers’ communication styles and their use of power. Examples include Richmond et al. (1980); Richmond, Wagner, and McCroskey
These studies used the French and Raven (1959) five bases as the conceptualization of power.

Two takeaways from this work are particularly relevant to the present study. The first is that the use of communication styles by a manager influences how subordinates perceive the manager’s use of power. Managers who use a “tell” or “sell” communication style were more likely to be perceived by employees as operating out of coercive, reward, or legitimate power. In contrast, the use of a “consult” or “join” communication style was linked to referent or expert power (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990; Richmond & Roach, 1992). Relationships between power types and communication styles were not, however, consistent across different organizational structures (Richmond & Roach, 1992).

Some organizational structures are more vertical than others. Some organizations are more horizontal in structure, with schools being one example. In some school settings, the supervisor and subordinate are also close colleagues. These studies demonstrated that communication styles help to shape power perceptions. They also highlighted the need for research to be conducted in specific contexts (e.g., the college classroom), since the communication style-power connection cannot be generalized to all situations.

The second take-away is that an organization’s management culture influences the communication styles used by its managers. This underscores the importance of legitimate power. It is possible that the culture of an institution, academic division, and/or academic department could influence the instructor’s behavior toward students and/or the student’s perceptions of the instructor’s legitimate power.
Another area of inquiry worth noting involved the study of behavioral-alteration techniques in the workplace. An important finding from this work was that both supervisors and subordinates attempt to influence each other, even if the latter did not see themselves as making this attempt (Richmond & Roach, 1992). Researchers detected power bases present in attempts at behavior alteration (Richmond et al., 1984; Richmond et al., 1986). One example is the subordinate who tries to persuade the boss by saying, “I’ve tried this approach before and I think it will work.” The subordinate is attempting to use expert power. Another example is the boss who threatens punishment if a directive is not followed, which is a clear example of coercive power.

A key takeaway from this work has to do with prosocial versus antisocial attempts at influence. The research identified behavioral-alteration techniques that negatively influenced the satisfaction of the targets for the techniques. In their summary of this work, Richmond and Roach (1992) point out that negative, or antisocial, techniques were associated with the coercive or legitimate power bases described by French and Raven (1959).

In addition to studying power in organizational settings, scholars pursued what Richmond and Roach (1992) described as a parallel course of research on the differential uses of power in the classroom. The study of power was viewed as a necessary element in the ongoing study of communication in the instructional setting. As Richmond and Roach (1992) put it, “although most teacher job descriptions will not mention it specifically, one must concede that the role of a teacher, almost by definition, involves social influence” (pp. 57-58.). The authors suggest that teachers do not use power for power’s sake, but for “influencing students toward educational
ends” (p. 58). The research that followed picked up on where Jamieson and Thomas (1974) left off.

The Power in the Classroom program of research began with McCroskey and Richmond (1983). This study involved students from seventh grade through college. A key finding was that teachers and students have different perceptions of the teacher’s use of power, with teachers having a more positive view than that of the students. As the authors pointed out, this is not surprising, as most people “tend to view themselves in the best light possible” (p. 59). The point is that this study demonstrated a perceptual difference between teacher and student when it came to power. This pointed to the need to study power from the student’s perspective. They wrote, “it is not the type of power the source actually uses or perceives he or she is using that holds the most sway; rather, it is what the targets perceive the source as using that really is important” (p. 59). To conceptualize power for this study, the authors used the French and Raven (1959) five bases of social power. Subsequent Power in the Classroom studies followed suit.

This program of research also addressed the question of how power use effects students. Another Power in the Classroom study focused on how power use impacts learning. Coercive and legitimate power were negatively associated with cognitive and affective learning while referent and expert power were positively associated (Richmond & McCroskey, 1984). Richmond (1990) examined the communication of power between teacher and student and showed that coercive power was negatively associated with students’ motivation to learn while referent and expert power had a positive relationship with motivation.
Kearney, Plax, Richmond, and McCroskey (1984a, 1984b, 1985) looked at how instructors use influence messages to manage student behavior. The data produced a typology of techniques and messages used to influence student behavior. The five bases from French and Raven (1959) were represented in the typology.

In a pair of studies, McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, and Kearney (1985a, 1985b) explored the degree to which different types of power were used by K-12 teachers and the effect of each power type on cognitive and affective learning. In the first study (1985a), they found that reward, referent, and expert were the most frequently used power types. In the second study, they found that 30% of the variance in cognitive learning and 69% of variance in affective learning was due to power use by the teacher. Coercive and, to a lesser extent, legitimate power was negatively associated with learning while referent and, to a lesser extent expert power were positively associated with learning. No association between reward power and learning outcomes was detected.

In another study of the K-12 classroom, McCroskey, Richmond, Plax and Kearney (1985b) treated two independent variables, behavioral alteration techniques and instructor’s status in terms of having received (or not received) communication training, as influencing the dependent variable student learning. They found that behavioral alteration techniques based in reward power had a positive influence on affective learning while punishment-based techniques were negatively associated with affective learning.

Plax et al. (1986) tested several hypotheses involving students’ perceptions of teachers’ behavioral alteration techniques, nonverbal immediacy, and affective learning. Instructor
“immediacy” is “the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between teachers and students” (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006, p. 169). As in previous studies, this one found that pro-social behavioral alteration techniques have a positive effect on learning outcomes. In this instance, the techniques increased instructor immediacy, which in turn positively impacted affective learning. Immediacy played a moderating role in the relationship between behavioral alteration techniques and learning by strengthening the effect of the former on the latter. Another study, by Kearney, Plax, Smith, and Sorenson (1988) confirmed these results.

**More recent studies using the bases of power approach.** Scholars continue to study the classroom experience through the lens of teacher power. Schrodt, Witt, and Turman (2007) carried out three studies to re-examine the power bases model that has dominated this branch of research (e.g., Roach, 1999). This model includes 20 statements, four for each of the five power types. These statements are used in surveys and/or interviews to solicit student responses that reveal their perceptions of instructor power. The researchers’ intent was to test the model’s ability to represent the latent construct of teacher power. The first two studies supported the researcher’s hypothesis that the model could be improved so that it better represented the latent construct. They proposed a model with 30 statements, six for each power type and labeled it the teacher power use scale (Schrodt et al., 2007). With its 20-item list, four for each power base, the questionnaire for the present study drew more heavily from the power bases model because this was the model employed in previous studies of the relationship between power and instructional dissent (Su & Bao, 2001; Mukherjee et al., 2009; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013).
Power continues to be treated as an influencer that impacts variables other than dissent. Chesebro and Martin (2010) examined how the instructor’s framing of choices for students impacted the students’ perceptions of instructor power. The less flexibility and fewer choices for students in a syllabus, the higher the perceptions of instructor coercive power.

Goodboy et al. (2011) examined a theoretical model explaining the influence of instructor power (i.e., coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, referent) on students’ relational and social influence communication behaviors (i.e., student affinity-seeking strategies, student behavior alteration techniques) across two cultures. Participants were 445 undergraduate students from the U.S. (265) and China (180). Results of structural equation modeling revealed that in the U.S., perceived instructor referent and expert power had indirect effects (mediated by student communication satisfaction), and perceived instructor reward power had a direct effect, on both student affinity-seeking strategies and student behavioral alteration techniques in the U.S. In China, perceived instructor referent and legitimate power had indirect effects (mediated by student communication satisfaction) on both student affinity-seeking and student behavioral alteration techniques, whereas perceived instructor expert and legitimate power had direct effects on student behavioral alteration techniques.

Finn (2012) surveyed 555 college students to study the relationship between students’ perceptions of instructor power and students’ perceptions of how well their instructor understands them, a construct called instructor understanding (Myers & Bryant, 2002). The author found that instructor use of prosocial power bases, such as reward, expert, and referent,
had a positive effect on instructor understanding while the use of antisocial bases, such as legitimate and coercive, had a negative effect.

Finn and Ledbetter (2013) explored the relationship between an instructor’s technology policies and students’ perceptions of teacher credibility; they also wanted to understand the effect that student perceptions of instructor power might have, if any, on this relationship. They surveyed 294 undergraduate students. The clearer an instructor’s technology policies, the higher the instructor’s credibility. Instructors who encourage students to use wireless technology also have higher credibility. The study found that instructors who encourage wireless use are more likely to draw from reward and referent power bases and less likely to draw from the coercive base. Instructors who discourage wireless use tend to draw from legitimate and coercive power bases. The authors found that student perception of instructor power mediated the relationship between student perception of technology policies and student perception of instructor credibility.

Diaz, Cochran, and Karlin (2016) studied the impact of instructor power on perceptions of self-empowerment among students learning English as a second language. They found that coercive and legitimate power had a negative impact on self-empowerment while expert, referent, and reward were positively associated with empowerment.

The Prosocial vs. Antisocial Perspective on Instructor Power

Instructors use many methods to influence students. One approach documented in the literature is behavior alteration. It includes 22 behavioral alteration (BA) techniques. The
techniques are supported with behavioral alteration messages (Kearney, Plax, Richmond & McCroskey, 1985). An example is the technique altruism and its supporting messages, including “If you do this it will help others…Others will benefit if you do it…It will make others happy if you do…I’m not asking you to do it for yourself…Do it for the good of your classmates and friends.”

Researchers have characterized some BA techniques and their associated messages as being prosocial and others as being antisocial. Prosocial techniques and messages contribute positively to the teacher-student relationship while antisocial approaches have the opposite effect (Roach, 1999). An example of a prosocial BA technique is expert teacher and a sample supporting message is, “From what I’ve learned, this is what you should do.” An example of an antisocial BA technique is punishment from teacher with its supporting message, “I will make it miserable for you.”

French and Raven’s (1959) five bases of power are reflected in the 22 BA techniques and their supporting BA messages. The parallels can be seen in certain pairings of BA techniques and power bases. For example, punishment from teacher reflects coercive power while reward from teacher echoes reward power. Teacher modeling, which includes the supporting message, “People who are like me do it,” resembles referent power.

Prosocial BA messages have been associated positively with students’ affective learning and with their perceptions of teacher immediacy (Plax et al., 1986). Immediacy is described as communication behaviors that encourage closeness between two people (Mehrabian, 1967,
Andersen, 1979). Plax et al. (1986) found that prosocial messages increase students’ perceptions of teacher immediacy which in turn leads to gains in affective learning.

With BA techniques and messages reflecting the bases of power, it is no surprise that some power bases have been described as prosocial and some as antisocial. Reward, referent, and expert have been found to be prosocial (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Turman & Schrodt, 2006; Finn, 2012) and coercive and legitimate antisocial (e.g., McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985; Finn, 2012).

Reward power has presented a challenge for scholars, as some studies indicate that it also has antisocial characteristics. Richmond and McCroskey (1984) and Finn (2012) found that, unlike referent and expert power, which positively impacted learning, reward power did not affect learning, either positively or negatively. Finn speculated that this is because students have both positive and negative feelings about instructors’ use of reward power. On one hand, students appreciate being rewarded for good work. On the other, they may associate rewards with a requirement to comply with the instructor’s requests.

When Finn and Ledbetter (2013) studied the mediating effect of instructor power on students’ perceptions of instructor’s technology policies, they concluded that reward and coercion might be related in the mind of a student:

In addition, it should also be noted that teachers’ technology policies could also, in and of themselves, be seen as a type of reward or coercive power. When teachers allow students to use their wireless communication technologies in the classroom, students could perceive this allowance or freedom to be a reward. Thus, students could perceive teachers
who enact encouraging policies to be high in reward power. On the other hand, when teachers prohibit use of wireless communication technologies in the classroom, students could perceive banning wireless communication technology wireless communication technology to be a punishment. Thus, students could perceive that teachers who enforce discouraging policies use more coercive power. (p. 40)

The overlap between reward and coercive power was articulated by Mukherjee et al. (2009) using a familiar analogy. They wrote that reward and punishment power “are typified by stick and carrot, involve the student begrudgingly yielding control to the instructor, which then leads them to exit rather than complain” (p. 1629). As one explanation for their finding of reward power as antisocial, Mukherjee and colleagues referred to Wilkinson (1979), who considered rewards a form of coercive power because they can be offered to promote collaboration or taken away to hand out punishment.

Different classroom scenarios demonstrate how reward power could play out as either pro- or antisocial. For example: A student has concerns about the instructor’s teaching style and the classroom environment. From the prosocial perspective, a student who perceives high reward power could be motivated to engage with the instructor directly and to do so in a constructive manner in the hope of gaining a positive outcome. This conversation could strengthen the instructor-student bond. From the antisocial perspective, the granting and withholding of rewards is seen as a form of coercion. A student who perceives high reward power might decide that to engage directly with the instructor puts at risk future rewards.
It should be noted that not all student-to-teacher communications through rhetorical dissent are going to be positive or even friendly. For example: A student goes to speak with an instructor in their office after class. The conversation is private. The student bluntly describes what the instructor needs to do, and how their approach to teaching should change, in order for the student to do better in class and to improve the overall class experience. This is a textbook case of rhetorical dissent, in terms of both goal and target for dissent, even if the conversation cannot be described as pleasant.

**Scholarly Inquiry into Instructor Power and Instructional Dissent**

Scholarly interest in instructor power and instructional dissent grew from efforts to better understand the teaching and learning process (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). These efforts produced bodies of literature in educational psychology, which focuses on the learner, and pedagogy, which focuses on the teacher. Because learning comes about, in part, through communication between teacher and student, scholars turned to a third field of inquiry, communication studies, for perspectives on how to study the student-teacher relationship. The resulting field of inquiry, instructional communication, occupies a space where pedagogy, educational psychology and communication studies intersect (Mottet & Beebe, 2006).

Mottet et al. (2006) identify two perspectives within the instructional communication literature: rhetorical and relational. The present study draws from both perspectives. From the rhetorical communication perspective, scholars explore how teachers use verbal and nonverbal communication to influence students. The rhetorical model of communication includes a source, a message, and a receiver. The message travels in one
direction, from source to receiver. From this perspective there is an emphasis on studying message content.

The present study is informed by this perspective. The study looks at instructor power, which is conveyed by verbal and non-verbal messages from a source (instructor) to a receiver (student). It also looks at students’ communication of instructional dissent, including the content of those communications.

Another perspective from communication studies is the relational perspective (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). From this perspective, there is a source and a receiver at both ends of the diagram. Communication flows back and forth and meaning is co-created between the two sources/receivers. This perspective is also represented in the present study. Power is an example of a type of meaning that is co-created through a relationship (Hartnett, 1971; Kanter & Stein, 1979). One purpose of the present study is to extend the current literature’s understanding of how this form of co-created meaning, instructor power, impacts a student’s instructional dissent choices.

Scholars exploring the teacher-student relationship found that students often resist teachers’ attempt to influence them and/or gain their compliance (Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984a, 1984b; Kearney & Plax, 1992). The body of work on student resistance is part of the instructional communications literature. Some of these documented forms of resistance are passive and some are active (Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989). Some forms of student resistance are forms of instructional dissent. Consider, for example, direct communication to the instructor, a form of resistance which fits the predominant definition of
rhetorical dissent, which is a rhetorical goal pursued through the upward dissent path. Another form of resistance known as rally student support involves a disgruntled student talking to other students (lateral dissent path) to see if others share their negative feelings about the teacher (expressive dissent goal) and if so, if the others are willing to join them in acts of non-compliance against the instructor.

The study of student resistance, instructional communication, and instructional dissent represents a continuation of the tradition of studying the nature and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, a tradition which originated in the pedagogy and educational psychology fields. The study of power in the classroom is also a continuation of a scholarly tradition. Once scholars recognized that attempts to influence were central to teaching and learning, the desire to understand the nature and impact of these attempts led to further research. Inquiry into the phenomenon of instructional dissent is one example.

**Conceptualizing Instructional Dissent**

Dissent is described as “a constructive attempt to communicate the need for change” (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013, p. 279). Rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful forms of dissent have been identified (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013). The goal of rhetorical dissent is to improve the instructional situation. The goal of expressive dissent is to vent one’s frustrations. Causing reputational harm to the instructor is the goal of vengeful dissent.

The conceptualization of instructional dissent draws from scholarship on organizational dissent (e.g., Hirschman, 1970; Kassing, 1998; Kassing & Avtgist, 1999; Sidelinger, Bolen,
Frisby, & McMullen, 2012); consumer complaining behavior (e.g., Singh, 1988 and 1990; Halsted & Droge, 1991; Blodgett, Hill, & Tax, 1997; Cronin, 2003; Bodey & Grace, 2006; Bunker & Ball, 2009; deMatos, Vargas, Teixeira, & Vieira, 2009) and student complaining behavior (e.g., Blodgett et al., 1997; Su & Bao, 2001; Harrison, 2007; Mukherjee et al., 2009; Hart & Coates, 2010; Lala & Priluck, 2011; Ferguson & Phau, 2012). Each literature has been significantly influenced by the work of Hirschman (1970), making his theory of exit, voice, and loyalty a logical starting point for discussion.

**Exit, voice and loyalty.** Hirschman (1970) concerned himself with the decline of economic, political and social systems. He suggested that any system, no matter how well designed, is prone to lapse from “efficient, rational, law-abiding, virtuous or otherwise functional behavior” (p. 1). As an example, he posited that over time, any given company will see declines in the quality of its output and will begin to disappoint its customers. Customers thus disappointed can stop purchasing that brand; this Hirschman called the “exit” option. Customers also have the option of communicating their disappointment to the company—the “voice” option—or of keeping quiet and remaining loyal to the firm, which he referred to as the “loyalty” option.

Hirschman (1970) considered exit and voice to be “recuperative measures.” Each gives the company an opportunity to recognize its quality problems, address them, and thereby recuperate from the downward slide and get back on track. In keeping with this, he envisioned companies having “alert” and “inert” customers. The hope for any company is that it has both types. Ideally, alert customers make the company aware of problems, either by exiting and/or
exercising voice, while the inert customers continue spending with the firm, buying it time to address the problems.

An important point in Hirschman’s (1970) work is that the availability of exit differs from one situation to the next. Customers weigh the value they receive from a brand against the costs of switching to another brand (Yang & Peterson, 2004). The same holds for college students. Dissatisfied students face the reality that switching to another class mid-semester is impossible, and that switching to another college altogether would be expensive and stressful (Su & Bao, 2001). For them, exit carries too high a cost to be a realistic option.

The availability of voice options also varies based on the situation. Some companies make it easy and convenient for customers to lodge complaints or offer feedback. Some employers do the same, creating channels for employees to raise concerns and offer suggestions. In a study of the perceptions of registered nurses, Spencer (1986) hypothesized that having more voice options available reduces employee turnover. The negative association between number of voice channels and employee turnover rates supported the hypothesis. The study also demonstrated that offering more voice options was associated with problem resolution processes that were more effective and more highly regarded by employees.

There is also variance in the risks and rewards of exercising voice. For example, before pursuing voice at work, employees will consider a) the likelihood of their voice making a difference, b) whether they will be perceived as being constructive or destructive in their use of voice, and c) the likelihood that they will face retaliation (Spencer, 1986).
Hirschman’s (1970) voice-exit-loyalty framework served as a foundation for continuing research into, and discussion of, dissent behavior in economic, political, social, and organizational settings. One important extension of Hirschman’s work was the addition of “neglect” as a fourth element (Farrell, 1983). Individuals exercise neglect when they stay with the organization or entity and express their dissatisfaction through neglectful behaviors, such as tardiness, excessive absences, and slacking off. These neglectful behaviors can be seen in both work and classroom environments.

One branch of the dissent literature focuses on the behaviors of employees within organizations. Within this literature a frequently used approach offers three paths for expressions of employee dissent. These are upward (sometimes called articulated) dissent, lateral dissent, and displaced dissent (Kassing, 1998). With upward dissent, the employee directs their expression of dissent to a supervisor or someone else higher on the chain of command who, presumably, has more power than the dissenter to effect change in the organization. Lateral dissent involves expressing one’s concerns to one’s peers, who are located similarly on the organizational chart and have similar levels of power. Taking a grievance outside the organization, to someone not able to impact the organization (e.g., family and friends), is considered displaced dissent.

The literature on consumer complaining behavior also draws heavily from Hirschman’s (1970) framework. This literature conceptualizes complaining paths that customers may pursue. The paths include voice, private, and third party Singh (1988, 1990). Voice involves consumers complaining to the company, private involves consumers complaining to family and friends, and
third party involves them complaining to an outside entity who may have some leverage over the company.

Concepts from consumer complaining are helpful in describing and explaining some of the actions taken by a dissatisfied college student (Su & Bao, 2001; Mukherjee et al., 2009). The student-instructor relationship, however, is less like the customer-brand relationship and more like the superior-subordinate relationship found in organizations (Brophy, 1983; Richmond & Roach, 1992; Sollitto, Johnston, & Myers, 2013; Myers, 2017).

Like an organization, a classroom is organized around a goal, in this case, student learning (Brophy, 1983). The classroom features a superior-subordinate relationship between instructor and student (Richmond & Roach, 1992). Superiors have the authority to direct the work of others; they engage in downward communication; they articulate policies and procedures; and they evaluate the performance of subordinates (Jablin, 1979). Superiors also are in the position to act as mentors for, and provide leadership to, those who report to them, a role that is also served by instructors to the benefit of their students.

Bolkan and Goodboy (2013), building on research on dissent in organizational settings (e.g., Hirschman, 1970; Sprague & Ruud, 1988; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999; Sidelinger et al., 2012), described student complaints about teachers and/or the classroom experience as a form of “instructional dissent” (p. 279). Citing Sprague and Ruud (1988) and Kassing and Avtgis (1999), they write that dissent is “a constructive attempt to communicate the need for change” (p. 279). The connection being made is that classrooms and other
instructional settings are like organizations and that students occupy a place similar to that of employees. Both settings, the workplace and the classroom, have individuals with goals for dissent who express their dissent to targets situated on dissent paths.

**The Three Types of Instructional Dissent**

For each of the dissent types, rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful (Goodboy, 2011; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013), there is the student’s goal(s) for expressing dissent and the target(s) to which this expression is directed (see Figure 1).

This conceptualization is grounded in qualitative inquiry. Goodboy (2011) asked students to describe their feelings and their behaviors in the classroom. The researcher found that some students were motivated to improve their classroom experience and/or classroom performance and were willing to speak directly with the instructor to make this happen. This approach was conceptualized as rhetorical dissent. Some students reported venting their anger and frustration to other students, family members, and/or friends. This was conceptualized as expressive dissent.

And then there were those students who intentionally tried to inflict reputational or professional harm to their instructor. Most often, these students described expressing their thoughts to others and not directly to the instructor. This was labeled vengeful dissent.

Within the context of instructional dissent, scholars have conceptualized upward dissent as communicating with the instructor or someone else in authority at the institution. Lateral dissent involves communicating with other students, while displaced dissent involves communicating with people not associated with the institution, such as family and friends (Buckner & Finn, 2013; Goodboy & Frisby, 2014).
Studies using the rhetorical-expressive-vengeful dissent model. The rhetorical-expressive-vengeful model for dissent (Goodboy, 2011) has been used to explore the relationship between instructional dissent and variables other than instructional power. Goodboy and Myers (2012) studied the link between a student’s verbal aggressiveness and the student’s likelihood of dissenting and their dissenting behavior. Findings from their survey of 172 undergraduates demonstrated that instructor behavior is not the only independent of student dissent; this student trait, verbal aggressiveness, is also a factor. The researchers used the three categories of dissent—rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful—as the measures of the dissent variable.

Buckner and Finn (2013) explored the relationship between academic locus of control, which is a characteristic of the student, and instructional dissent, using the rhetorical-expressive-vengeful framework. Results from their study with 380 undergraduates suggested that students who have high academic locus of control—that is, they feel a higher sense of control over their instructional experience—are somewhat more likely to pursue vengeful dissent.

Goodboy and Bolkan (2012) used a questionnaire (160 respondents) to examine how students’ conflict styles (i.e., integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising) related to their expression of instructional dissent (i.e., rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful). Students who pursued rhetorical dissent used the compromising, dominating, and integrating conflict styles but not the avoiding style. Students who communicated more expressive, rhetorical, and vengeful dissent were more likely to use the dominating conflict style, but not the integrating or obliging styles.
Goodboy and Frisby (2014) examined if a student’s academic orientation (i.e., academic entitlement, learning orientation, grade orientation, academic locus of control, academic self-efficacy) predicts the student’s use of instructional dissent (i.e., expressive dissent, rhetorical dissent, vengeful dissent). Their study of 222 undergraduates found that “when students were academically entitled, grade oriented, and lacked academic self-efficacy, they communicated more expressive and vengeful dissent, but...when students were learning oriented, they communicated more rhetorical dissent.”

Holmgren and Bolkan (2014) asked 208 university students to recall a situation where they pursued rhetorical dissent with an instructor. Through a combination of open-ended questions and scaled responses, the study measured the student’s perceptions of the justice in their instructor’s response. Students also were asked to report on learning and other classroom outcomes. When students perceived higher levels of justice, they reported more satisfaction with the instructional experience and better classroom outcomes.

As in previous studies, Labelle, Martin, and Weber (2013) used the rhetorical-expressive-vengeful dissent framework as the dependent variable. The influencer variables were students’ perceptions of instructor characteristics (i.e., clarity, nonverbal immediacy, affirming style) and students’ perceptions of their own academic self-efficacy. The study of 244 university students also measured the student’s self-perceived communication behaviors after a disagreement or difference of opinion with the instructor. When students perceive their instructors to be clear, those students are more likely to experience higher self-efficacy and more likely to engage in rhetorical dissent.
The sample \((N = 244)\) was also used in an exploration using attribution theory. Labelle and Martin (2014) used a survey to ask students about a disagreement they had with an instructor. Students were asked questions that measured the extent to which they attributed the instructor’s behaviors to internal factors—that is, internal characteristics of the instructor—or to external factors related to the environment (e.g., the institution). Students also self-reported on their dissent behaviors. Students’ attribution of instructor behavior to internal factors was linked to all three forms of dissent: rhetorical, expressive, and vengeful.

Buckner and Frisby (2015) explored the relationship between an effective instructor behavior known as instructor confirmation and instructional dissent among 381 undergraduates. Instructor confirmation has been shown to discourage students from behaving negatively (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Being responsive to students’ questions and using an interactive teaching style are examples of instructor confirmation behaviors. Such behavior by the instructor was shown to relate positively to rhetorical dissent and negatively to expressive and vengeful dissent.

Vallade et al. (2015) looked at student forgiveness toward the instructor. The authors surveyed 153 university students. Results indicated that an instructor’s actual mistakes or misbehaviors are not as important as the student’s perceptions of those mistakes or misbehaviors. When students perceive higher severity of the mistake or misbehavior, they are less likely to forgive the instructor. They are also less likely to forgive if they perceive that the instructor was to blame for a mistake. Students were more forgiving if the severity and/or instructor’s
blameworthiness was perceived to be low. Forgiveness had a mediating effect on instructional dissent. The more forgiving the student, the less likely they pursued dissent.

Kennedy-Lightsey (2017) examined dissent among 196 university students as a response to students’ feelings of emotional exhaustion. The author found that students dissent “to restore emotional resources or to protect from additional resource drain” (p. 188).

Tatum et al. (2018) explored why students do or do not choose to follow classroom cell phone policies. Results (N = 750) demonstrated that students perceive a threat to their autonomy when the instructor discourages cell phone use for purposes not related to the class. These perceptions of autonomy threat predict student resistance, including instructional dissent.

**Relationship between instructor power and instructional dissent.** Of relevance to the present study are three projects that focused on the relationship between complaining or dissenting behaviors and instructor power. These include Su and Bao (2001), Mukherjee et al. (2009), and Bolkan and Goodboy (2013). An overview is provided in Table 3.

Su and Bao (2001) were interested in the interplay between complaining styles of students and students’ perceptions of instructor legitimate power and instructor punishment power. They surveyed 195 undergraduates. Passive recipients (31% of the respondents) had the highest perceptions of both legitimate and punishment power. These were the students who chose to not complain and/or to switch to another college. Private complainers (44%) told friends, relatives, and other students about their dissatisfaction but did not tell the college; they had high perceptions of punishment power but low perceptions of legitimate power. Voicers, those who complained to the college (25%), had low perceptions of both types of faculty power.
Mukherjee et al. (2009) studied the relationship between students’ perceptions of instructor power and the students’ modes of complaining. They used a questionnaire ($N = 314$) to activate the student’s memory of a past dissatisfying experience, then asked the student to describe their perceptions of instructor power using the five bases of social power, and to describe their complaining behaviors in terms of voice, negative word of mouth, and third party. In their study, voice meant complaining to the instructor; negative word of mouth to students; and third party to the administration, a formal institutional grievance process, and/or posting online. The researchers found that high referent and expert power led to more use of voice and high legitimate power was linked to more use of third party.

Bolkan and Goodboy (2013) conducted a qualitative study of 186 undergraduates, asking them why they withheld rhetorical dissent from their instructors. The most common reasons were related to organizational factors, such as the fear of retaliation and not knowing if their concerns would be received positively.

The present study adds to the body of power-complaining-dissent work established by Su and Bao (2001), Mukherjee et al. (2009) and Bolkan and Goodboy (2013). It extends the instructional dissent literature by providing separate measures for dissent goal and dissent target, providing a more nuanced look at how power impacts each one separately. It also explores the goal-target relationship, which has not received attention in the literature.
### Table 3

Overview of Power-Dissent Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Independent variable(s)</th>
<th>Dependent variables(s)</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Su &amp; Bao (2001)</td>
<td>Instructor power bases (coercive, reward, expert, referent, legitimate)</td>
<td>Student complaining behavior (voice, third party, passive)</td>
<td>Survey of 195 undergraduate college students</td>
<td>K-mean cluster analysis, one-way ANOVA, multiple discriminant analysis</td>
<td>Researchers developed “…empirical taxonomies of student complainers within which students assume similar complaint styles” (p. 50). Findings supported link between power bases and complaining behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukherjee, Pinto &amp; Malhotra (2009)</td>
<td>Instructor power bases (coercive, reward, expert, referent, legitimate)</td>
<td>Student complaining behavior</td>
<td>Survey of 314 junior- and senior-level college students</td>
<td>Correlation analysis and factor analysis</td>
<td>Separate analysis of juniors and seniors in sample found no differences in relationships between variables. Findings supported link between power bases and complaining behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolkan &amp; Goodboy (2013)</td>
<td>Instructor power bases (coercive, reward, expert, referent, legitimate)</td>
<td>Instructional dissent (rhetorical, expressive, vengeful)</td>
<td>Survey of undergraduates from U.S. (265) and China (180)</td>
<td>Structural equation modeling</td>
<td>Findings supported link between power bases and complaining behavior.</td>
</tr>
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Chapter 3: Research Methods

Schram (2003) suggested that social science researchers can take two different views of the world. They can be satisfied with the status quo or concerned about the need for change. These views are not mutually exclusive; most research requires both. The question is, which one will be dominant? For this author’s inquiry, the second perspective, that things could be better, was emphasized. Collaboration between college students and their instructors can be disrupted by conflict. There is room for improvement, and room in the literature for ideas and insights that could foster this improvement.

Rather than claiming or adopting a single research paradigm, Schram (2003) suggests that scholars should seek to connect with one or more paradigms that inform their inquiry and influence their research design. This thought is echoed by Glesne (2006). Drawing from Patton (2002), Glesne writes about the postpositivist paradigm for scholarly inquiry, claiming that researchers cannot know the world with certainty. Knowledge is situated within contexts and all research methods are imperfect, making it advisable to use multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative. Allowing respondents to describe reality in their own words is important, as is generating facts that are good enough to generalize about social behaviors. Consistent with this paradigm, the present study used a survey instrument that activates the respondent’s memories and feelings about a past situation. The first item is a framing question that asks the respondent to recall their most dissatisfying instructional experience. The survey
used scaled responses to measure power perceptions and dissent goals and dichotomous responses to measure dissent targets.

Previous studies measured instructional dissent with survey items that combined dissent goal and dissent target into one measure, instructional dissent. The present study used separate variables for dissent and goal and dissent target, respectively. The research questions pursued were as follows:

RQ 1: Are student perceptions of instructor power associated with rhetorical dissent?
RQ 2: Are student perceptions of instructor power associated with dissent targets?
RQ 3: Is the rhetorical dissent goal associated with dissent targets?

Data Collection and Analysis

Survey participants were undergraduates ages 18 to 29 at a Midwestern university with an undergraduate population of 21,000. After securing approval from the dissertation committee and the university’s human subjects review committee (Appendix A), the author worked with the institutional research and effectiveness office to send email invitations (Appendix B) to 11,500 students to participate in a web survey. The sample selected to receive the survey reflected the total undergraduate population on these dimensions: age, gender, ethnicity, and race. There were 713 responses, representing a 6% response rate.

A key question is, what percentage of the 11,500 students contacted for the survey experienced instructional disappointment? Harrison (2007) surveyed 308 university students and found that one third of them had experienced dissatisfaction with an instructor for which they had pursued some form of resolution. This percentage applied to 11,500 would suggest that 3,795 may have
experienced such a disappointment. If that were the case, the 713 responses for the present study would represent an 18% response rate.

Data was collected using an online survey (Appendix C); the informed consent information is in Appendix D. Respondents were not asked to identify their institution or to provide any identifiable information about themselves or their instructor. These steps were taken because respondents were asked to describe their feelings and actions surrounding instructional disappointment. It was important to ensure that this information cannot be traced back to the respondent’s institution.

Data analysis. The measurement plan is described in Table 4. Power perceptions was a scaled variable treated as independent. These survey items used a Likert-type scale to solicit responses to statements. The response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). There were four items for each type of power. The mean of the four item scores was calculated to produce a single value, between 1 and 7, for each power type. This produced a continuous variable that was used for linear regression with the continuous variable for dissent goal and for logistic regression for the dichotomous variable for dissent target.

Dissent goal was treated as a dependent variable in one set of analyses and as an independent variable in another. Dissent goal was initially captured in the survey as a dichotomous variable: 1 (yes) and 0 (no). There were four questions for each type of goal. These four responses were summed to produce a single score, between 0 and 4, for the rhetorical dissent goal. This produced a continuous variable that was used in linear regression with the
continuous variable for power. This continuous variable for goal was also used in logistic regression with the dichotomous variable for dissent target. In that analysis, goal was the independent variable and target the dependent variable.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Item Scales</th>
<th>Construct Scales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of instructor power</td>
<td>Coercive</td>
<td>Four for each type of power (total of 20)</td>
<td>Likert-type: 1 = Strongly disagree 7 = Strongly agree</td>
<td>Average of the four items for each type of power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reward</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legitimate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissent goal</td>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Dichotomous Yes or No</td>
<td>Total of the four items for dissent goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissent targets</td>
<td>9 targets for dissent expression</td>
<td>Three targets for each of 3 dissent paths (upward, lateral, displaced)</td>
<td>Dichotomous Yes or No (used for logistic regression)</td>
<td>Total of the three items for each dissent path. (used for linear regression)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For dissent target, there were three questions representing each of three dissent paths. Examples include the professor in this class (upward path), another student (lateral path), and non-college friend (displaced path). The questions were dichotomous: 1 (yes) and 0 (no). This variable was treated as the independent in logistic regression with the continuous variables goal and power, respectively. A significance level of $p = .05$ was employed for all regression tests.
The term “instructor” is used throughout this paper because this is the term commonly used in the literature to discuss instructional communication and instructional dissent. Survey items represented in the literature, however, often use “professor” because this is a term that students relate to. The term “professor” was used in the present study’s survey and it appears in this report when discussing that specific survey item. At the end of the survey, an open-ended response item was provided, and respondents were invited to provide comments.
Chapter 4: Results

General Results

There were 713 total responses. Respondents skipped some questions. Responses for individual survey items ranged from a low of N = 630 to a high of N = 693. The survey was sent to undergraduates only. Seventy six percent of respondents have been attending college for five or more semesters, 10% for three to four semesters, and 9% for two to three. The remaining 5% reported being in their first semester.

Eighty five percent of respondents fell into the age range of 18-to-24 years. The remaining 15% were between the ages of 25 and 29. The average age of respondents was 22, compared to 23 for the overall university undergraduate population.

Respondents were asked to record their gender identity. Seventy four percent selected female, 22% male, and 4% other. The university’s undergraduate population is reported as 69% female and 31% male.

The ethnicity/race breakdown of respondents, compared to the university’s undergraduate population, included 80% White (64% of university population), 9% Black/African American (19% of university population), 4% other (11% of university population), 3% Hispanic/Latino (5% of university population), 2% Asian (less than 1% of university population), 1% American Indian/Alaska Native (less than 1% of university population), and 0% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (less than 1% of university population).

Descriptive statistics for the instructor power variable can be found in Table 5. The highest mean score was for legitimate power. Coercive power was next highest, followed by
expert and reward power, respectively. Expert and reward power had nearly identical mean scores. The lowest score was for referent power.

Each type of power was measured with four items; reliability tests produced adequate Cronbach’s alpha values for reward power (α = .75), referent power (α = .71), and coercive power (α = .73); a lower value for legitimate power (α = .60); and an exceptionally low value for expert power (α = .19). Alpha values are in Appendix E.

For the rhetorical dissent goal variable, the mean score was 2.69 on a scale of 0 to 4 (N = 630, SD = 1.26, Var. = 1.6). Respondents identified more strongly with the expressive dissent goal, with a mean of 3.62 (N = 630, SD = .72, Var. = .52). The mean score for the vengeful dissent goal was substantially lower at 0.90 (N = 630, SD = 1.0, Var. = 1.06).

Rhetorical dissent goal was measured with four items (α = .713). Alpha values are presented in Appendix E.

Data on students’ choices of dissent targets are provided in Figure 2. Targets on the lateral and displaced paths make up the top five targets. Thirty-six percent of respondents approached the professor in this class about their concerns. Almost the same percentage (35%)

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate power</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Response scale was 0 to 7.
approached another professor with their dissent, while 20% took the issue to administration. Twelve percent expressed their concerns to a person outside of the institution who was not family or friend, and/or posted to a website that evaluates institutions and/or professors.

Although histograms show deviation from the normal distribution, parametric tests were performed due to the large sample size. Histograms are presented in Appendix F (Figures 8 through 15).

The distributions show very low levels of variance, especially among the lateral and displaced paths. This may explain some of the weak or non-existent findings reported below.

**RQ 1: Are Student Perceptions of Instructor Power Associated with Rhetorical Dissent?**

RQ1 was explored by testing the null hypothesis H1 and the non-directional alternative hypothesis H1a:

**H1:** There is no association between student perception of instructor power as independent variable and student rhetorical dissent goal as dependent variable.

**H1a:** Student perception of instructor power as independent variable is associated with student rhetorical dissent goal as dependent variable.

Linear regression was used to test for these relationships. Each of the five bases for instructor power was tested with rhetorical dissent. Statistics are in Table 6. H1 was rejected and H1a supported for reward, coercive and legitimate power. H1 was supported for expert and referent power.

Reward power was negatively associated with rhetorical dissent. As reward power increased, rhetorical dissent decreased. Coercive power was positively associated with rhetorical
Figure 2. Targets for instructional dissent. This figure provides a breakdown of where survey respondents directed their expressions of dissent.

dissent. As coercive power increased, rhetorical dissent increased. Legitimate power was positively associated with rhetorical dissent. As legitimate power increased, rhetorical dissent increased. Expert and referent power were not associated with rhetorical dissent.

Relationships between instructor power, the rhetorical goal, and upward path dissent targets are visually represented in Figures 3 through 7. These include reward power (Figure 3), expert power (Figure 4), referent power (Figure 5), coercive power (Figure 6) and legitimate power (Figure 7).
Table 6

Statistics for RQ1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical dissent goal (dependent)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R square</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward power as independent</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>-2.023*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power as independent</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power as independent</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive Power as independent</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>3.05**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Power as independent</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.722*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < 001. Linear regression was performed using instructor power as independent variable and rhetorical dissent goal as dependent variable.

RQ 2: Are Student Perceptions of Instructor Power Associated with Dissent Targets?

RQ2 was explored by testing the null hypothesis H2 and the non-directional alternative H2a:

H2: There is no association between student perception of instructor power as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.

H2a: Student perception of instructor power as independent variable is associated with dissent target as dependent variable.

Logistic regression was used to explore the relationship between instructor power as independent variable and dissent targets as dependent variable. With five power bases and nine dissent targets, the analysis involved 45 independent-dependent pairings. These pairings are presented in five different tables, one for each power base (see Tables 7 through 11).
H2 was rejected, and H2a supported, for 16 of the 45 independent-dependent pairings were significant. H1 was supported for the remaining 29 pairings.

Referent power had the highest number of significant pairings (Table 9) with seven of nine pairings being associated. Expert power (Table 8) and reward power (Table 7) each had four of nine pairings test significant. One pairing was significant with coercive power (Table 10). None of the legitimate power-target pairings was significant (Table 11).
Table 7

Statistics for RQ 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reward power as independent and target as dependent</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor in this class as target (upward path)</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>-.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration as target (upward path)</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>-.83*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another professor as target (upward path)</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>-.88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this class as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>-.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in other classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>-.80*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in non-shared classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>-.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-college friends as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>-.105</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>-.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>-.134</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>-.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External people, web sites as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>-.374</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>14.14</td>
<td>-.68***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Logistic regression was performed using reward power as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.
Table 8

**Statistics for RQ 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert power as independent and target as dependent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor in this class as target (upward path)</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration as target (upward path)</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>-.69**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another professor as target (upward path)</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>-.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this class as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>-.70*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in other classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>-.75**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in non-shared classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>-.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-college friends as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>-.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.349</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External people, web sites as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>13.01</td>
<td>-.622***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Logistic regression was performed using expert power as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.
Table 9

*Statistics for RQ 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referent power as independent and target as dependent</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor in this class as target (upward path)</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration as target (upward path)</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>-.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another professor as target (upward path)</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>14.94</td>
<td>-.72***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-.23</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>-.79*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in other classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>-.74***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in non-shared classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td>-.84*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-college friends as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>-.78**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as target (displaced path)</td>
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<td>-.21</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>-.81*</td>
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<tr>
<td>External people, web sites as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>13.56</td>
<td>-.673***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *p* < .05; **p** < .01; ***p** < .001. Logistic regression was performed using referent power as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.
Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coercive power as independent and target as dependent</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor in this class as target (upward path)</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration as target (upward path)</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>-.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another professor as target (upward path)</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this class as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in other classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in non-shared classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-college friends as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>1.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External people, web sites as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. Logistic regression was performed using coercive power as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.*
Table 11

Statistics for RQ 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legitimate power as independent and target as dependent</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor in this class as target (upward path)</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>1.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration as target (upward path)</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another professor as target (upward path)</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this class as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in other classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in non-shared classes as target (lateral path)</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>-.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-college friends as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>-.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>External people, web sites as target (displaced path)</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>-.88</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. Logistic regression was performed using legitimate power as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.

RQ3: Is the Rhetorical Dissent Goal Associated with Dissent Targets?

RQ3 was explored by testing the null hypothesis H3 and the non-directional alternative

H3a:

H3: There is no association between student rhetorical dissent goal as independent variable and dissent target as dependent variable.

H3a: Student rhetorical dissent goal as independent variable is associated with dissent target as dependent variable.
Logistic regression was used to test if the continuous variable rhetorical goal and the dichotomous variable dissent target were associated. Results are presented in Table 12. The null hypothesis H3 was supported, and H3a rejected, for the three upward path dissent targets. H3 was supported for the three lateral paths and three displaced paths.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics for RQ 3</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable (with rhetorical dissent goal as independent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Upward path to this professor</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>.751</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>67.69</td>
<td>2.12***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward path to another professor</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>1.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward path to administration</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>1.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral path to students in this class</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral path to students in shared classes</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<td>1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lateral path to students in non-shared classes</td>
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<td>.052</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Displaced path to non-college friends</td>
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<td>-.074</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>-.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaced path to family members</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>Displaced path to external people, websites</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>-1.79</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>-.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. Logistic regression was performed using rhetorical dissent goal as independent variable and target for dissent expression as dependent variable.
Rhetorical dissent goal was positively associated with each of the three upward path targets, including this professor, administration, and another professor. The strongest association was between rhetorical dissent goal and this professor \( (p < .001, \text{OR} = 2.12) \). The odds ratio statistic, OR, indicates that for every unit of increase in rhetorical dissent, the likelihood slightly more than doubles that this professor will be a target for dissent expression. Rhetorical dissent goal was positively associated with the dissent target administration \( (p < .01, \text{OR} = 1.12) \), indicating that for every unit of increase in rhetorical dissent, administration increases by 12%. Rhetorical dissent goal was also positively associated with the dissent target another professor \( (p < .05, \text{OR} = 1.19) \), indicating a 19% increase in another professor for every one-unit rise in rhetorical dissent goal.

Rhetorical dissent goal was not associated with any targets on the lateral and displaced paths. These included the lateral path targets of students in this class, students in shared classes, and students in non-shared classes, and the displaced path targets of non-college friends, family members, and external others and/or websites.

**Mapping of Significant Relationships**

Figures 3 through 7 provide a visual representation of the associations that serve as the focal points for this study. These include associations between each of the five power types and the rhetorical dissent goal. As previously stated, the rhetorical goal was associated with only the upward path targets of this professor, another professor, and administration; these targets are represented in Figures 3 through 7. The figures also capture relationships between the five power types and these three dissent targets.
Figure 3. Significant associations for reward power. This figure maps significant relationships involving reward power, rhetorical goal and upward path targets.
Figure 4. Significant associations for expert power. This figure maps significant relationships involving expert power, rhetorical goal and upward path targets.
Figure 5. Significant associations for referent power. This figure maps significant relationships involving referent power, rhetorical goal and upward path targets.
Figure 6. Significant associations for coercive power. This figure maps significant relationships involving coercive power, rhetorical goal and upward path targets.
Figure 7. Significant associations for legitimate power. This figure maps significant relationships involving legitimate power, rhetorical goal and upward path targets.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Rhetorical dissent has been described as the student communicating directly to the instructor with the hopes of improving the instructional experience and/or their performance in the class. The present study’s findings support this model for rhetorical dissent. The rhetorical dissent goal was positively associated with the upward path target, *this professor* (Table 13).

The present study also extends the existing literature by demonstrating that students with the rhetorical dissent goal do not limit their dissent expressions to the instructor in the class. The present study found associations between the rhetorical dissent goal and the other two upward dissent targets: *administration*, and *another professor* (Table 13).

The study did not, however, find associations between the rhetorical goal and other dissent targets. There were no associations between this goal and any student targets on the lateral path, or between this goal and displaced path targets, including *friends*, *family*, and *external others and/or websites*. These findings support the prevailing understanding that rhetorical dissent involves expression in an upward path direction.

Instructor Power and Instructional Dissent

Previous studies did not measure dissent goal as one variable and dissent target as another. Those studies did, however, use survey items that incorporated meanings which could be interpreted as dissent intentions or goals.

For example, the Su and Bao (2001) survey asked participants to respond to the item, “Speak to friends or relatives about the bad feeling.” This item suggests an expressive goal (i.e., sharing one’s feelings) and one or more dissent targets (i.e., friends and relatives). The item “Go
to the educator’s office to voice a direct complaint” implies a purpose for complaining, as does the item “Write a letter to a higher level of administration to voice a complaint.” The item “Convince friends or relatives not to use the service in the future” also sounds like a dissent goal, in this case vengeful.

Examples from the survey used by Mukherjee et al. (2009) include “Complain to the professor via email,” “Complain to other students face to face,” “Talk to an administrator about the issue,” and “Post a negative comment to an online chat room.” These survey items do not articulate a goal, but they all contain elements of a problem or challenge, through the use of the words ‘complain’, ‘issue,’ and ‘negative comment.’ So again, there are elements of a dissent goal imbedded in the survey items.

By teasing goals and targets out of existing survey items and treating them as separate variables, and testing them with instructor power, the present study extends previous work on instructor power and rhetorical dissent. What follows is a discussion of the results from the present study related to each of the five bases of instructor power.

**Reward power and rhetorical dissent.** Significant relationships involving reward power, the rhetorical goal, and upward dissent targets are mapped in Figure 3. Reward power was negatively associated with rhetorical dissent goal. Su and Bao (2001) and Mukherjee et al. (2009) did not measure dissent goal but they did measure instructor power and dissent targets. Mukherjee and colleagues found no relationships between reward power and dissent targets.
Su and Bao (2001) and the present study both found the relationship to another professor to be negative. The same is true for the relationship to administration. Su and Bao also found a negative relationship between reward power and this professor, while the present study found no relationship. One possible explanation for the differences could lie in the variables used for analysis. As discussed previously, Su and Bao, and Mukherjee et al. (2009), used survey items that combined dissent goal and dissent target while the present study used separate variables for goal and target, respectively.

A key finding in the present study is reward power’s negative association with the rhetorical dissent goal and its negative association with the upward path targets administration \((p < .01)\) and another professor \((p < .05)\) (Table 13). These results indicate that a professor who emphasizes reward power might push some students away from upward path targets.

It is possible that reward power has this effect because it is coercive in nature. As already mentioned, previous authors have expressed this view. Examples include Wilkinson (1979) and Mukherjee et al. (2009). As these and other scholars have found, individuals perceive that a reward is something that can be given, withheld, and even taken away. This can be perceived as coercive.

**Expert power and rhetorical dissent.** Significant relationships involving expert power, the rhetorical goal, and upward dissent targets are mapped in Figure 4. Results involving expert power should be viewed with caution because the items used to measure this power type produced an unacceptably low Cronbach’s alpha value of .19.
While Su and Bao (2001) found no associations between expert power and dissent, Mukherjee et al. (2009) found that expert power was positively associated with this professor as dissent target. Students who perceived their professor to have high levels of expertise were more likely to dissent directly to that professor. The present study found no relationship between expert power and the target, this professor. In addition, the present study found no relationship between expert power and another professor as target.

One respondent in the present study typifies this finding. In the survey’s open-ended comment field, the respondent wrote, “My professor is a professional in his field, but the way in which he presented the information was very ineffective for learning and testing. For exams, I had to re-teach myself, spending less time studying the information.” This respondent did not express dissent to this instructor, administration, or another instructor. The respondent did communicate with targets on the lateral and displaced paths.

**Referent power and rhetorical dissent.** Significant relationships involving referent power, the rhetorical goal and upward dissent targets are mapped in Figure 5.

While Su and Bao (2001) found no relationships between referent power and dissent, Mukherjee et al. (2009) did. Referent power was positively associated with this professor and negatively associated with another professor. The present study detected a negative relationship between referent power and another professor. This indicates that students who identify with their professor might be hesitant to take their issue with the professor to another instructor.

One respondent, who did not express dissent to any of the targets on the upward path, but did express to other paths, wrote:
The professor I had in mind during this survey, she was a very nice woman and I liked her a lot. She wanted all of us to succeed, however…if there was a question on something, she would not fully clarify what we can do to fix it. The class was way harder than it should have been. She needed to step back and see that her way of teaching wasn’t teaching anyone in the class and (was) just making assignments harder than they should be.

**Coercive power and rhetorical dissent.** Significant relationships involving coercive power, the rhetorical goal, and upward dissent targets are mapped in Figure 6. Findings by Mukherjee et al. (2009) and the present study are consistent when it comes to coercive power and dissent targets: No significant relationships were detected. The only significant relationship in the present study was that between coercive power and the rhetorical goal. This association was positive, suggesting that perceiving high coercive power encourages students to develop a rhetorical dissent goal.

Does this mean that professors should emphasize coercive power? Not necessarily. As previously discussed, coercive power has been associated with negative educational outcomes. And the Su and Bao (2001) study found results to support the avoidance of coercive power.

Su and Bao (2001) used the term “punishment power” rather than “coercive power” in their study. They did this because they found through factor analysis that reward power and coercive power loaded on the same factor. They combined the two into punishment power. They found that punishment power was one of two power types—the other being legitimate power—that explained differences in students’ selection of dissent targets.
They organized dissent targets into categories. In the *voice* category, students targeted the instructor, the department head or someone else in a position of authority. This mirrors the upward path used for the present study. Su and Bao (2001) found that students who pursued voice had low perceptions of punishment power. For example, as punishment power increased, instructor as target decreased, and vice versa: A lowering of punishment power resulted in a raising of instructor as dissent target.

*The coercive nature of reward power.* The rhetorical dissent goal was associated with reward power and coercive power, but in ways that could be considered counterintuitive. Reward power was negatively associated with the separate variable rhetorical dissent goal. One possible explanation is that reward power possesses elements of coercion. The offering of rewards comes with it the possibility that rewards might also be withheld, which can be perceived as a form of punishment (Su & Bao, 2001). This rationale, however, is not consistent with another finding in the present study, that coercive power was positively associated with the rhetorical goal. If both reward and coercive power are similar, in that each offers the possibility of something good being provided or withheld, shouldn't the reward-rhetorical relationship and coercive-rhetorical relationships be similar?

It is possible that these results point to the difference between the withholding of a benefit or positive outcome and the inflicting of a penalty or negative outcome. The former, which aligns with reward power, might lead a student to conclude that it is best to "leave well enough alone." Why put a potential future benefit at risk?

The latter, which aligns more with coercive power, might intensify a student's desire to
address the instructional situation. Perhaps these students adopt a "fight fire with fire" attitude when it comes to addressing their instructional concerns. There is ample evidence in the student resistance literature to suggest that antisocial behavior by instructors can lead to antisocial responses from students (Myers, 1999; Chory & Goodboy, 2010). Perhaps students who perceive coercive approaches by an instructor respond in kind, similar to the student in the Bolkan and Goodboy (2013) study who said, “I started rebelling in class and did the same thing she was doing.”

**Legitimate power and rhetorical dissent.** Significant relationships involving legitimate power, the rhetorical goal, and upward dissent targets are mapped in Figure 7. The present study found a positive relationship between legitimate power and the rhetorical dissent goal. Legitimate power was positively associated with the target this professor. This differs from Su and Bao (2001); they found that students who voiced their concerns to the instructor had low perceptions of legitimate power. Their findings supported the idea that students would avoid direct engagement with the instructor if they believed that the instructor had authority granted by the department and/or institution and that the instructor would be supported in a dispute.

The present study’s results suggest that students who perceive high legitimate authority recognize that appealing to the department or institution will be ineffective and that they have a better chance at resolution if they try direction interaction with the instructor, rather than trying go over the instructor’s head.
Legitimate power was the most highly perceived power among respondents in the present study. Their open-ended responses describe perceptions that shape students’ thoughts about what the literature refers to as legitimate power:

Respondent 1:

This professor had tenure, so it was no use trying to get her in trouble, so all I could do was tell all my friends and family to not take her class.

Respondent 2:

I think students are afraid to go to a higher-up because their message won't be heard. There is little a student can do. If I went to complain about how terrible this professor was, I would worry that they would think I just wasn't trying hard enough or following rules correctly.

Respondent 3:

Administration did not respond when I requested assistance with communicating with the professor. It was not resolved. I believe I was given a B when I might have only earned a C for the semester. It was a confusing time.

Respondent 4:

By making a big deal out of it I would not have accomplished anything, especially because I do not have the qualifications to disagree formally.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

This study supported previous findings indicating that student perceptions of instructor power are associated with student instructional dissent behaviors. The study extended the existing literature by expanding the understanding of rhetorical dissent. It did this by measuring dissent goal and dissent target as separate variables, creating an opportunity to explore previously unexamined relationships involving power-goal and goal-target. This led to the finding that students with rhetorical goals for dissent express their dissent to targets in addition to the instructor for the class. Taken within the context of previous scholarly work, the study’s findings support a series of observations that build on the body of knowledge about instructional dissent and instructor power.

College students are more than willing to express their feelings about the instructional experience. Respondents in this study identified with the expressive dissent goal more strongly than they did with the rhetorical or vengeful goals. On a scale of 0 to 4, the mean scores for dissent goal were 3.62 for expressive, 2.98 for rhetorical, and 0.89 for vengeful, respectively. This finding might be related to an increasing number of students seeing themselves as customers and/or having a sense of academic entitlement. Whatever the reason for the finding, it presents a challenge for instructors and their institutions: how to encourage more students to adopt a more rhetorical, and less expressive, mindset about instructional discontent.

College students are more likely to express their dissent to individuals who are not positioned to address their concerns. Just over one-third of respondents in the present study
expressed their dissent to *this professor* or to *another professor*; 20% expressed to *administration*. The most popular targets were on the lateral path—*students in this class* (91%)—
and on the displaced path, including *family members* (89%) and *non-college friends* (78%). Again, the challenge for instructors and administrators is to steer more students toward the instructor and other upward path targets for dissent.

This does not mean steering them away from other targets on the lateral or displaced paths. It is highly unlikely that students are going to abandon a behavioral pattern that is quintessentially human and as old as higher education itself, that of complaining to students, family, and friends about a class. The best that can be hoped for is that through intentional efforts by instructors and institutions, more students would add upward path targets to their selection of recipients for their dissent expression.

College students who use the upward dissent path are of particular value to instructors and institutions. Hirschman (1970) used the term *voicer* to describe someone who raises their concern about an organization to someone within the organization who has the authority to address the matter. By staying with the organization and voicing their concerns, these individuals are demonstrating a level of loyalty to the organization. He posited that this is one reason why voicers are of great value to an organization. They buy the organization time to fix a problem before large numbers of others exit the organization without complaining.

The problem is, voicers represent the smallest percentage of customers in most industries (Cronin, 2003; Barlow & Møller, 2008). The same holds for higher education, as demonstrated
by Su and Bao (2001) and the present study. As in business, most disappointed students tell everyone but the person(s) in a position to address their concerns.

Care should be taken with the use of reward power if the goal is to encourage students to develop rhetorical dissent goals and pursue the upward dissent path. In this study, reward power was negatively associated with rhetorical dissent goal, meaning that as reward power increased the rhetorical goal decreased. It was also negatively associated with another professor and administration as dissent targets. These results could be explained by previous findings suggesting that reward power is coercive in nature. Rewards can be offered and withheld; the latter may feel like punishment. It is possible that students who perceive high reward power sense some level of risk in engaging with a person of authority, such as an administrator or another professor. The risk is that the instructor in the class is made aware of this dissent expression and as a result, the student’s access to future rewards will be impacted.

Coercive power’s positive association with rhetorical dissent goal raises questions. There was no association between coercive power and any dissent target. Coercive power was, however, positively associated with the rhetorical dissent goal. This raises the question, why would students who perceive high coercive power more strongly identify with the rhetorical goal? Is it possible that some students want a better instructional situation and also wish to punish the instructor?

Student perceptions of legitimate power reflect power imbalance. In the present study, legitimate power was the most strongly perceived of the five power bases. This finding supports the notion of a power imbalance between students and their institutions.
Some students demonstrate an approach to self-checking their thinking about their instructional concerns. One respondent wrote:

I haven’t had a terrible experience with any of my professors. I tend to do well in classes and being proactive is beneficial to both students and teachers. When I do complain it is often to make myself feel better or vent, not because a teacher is failing to do their job.

Another stated, “This professor was condescending, which prompted me to reach out and ask another professor and other students in the class what they thought.” Another commented, “In most cases I vent in order to gauge if how I am feeling is justified with classmates.”

Three others expressed regret about not approaching the instructor. First, “My issues with the professor were raised by other students in class. Looking back, I wish I had added my thoughts, but felt the others’ were just fine at the time.” Second, “I do regret not discussing my issue with this professor.” And third, “I know I should have verbalized my issues directly to my professor and I do that now and it is more productive!”

**Encouraging Constructive Approaches to Dissent**

These findings emphasize the need for instructors and institutions to encourage more students to pursue approaches to dissent that promote the instructor-student relationship. This means encouraging students to develop rhetorical dissent goals, to talk to their instructor or to other upward dissent targets, and to engage in prosocial behaviors. The current literature on instructor power and instructional dissent and the findings in the present study support the following recommendations:
1. **Instructors can draw more from the prosocial power bases of expert and referent power and less from the antisocial bases of reward, coercive, and legitimate.** Doing so will discourage students from pursuing less constructive approaches to dissent and are likely to discourage student incivility. As one respondent described it, “I feel like some professors are really approachable and some aren’t. If I can tell that the teacher thrives on student success, I am more apt to approach them with my concerns.”

2. **Instructors can create a classroom environment that welcomes student feedback early in, and throughout, the semester.** This can be accomplished by frequent check-ins with the full class, giving those who are comfortable doing so the chance to share their thoughts in front of the class. Another approach is the mid-semester evaluation, which is conducted anonymously. Instructors could also be intentional about making themselves available to students before and after class for one-on-one conversations and could actively solicit their feedback. A third option is to include language in the syllabus that encourages students bring their concerns and questions directly to the instructor. “What we need is a system that shows more immediate response,” one respondent wrote. “The anonymous surveys at the end of each semester are definitely better than nothing, but we as students don’t get to see the results of our concerns because they take so long to go through the system.”

3. **The institution can provide a means for students to submit their complaints and concerns.** The key is to lower the personal cost, in terms of time and energy, so that more students will be willing to document their concerns with someone who is positioned to
address the matter. One option is an easy-to-use online reporting system that is widely publicized among students and faculty.

4. **The process for responding to complaints can include a step for encouraging the student to pursue rhetorical dissent with the instructor.** There is a risk that the system described in #3 will encourage students to bypass their instructors and take the easier and less confrontational route of submitting a report through email or a webpage. One way to reduce this risk is to build into the process a mechanism that facilitates student-teacher interaction. For example, the report form could include an item that asks the student if they have communicated with their instructor about the concern and, if the answer is ‘no’, provide an explanation as to why not. This item could be required; the form cannot be submitted unless it is filled out. When the complaint report handler responds to the student, the first order of business is to talk about why the student did not attempt to address the matter with the instructor directly. There may be an opportunity to then facilitate rhetorical dissent. The student receives coaching and direction on how to approach the matter. The instructor is briefed on the situation. The student gives direct communication a try. If this does not resolve the matter, additional procedures need to be in place to pursue resolution.

5. **The institution’s procedure for resolving complaints and concerns can be balanced and fair.** When backed by appropriate policies and administered by people with
appropriate training, such a process can be fair to all parties involved and can strike a balance between the rights of students and the rights, and authority, of the faculty.

6. **Instructors and academic or student services administrators who handle student instructional complaints would benefit from an orientation to the three types of instructional dissent.** Faculty and administrators can work together to encourage rhetorical dissent when they see it. Some students might have a rhetorical goal but choose to pursue it with an administrator or another professor. This is an opportunity to collaborate in an effort to facilitate a constructive student-instructor interaction. These same individuals can work together to address expressive and vengeful dissent behaviors in those instances where the behaviors are apparent (e.g., social media posts) or brought to the instructor’s or administration’s attention. Some expressive and/or vengeful dissent behaviors may rise to the level of a student code of conduct violation and will need to be addressed through that process. In some instances, there might be an opportunity to redirect the student toward a more rhetorically-oriented approach to resolution.

7. **Instructors and academic and student services administrators would benefit from learning more about the bases of social power and how they are manifested in college and university settings.** Exploring social power heightened the author’s awareness and understanding of the student-instructor relationship and of institutional dynamics, culture, and politics. These bases of power are a factor everywhere on campus where individuals attempt to use influence to share the thinking and behaviors of others.
Awareness of this phenomenon can make for more effective instructors and administrators.

8. **Students would benefit from education and awareness-building on how best to handle instructional disappoints and concerns and conflicts with the instructor.**

Instructional dissent starts with the student, with their expectations for the instructional experience and their perceptions about the actual experience. If they receive information about what to do when their expectations are not met, there is a chance that some of them will pursue the more constructive routes to instructional dissent. One respondent in the present study offered this suggestion: “Students will complain about anything if they are tired and stressed out. Meditation should be encouraged for students who feel overwhelmed.”

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

Like any study, this one had limitations. One limitation relates to the demographic profile of the sample. The population that received an invitation to take part in the survey was representative of the overall student population terms of age, gender, and race/ethnicity. In the resulting sample of students who completed the survey, some groups were under represented and some were over represented.

Female students make up 69% of the university’s undergraduate population and made up 74% of survey respondents. Males are 31% of the population and were 22% of respondents.

White students account for 64% of the population and represented 80% of respondents. Black/African American students account for 19% of the population and 9% of respondents.
There are opportunities to explore the role of each factor, age, gender, and race/ethnicity, in the development of the rhetorical dissent goal.

Another limitation has to do with the institutional setting for students who completed the survey. Like previous studies of power and dissent, this one involved university students. In this study they were undergraduates at a public university in the Midwest. Other projects have studied undergraduates in the U.S. Northeast and West, and in Western Canada. Future studies could involve students at private colleges, two-year institutions and in other higher education contexts.

In addition, future studies could explore how a student’s length of time in school impacts the development of the rhetorical dissent goal. Are first-semester students more or less likely to develop this goal? What about students in their second, third, fourth, or fifth (and beyond) semesters? Might there be a difference in goal development based on how much time and experienced the student has in the classroom?

Also, it is important to note that there are many sources of student discontent (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2013), and some are viewed as being more severe than others. Perceived severity of a problem has been shown to influence how students respond to the problem (Iyer and Muncy, 2008). This study did not ask respondents to quantify the severity of the factor(s) that led them to dissent. In attempt to bring some level of consistency to the frame of reference across respondents, each was asked to recall a very dissatisfying instructional experience and to provide answers based on that experience. It is realistic to assume that there was variety among respondents concerning their internal scales for measuring severity of a problem or concern.
There is an opportunity with future research to explore the influence of severity on dissent choices.

The present study focused only on students who developed dissent goals and then acted on them. It did not address power’s impact on those students who choose to not express their dissent.

While other scaled items used to measure the power and goal variables produced acceptable alpha values of .60 or higher, the measures for expert power did not (α = .19). These four items should be revisited before being applied to another study. The items, adapted from previous studies, one item from Gaski (1986), *Students respected this professor’s judgment*, and three items from Mukherjee et al. (2009), including *Students received good advice from this professor, This professor is intelligent, and Students did not know as much as this professor*. The last item was reverse coded for analysis.

One of the four items, *This professor is intelligent*, directly measures the respondent’s assessment of the instructor. Two items ask the respondent to assess other students’ perceptions (*Students respected this professor’s judgment* and *Students did not know as much as this professor*) and the fourth item asks about other students’ experiences (*Students received good advice from this professor*). It is possible that focusing solely on the respondent’s perceptions of the instructor would improve the reliability of these items as a measure of expert power. For example, the other three items could be reworded: *I respected this professor’s judgment, I am confident that I would receive good advice from this professor, I did not know as much as this professor.*
And finally, the present study treated dissent goal as a variable separate from dissent target. The study focused specifically on rhetorical dissent, and on its relationship with perceptions of instructor power and on targets for dissent. Future studies could explore the expressive dissent goal and the vengeful dissent goal in the same manner. And there are opportunities to explore dissent goal’s relationships with other variables that may have an influence on the development of such goals.

Such lines of inquiry would add to a body of literature that is especially relevant now. Instructors and their institutions are under pressure to educate students who see themselves as customers and bring to campus a sense of entitlement. By grounding their response in the latest knowledge of instructional dissent, instructors and their institutions will situate that work within the context of instructional communication and ensure that their focus remains on improving the educational process.
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*Management Communication Quarterly, 12*(2), 183.


Appendix A

Approval letter from University Human Subjects Review Committee

UHSRC Determination: EXEMPT

Date: September 26, 2017

To: Martin Glenn Heator
Eastern Michigan University

Re: UHSRC: # H20170820-1
Category: Exempt category 2
Approval Date: September 26, 2017

Title: An exploration of college students’ perceptions of instructor power and students’ goals and paths for instructional dissent

Your research project has been determined Exempt in accordance with federal regulation 45 CFR 46.102. UHSRC policy states that you, as the Principal Investigator, are responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of your research subjects and conducting your research as described in your protocol.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please submit the Human Subjects Study Completion Form.

Modifications: You may make minor changes (e.g., study staff changes, sample size changes, contact information changes, etc.) without submitting for review. However, if you plan to make changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a Human Subjects Approval Request Form and obtain approval prior to implementation.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects or change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an Event Report form.

Follow-up: If your Exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project. Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office. Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
University Human Subjects Review Committee
Appendix B

Email to university students inviting them to participate in online survey

TO:

FROM: mheator@emich.edu

SUBJECT: Responses needed for student dissatisfaction survey

I am a doctoral student conducting research on how students respond to dissatisfying classroom experiences. The survey takes 10 minutes or less to complete and is completely anonymous. Your institution of enrollment will not be identified and no personally identifiable information is requested.

Take the survey here:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/student_dissatisfaction_survey
Appendix C

Survey questions

1. Think about a time when you were VERY dissatisfied with a professor in a class. It might have been over testing, grading, assignments, teaching style, classroom policies, lack of feedback from the professor, lack of effort by the professor, group members slacking or some other concern. Did you communicate your concerns directly to this professor?  _Yes  _No  _Not sure
2. Did you communicate your concerns to the administration?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
3. Did you communicate your concerns to another professor?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
4. Did you communicate your concerns to students in this class?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
5. Did you communicate your concerns to students you shared other classes with?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
6. Did you communicate your concerns to students you shared no classes with?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
7. Did you communicate your concerns to non-college friends?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
8. Did you communicate your concerns to family members?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
9. Did you communicate your concerns?  Yes  _No  _Not sure
10. Did you post your concerns to a website, or share your concerns with someone outside of the college who isn’t family or friend, such as an attorney?  Yes  _No  _Not sure

(Questions 1 through 10 adapted from Kassing, 1998; Buckner & Finn, 2013; Goodboy & Frisby, 2014).

11. How long was this experience with this instructor?  _past month  _past six months  _past year  _more than a year ago.
12. What did you hope to accomplish by communicating your concerns?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissent type</th>
<th>Item number</th>
<th>SURVEY RESPONSE ITEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>12a</td>
<td>I wanted to make sure that I got the best grade possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>12b</td>
<td>I wanted the professor to know what he/she needed to do for me to succeed in the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>12c</td>
<td>I wanted to make the class experience better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>12d</td>
<td>I wanted to know what I could do to succeed in the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>12e</td>
<td>I wanted to feel better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>12f</td>
<td>I wanted to find out if I was the only one who felt this way about the professor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>12g</td>
<td>I wanted to get my frustrations off my chest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>12h</td>
<td>I wanted to talk about my concerns with someone else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vengeful</td>
<td>12i</td>
<td>I wanted everyone to know how bad this professor is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vengeful</td>
<td>12j</td>
<td>I hoped my professor might get fired because of my criticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vengeful</td>
<td>12k</td>
<td>I wanted to ruin my professor’s reputation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vengeful</td>
<td>12l</td>
<td>I wanted to get my professor in trouble.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Questions 12a through 12l adapted from Goodboy, 2011; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2013)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power dimension</th>
<th>Item number</th>
<th>POWER PERCEPTIONS</th>
<th>Question adapted from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>This professor rewarded good work.</td>
<td>Comer, 1984; Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>This professor did not recognize student achievement.*</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>This professor gave credit where credit is due.</td>
<td>Comer, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Students are rewarded for complying with this professor.</td>
<td>Schrodt et al., 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>This professor would ensure that something bad would happen to a student if the student did not comply.</td>
<td>Schrodt et al., 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>This professor was overly critical of students.</td>
<td>Comer, 1984; Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>This professor was not a disciplinarian.*</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>This professor was strict.</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Students respected this professor’s judgment.</td>
<td>Gaski, 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Students received good advice from this professor.</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>This professor is intelligent.</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Students did not know as much as this professor.*</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>I admired this professor.</td>
<td>Comer, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>I personally identified with this professor.</td>
<td>Comer, 1984; Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>I couldn’t care less what this professor thought of me.*</td>
<td>Gaski, 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>This professor was likeable.</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate power</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Students had to comply with this professor because it was a rule or expectation of the department.</td>
<td>Schrodt et al., 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate power</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Students had to comply with this professor because it was a rule or expectation of the institution.</td>
<td>Schrodt et al., 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate power</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Students do not have an obligation to accept the orders of this professor.*</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate power</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>This professor had the right to tell students what to do.</td>
<td>Mukherjee et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reverse-coded
33. For how many semesters have you attended college? _This is my first semester _2-3 semesters _4-5 semesters _More than 5 semesters.


35. What is your gender identity? _Female _Male _Other _Prefer not to answer.

36. What is your ethnicity? _Hispanic/Latino _Non-Hispanic/Latino _Prefer not to answer.

37. What is your race? _American/Alaskan Native _Asian _Black/African American _Hawaiian/Pacific Island _White _Other _Prefer not to answer.

38. Thank you for taking my survey. Use this space to provide additional information or comments.
Appendix D

Histograms

Figure 8. Reward power histogram.
Figure 9. Coercive power histogram.
Figure 10. Expert power histogram.
Figure 11. Referent power histogram.
Figure 12. Legitimate power histogram.
Figure 13. Rhetorical dissent histogram.
Figure 14. Expressive dissent histogram.
Figure 15. Vengeful dissent histogram.
Appendix E

Coercive power scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.732</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Legitimate power scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.600</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Informed Consent:

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. These questions concern student perceptions of their college faculty and how students respond when they are dissatisfied the instructional experience. The purpose of this survey is to help the researcher measure students’ attitudes toward complaining about their instructional disappointment and students’ perceptions of the professor’s behavior.

I do not anticipate that taking this survey will contain any risk or inconvenience to you. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. The survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

All information collected will be used only for my research and will be kept confidential. There will be no connection to you specifically or to your college in the results or in future publication of the results. Results will be presented in aggregate form.

Once the study is completed, I would be happy to share the results with you if you desire. In the meantime, if you have any questions please contact:

Marty Heator  
Doctoral student researcher  
Eastern Michigan University  
mheator@emich.edu  734-462-4604

or

Dr. James Berry  
Faculty Advisor  
Department of Leadership and Counseling  
Eastern Michigan University College of Education  
jberry@emich.edu  734-487-0255

Additionally, if you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write:

Chair, University Human Subjects Review Committee  
Eastern Michigan University  
202E Boone Hall  
Ypsilanti, MI 48107  
734-487-3090

By clicking YES, you consent that you are willing to answer the questions in this survey and that you are willing to have your responses processed as described above. You must click ‘yes’ in order to take the survey.