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## **Student Misbehaviors, Instructor Responses, and Connected Classroom Climate: Implications for the Basic Course**

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The development of classroom environments that optimize the educational experience for students has been the focus of considerable research (e.g. Chory, 2007; Fraser, Teagust, & Dennis, 1986; Myers & Rocca, 2001; Schaps, Lewis, & Watson, 1997). Within this wide-ranging body of work, one goal of instructional communication researchers is to discover communication-related factors that affect the college classroom climate. Scholars continue to call for more research and instruments that focus on the kinds of communication behaviors that create a positive climate in the college or university classroom (e.g., Myers, 1995; Lippert, Titsworth, & Hunt, 2005). This goal is especially important for instructors in the basic communication course because many students enroll in this course at the beginning of their college careers. The basic course therefore provides an enhanced opportunity for instructors to help students experience social support and connection, thereby increasing the potential for their well-being and success.

While much of the literature on classroom climate has focused on teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that enhance a positive and supportive climate

(e.g., Myers, 1995; Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994), recent work on “classroom connectedness” emphasizes the role of students in the creation of the classroom atmosphere. *Connected classroom climate*, defined as “student-to-student perceptions of a supportive and cooperative communication environment in the classroom” (Dwyer, Bingham, Carlson, Prisbell, Cruz, & Fus, 2004, p. 5), places students’ communication behaviors at the center of classroom climate inquiry.

A review of previous studies on connected classroom climate suggests that two assumptions are fundamental to the concept. One assumption is that student-to-student connectedness is desirable; the other is that a connected classroom climate is created through the supportive and cooperative communication behaviors of students in a class. In support of the first assumption, two studies have found student perceptions of connectedness in the basic course to be associated with desirable educational outcomes, including reduced communication anxiety among public speaking students (Carlson, Dwyer, Bingham, Cruz, Prisbell, & Fus 2006) and increased cognitive and affective learning (Prisbell, Dwyer, Carlson, Bingham, & Cruz, 2009).

Research examining the second assumption has been supported by positive correlations found between the behavioral items which compose the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI) and responses to global items measuring feelings of connection, friendliness, and liking among students in a class (Dwyer et al., 2004). That is, students who report engaging in the communication behaviors which compose the CCCI, such as praising and supporting one another, showing cooperation, sharing stories, and engaging in small talk

(Dwyer et al., 2004), also tend to report global feelings of connectedness with the students in their class.

If positive, supportive communication behaviors by students are associated with perceptions of a connected classroom climate, it should follow that negative and destructive student behaviors or misbehaviors (Plax, Kearney, & Tucker, 1986; Royce, 2000) are detrimental to classroom connectedness. However, the role that these student incivilities may play in detracting from or undermining a connected classroom climate has not been investigated. To further explore the assumption that student behaviors shape a connected classroom climate, this study examines the association between connected classroom climate and student misbehaviors.

Positive and supportive behaviors by instructors also appear to be related to students' sense of connection with other students in their class. Specifically, previous research has found that students' perceptions of a connected classroom climate are associated with the instructor's use of verbal and nonverbal immediacy (Bingham, Carlson, Dwyer, Prisbell, Cruz, & Fus 2004). In contrast, negative and unsupportive instructor behaviors may weaken students' perceptions of a connected classroom climate. Specifically, the ways instructors respond to student misbehaviors in the classroom (e.g., Cooper & Simonds, 2007; Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991) may be associated with student perceptions of student-to-student connectedness.

A third and previously unacknowledged assumption in the literature on connected classroom climate is that individual students in a class may perceive the connectedness between students differently. Even though it is assumed that a connected classroom climate is created

through the communication behaviors of students in a class, individual students may interpret those behaviors differently and draw varying conclusions about the climate. Therefore, it is important to treat individual students, in addition to entire class sections as units of analyses when examining this variable.

In an effort to learn more about the behaviors that are associated with and may undermine a connected classroom climate in the basic course, this study explores associations between students' perceptions of classroom connectedness, student misbehaviors, and instructor reactions to student misbehaviors.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RATIONALE

### *Student Misbehaviors*

Disruptive behaviors by students in a class may detract from a positive classroom climate. For example, Royce (2000) identified 23 student "incivilities," including behaviors such as arriving late to class, letting cell phones go off, and making vulgar comments in class (Royce, 2000). Kearney, Plax, and McPherson (2006) described such incivilities and misbehaviors as "things students say or do to impede learning" (p. 236). According to Kearney et al. (2006), "[J]ust one or two students who misbehave can substantially impact the classroom culture or environment" (p. 236).

Researchers (Bellon, Doek, & Handler, 1979; Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989; Plax & Kearney, 1999; Plax, Kearney, & Tucker, 1986; Richmond, Wrench, & Gorham, 2001) have classified student misbehaviors in terms of being either active or passive. Richmond et al.

(2001) classify student behaviors as negative and active to include examples such as cheating, coming to class unprepared, asking counterproductive questions, using inappropriate language, challenging instructors or questioning their credibility, and making unusual noises. They further classify behaviors as negative and passive to include examples such as sleeping in class, apathy, reading the school newspaper in class, and listening to music. Although all these behaviors may be viewed as intentionally negative, some of them may be unintentional such as looking at one's watch, looking down during a lecture, or rustling of papers (Richmond, et al., 2001).

Researchers also have suggested a number of reasons why students misbehave. For example, students may desire attention, want to rebel against classroom policies, have a need to release psychological energy or exhibit apathetic behavior, and overtly refuse to comply with the instructor's request (Richmond, et al., 2001). Students may also engage in an uncivil manner because they have observed their teachers engaging in misbehaviors (Boice, 1996).

To date, student misbehaviors have typically been measured in instructional communication research using hypothetical scenarios as a stimulus for student perceptions (e.g., scenarios depicting a student who sits passively in class; counter-productive challenges to a teacher) (Plax, Kearney, & Tucker, 1986). A review of the instructional communication literature on student misbehaviors suggests that an instrument measuring student perceptions of student misbehaviors in an actual classroom is not available. Research using a self-report instrument to measure student perceptions of

misbehaviors occurring in actual classroom interactions is needed to increase the ecological validity of the research.

### ***Instructor Intervention in Student Misbehaviors***

The manner in which instructors intervene in student misbehaviors appears to play a role in the development of a positive classroom climate. For over 30 years, instructional researchers have studied how teachers respond to student misbehaviors in the classroom and have conventionalized the interventions in many ways. The goal of such research is to help instructors “establish and maintain positive teacher-student relationships,” and thus “facilitate academic growth while creating a positive environment conducive to learning” (Cooper & Simonds, 2007, p. 204).

The literature on classroom management suggests how teachers should intervene in student misbehaviors and the outcomes of those interventions. Classroom management refers to instructor behaviors that “produce high levels of student involvement in classroom activities, minimal amounts of student behaviors that interfere with the teacher’s or students’ work, and efficient use of instruction time” (Emmer & Evertson, 1981, p. 342). It appears that effective classroom management is conducive to a positive classroom atmosphere, whereas ineffective classroom management promotes a negative environment in the classroom. When classrooms are managed well, students have high levels of cognitive, affective and behavioral learning, high affect for the teacher, and good interpersonal communication skills (Richmond, et al., 2001). On the other hand, poor

classroom management results in negative reactions by students. Specifically, students respond with misbehaviors and challenges when teachers do not communicate classroom rules and expectations in ways that students clearly understand (Simonds, 1997).

Considerable research has examined the specific ways instructors influence students, especially the techniques and messages teachers use to influence students and manage their misbehaviors. One prominent line of research identified a final typology of 22 behavioral alteration techniques (BATs) and representative behavioral alteration messages (BAMs) that are used by instructors (McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond & McCroskey, 1984). These studies found a significant relationship between instructors' use of particular BATs/BAMs and affective learning among students. Pro-social BATs and BAMs were positively associated with affective learning, whereas anti-social BATs and BAMs were negatively associated with affective learning. Similarly, other researchers distinguish between instructors' use of confirming and disconfirming behaviors. Confirming behaviors (e.g., endorsement, recognition, acknowledgment) are believed to help students respond positively to teacher influence whereas disconfirming behaviors (e.g., rudeness, belittling, embarrassing remarks) do not help students respond positively (Ellis, 2004).

Kounin (1977) queried how teachers handled student misbehaviors and found that it can have a ripple effect on other students. He reported those instructors who display "with-it-ness" (awareness of classroom behaviors), overlapping (capability of doing several tasks



at once), momentum (ability to keep the pace of the class moving), and group alerting (ability to keep all students focused on the class) experienced fewer misbehaviors in their classrooms.

Cooper and Simonds (2007) urge teachers not to react to student misbehaviors with anger. Instead, Good and Brophy (2002) advise teachers to employ simple nonverbal and verbal interventions when a student misbehaves by: (1) establishing eye contact and nodding, (2) pointing or gesturing (e.g., put fingers to lips), (3) moving close in proximity to the student, and (4) asking a question or calling on the student for a response. The instructor should always try to maintain appropriate degrees of immediacy (Boice, 1996).

In contrast, when teachers respond with aggression or hostility to student misbehaviors, the effect on the classroom environment is likely to be harmful. Teacher misbehaviors have been categorized into three dimensions: incompetence (e.g., gives unclear, boring, not up-to-date lectures, gives unfair tests, or uses poor grammar), indolence (e.g., arrives late, deviates from syllabus, or is disorganized and unprepared), and offensiveness (e.g., uses sarcasm, put downs, or verbal abuse) (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991; Kelsey, Kearney, Plax, Allen, & Ritter, 2004). It is the dimension of offensiveness that may be most associated with a negative classroom atmosphere. Offensiveness includes mean, cruel, and ugly communication toward the students that could impact perceptions of classroom climate. Offensive teachers humiliate students. They may yell out of anger and are verbally abusive, rude or sarcastic, especially in response to student misbehaviors.

Not all instructors are familiar with the research or have been trained in how to successfully respond to students who misbehave in class. Classroom management training (CMT) has been advocated by many to help instructors learn to intervene positively in student misbehaviors. When instructors decide in advance on how to respond to student misbehaviors, there is less instructional time spent dealing with disruptions (Evertson & Harrison, 1992; Orenstein, 1994). Meyer (2005) reported that when classroom management training, including reacting immediately and firmly to disruptions, is a part of new college instructor preparation programs, instructors find fewer instances of student misbehaviors and have more confidence to manage them.

In summary, previous research on connected classroom climate suggests that the communication behaviors of students and their instructors shape students' sense of connection with other students in their courses. Less is known, however, about the kinds of behaviors that may impede students' perceptions of student-to-student connectedness. The literature on student misbehaviors and teacher responses to student misbehaviors suggests that negative and anti-social behaviors by students and teachers are associated with a negative or harmful classroom environment. These same kinds of behaviors may weaken students' perceptions of student-to-student connectedness. In an effort to learn more about the behaviors that may contribute to or undermine classroom connectedness, this study explores associations between students' perceptions of a connected classroom climate, student misbehaviors, and instructor reactions to student misbehaviors.

We propose the following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the relationship between student perceptions of student misbehaviors and student perceptions of a connected classroom climate in the basic course?
- RQ2: What is the relationship between student perceptions of teacher responses to student misbehaviors and student perceptions of a connected classroom climate in the basic course?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were 542 undergraduate students (230 males, 308 females, 4 missing data) at a large Midwestern university enrolled in 30 total sections of the basic public speaking course (maximum enrollment of 25 students per section). Since this course fulfills a general education oral communication requirement, a wide variety of majors were represented. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 35 with a mean age of 19.66 and *SD* of 2.57. Respondents represented a cross-section of class rankings (320 freshmen, 123 sophomores, 65 juniors, 20 seniors, and 14 missing data).

The course used a standard syllabus as well as the same textbook and student workbook in all the sections. All students were required to deliver at least four formal speeches, engage in classroom activities, and take two exams. Instructors were given a course manual that included weekly lesson plans, class policies, and additional instructional training materials.

## ***Procedures***

Packets of instruments containing the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI) (Dwyer, et al., 2004), 12 items measuring student misbehaviors (Table 1 has the scale items in abbreviated form), 12 items measuring instructor responses to student misbehaviors (Table 2 has the scale items in abbreviated form), and demographic items (gender, age, year in school) were distributed to the students during the last two weeks of the semester by their instructors. All questionnaires were completed during class time. Instructors read a script that assured students of confidentiality and invited them to voluntarily participate in a research project that would ultimately help professors improve instruction in the basic course. Students were asked to answer the questions in reference to their present public speaking class and instructor. Students placed the instruments in an envelope which the instructor returned to the basic course director.

## ***Instrumentation***

*Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI).* The CCCI is an 18-item Likert-type instrument (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*) measuring students' perceptions of student-to-student behaviors and feelings that create a supportive, cooperative classroom environment. Sample items include, "The students in my class are supportive of one another," "The students in my class cooperate with one another," and "The students in my class respect one another." Research has found the CCCI to be a unidimensional scale with a high

overall reliability of  $\alpha = .94$  and evidence of validity (Carlson et al., 2006; Dwyer et al., 2004).

*Student Misbehaviors.* Student misbehaviors were measured with 12 items adapted from the works of Kearney, Plax, Sorensen, and Smith (1988) and Richmond, Wrench, and Gorham (2001) who had created general categories of misbehaviors based on qualitative data. We used these categories as the basis for developing survey items measuring perceptions of student misbehaviors. Participants responded on a Likert-type scale, including 1 = almost never (or never), 2 = infrequently, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently, and 5 = almost always (or always) (see Table 1 for abbreviated survey items).

*Teacher Response to Student Misbehaviors.* Teacher response to student misbehavior items were developed based on descriptive terms abstracted from classroom management literature (e.g., Boice, 1996; Good & Brophy, 2002; Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). The 12 items included appropriate and inappropriate ways to manage classroom behavior (see Table 2 for abbreviated survey items). Students responded using a scale of 1 = almost never (or never), 2 = infrequently, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently, and 5 = almost always (or always) (see Table 2 for abbreviated survey items).

## RESULTS

Factor analyses and item analyses were performed on the student misbehavior items (Table 1) and the teacher response to student misbehavior items (Table 2). Factor analysis of the student misbehavior items re-

sulted in a 2-factor scale, with each factor composed of five items. Two items were eliminated because they did not meet the .60 - .40 criterion (McCroskey & Young, 1979). Similarly, factor analysis of the teacher response to student misbehavior items resulted in a 2- factor scale, with each factor consisting of five items. One item was eliminated because it did not meet the .60 - .40 criterion; another item was eliminated because it had the lowest loading of the remaining items and was conceptually ambiguous.<sup>1</sup>

Principal components analyses indicated that the two factors in each of these two scales could be combined to obtain overall scores for student misbehaviors and for teacher response to student misbehaviors. Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, principal component extraction loadings, and factor loadings after varimax rotation for the Student Misbehavior Scale items; Table 2 presents the same information for the Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale items.

For the Student Misbehavior Scale, total scores ranged from 10 to 38 ( $\mu = 15.36$ ,  $SD = 4.33$ ). The two factors in the scale were *inconsideration* (Eigenvalue = 3.70, 37.03% of the variance, range 5 to 21,  $\mu = 9.64$ ,  $SD = 3.46$ ) and *harassment* (Eigenvalue = 1.78, 17.80% of the variance, range 5 to 19,  $\mu = 5.72$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ). For the Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale, total scores also ranged from 10 to 38 ( $\mu = 21.01$ ,  $SD = 5.83$ ). The two factors in the scale were *constructive interven-*

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<sup>1</sup> The ambiguous factor leadings for the original item, "My instructor uses humor to minimize and stop the student misbehavior" may be due to the ability of an instructor to use humor in either constructive or offensive ways.

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Table 1  
Items, Means, Standard Deviations, Principal Components from Factor Analysis,  
and Varimax Factor Loadings of the *Student Misbehavior Scale*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Principal Component <i>Extraction</i> <i>Loadings</i>	Varimax Rotation	
				<i>Factor 1</i>	<i>Factor 2</i>
Students in my class engage in ...					
<u>1.</u> physical disruptions...	1.09	.41	.37	.05	.61
<u>2.</u> verbal disruptions...	1.18	.51	.51	.16	.70
<u>3.</u> teacher challenging...	1.27	.61	.48	.25	.65
<u>4.</u> harassment disruptions...	1.08	.37	.67	.07	.82
5. passive disruptions...	1.74	.86	.56	.71	.25
6. leave-taking disruptions...	2.01	.96	.61	.78	.07
7. time-taking disruptions...	2.07	.94	.58	.76	.08
8. side-conversation disruptions...	1.93	.94	.55	.72	.16
<u>9.</u> ethical disruptions...	1.11	.42	.58	.13	.75
10. inattentive disruptions...	1.90	.88	.56	.74	.12

<sup>1</sup>Factor 1 was labeled *Inconsideration* and contains the non-underlined, unbolded question numbers;  
Factor 2 was labeled *Harassment* and contains the underlined, bolded question numbers.

Table 2  
 Items, Means, Standard Deviations, Principal Components from Factor Analysis,  
 and Varimax Factor Loadings of the *Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Principal Component Extraction Loadings	Varimax Rotation Factor Loadings <sup>1</sup>
				<i>Factor 1</i> <i>Factor 2</i>
My instructor ...				
<u>1.</u> points out student misbehavior...	3.20	1.38	.57	.75    .10
2. uses verbal aggression...	1.52	.90	.39	.13    .61
<u>3.</u> politely asks...to stop...	3.68	1.33	.62	.79    -.05
4. embarrasses the student...	1.27	.59	.60	-.03    .78
5. threatens to punish...	1.28	.63	.47	.12    .68
<u>6.</u> approaches...silently...	2.12	1.24	.36	.60    .02
<u>7.</u> makes sustained eye contact...	2.56	1.29	.56	.72    .22
8. nonverbally displays frustration...	1.67	.95	.43	.26    .60
<u>9.</u> calls on...to participate...	2.49	1.24	.52	.69    .19
10. yells or raises voice...	1.17	.52	.48	-.02    .69

<sup>1</sup>Factor 1 was labeled *Constructive Intervention* and contains the underlined, bolded question numbers;  
 Factor 2 was labeled *Offensive Intervention* and contains the non-underlined, unbolded question numbers.



tion (Eigenvalue = 3.12, 31.19% of the variance, range 5 to 25,  $\mu = 14.09$ ,  $SD = 4.66$ ) and *offensive intervention* (Eigenvalue = 1.87, 18.74% of the variance, range 5 to 20,  $\mu = 6.92$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ).

Reliability for the overall Student Misbehavior Scale was  $\alpha = .80$ ; the *inconsideration* factor,  $\alpha = .81$  and the *harassment* factor,  $\alpha = .75$ . Reliability for the overall Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale was  $\alpha = .75$ ; the *constructive intervention* factor,  $\alpha = .77$  and the *offensive intervention* factor,  $\alpha = .67$ . For the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI), reliability was  $\alpha = .94$ , range 18 to 90,  $\mu = 70.95$ ,  $SD = 9.96$ .

We examined our research questions in two ways. Initially we analyzed the data using the individual student as the unit of analysis. Then, because the data were collected using an intact class design, we used the class section as the unit of analysis to reduce statistical dependency in the sample. When class section was the unit of analysis, class averages were computed for all the variables and these averages were used in the analyses. Tables 3 and 4 report the results used to answer the research questions as well as correlations between the Student Misbehavior Scale, the Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale, and their factors.

Table 3 presents the Pearson product-moment correlations using the individual student as the unit of analysis between the CCCI; the Student Misbehavior Scale and its two subscales, Inconsideration and Harassment; and Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale and its two subscales, Constructive Intervention and Offensive Intervention. Classroom connectedness (CCCI) was *negatively* correlated with Student Misbe-

Table 3  
 Pearson Correlations between Classroom Connectedness (CCCI); Student Misbehavior Scale—Total, *Inconsideration* Factor, and *Harassment* Factor; and Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale—Total, *Constructive Intervention* Factor and *Offensive Intervention* Factor (unit of analysis = individual student; N=542)

CCCI	Student Misbehavior Scale		Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale	
	Total	Inconsideration	Harassment	Total
CCCI	1.00	-.27**	-.18**	.07
<i>Student Misbehavior Scale</i>				
Total	1.00	.93**	.66**	.11*
Inconsideration		1.00	.35**	.10*
Harassment			1.00	.08
<i>Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale</i>				
Total				1.00
Constructive Intervention				.92**
Offensive Intervention				1.00
				.16**
				-.13**

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

Table 4  
 Pearson Correlations between Classroom Connectedness (CCCI); Student Misbehavior Scale—Total, *Inconsideration* Factor, and *Harassment* Factor; and Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale—Total, *Constructive Intervention* Factor and *Offensive Intervention* Factor (unit of analysis = individual class section; N=30)

CCCI	Student Misbehavior Scale			Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale		
	Total	Inconsideration	Harassment	Total	Constructive Intervention	Offensive Intervention
CCCI	1.00	-.46*	-.34*	-.16	-.07	-.26
<i>Student Misbehavior Scale</i>						
Total	1.00	.93**	.48**	.31*	.13	.52**
Inconsideration		1.00	.13	.21	.11	.33*
Harassment			1.00	.33*	.10	.64**
<i>Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale</i>						
Total				1.00	.93**	.75**
Constructive Intervention					1.00	.45**
Offensive Intervention						1.00**

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

havior total score ( $r = -.27, p < .001$ ), the Inconsideration factor ( $r = -.25, p < .001$ ), and the Harassment factor ( $r = -.18, p < .001$ ). The CCCI was not significantly correlated with the Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior total score, but was *negatively* correlated with the Offensive Intervention factor ( $r = -.13, p = .003$ ) and *positively* correlated with the Constructive Intervention factor ( $r = .16, p < .001$ ).

Table 4 reports the Pearson product-moment correlations between all of the variables in the study using the class section as the unit of analysis. The CCCI was *negatively* correlated with the Student Misbehavior total score ( $r = -.46, p < .05$ ), the Inconsideration factor ( $r = -.38, p < .05$ ), and the Harassment factor ( $r = -.34, p < .05$ ). The CCCI was not significantly correlated with the Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior total score and was not significantly correlated with the Offensive Intervention factor or the Constructive Intervention factor.

## DISCUSSION

This study extends the research on classroom climate and student-to-student connectedness by exploring one of the assumptions underlying the concept of connected classroom climate. Previous work supports the assumption that a connected classroom climate is created through the supportive and cooperative communicative behaviors of students in a class (Dwyer, et al., 2004). The present study queries this assumption by examining its inverse. That is, if positive and supportive communicative behaviors constitute a connected class-

room climate, then negative and destructive misbehaviors may undermine it.

Our findings support the assumption that negative and destructive behaviors by students do undermine perceptions of student-to-student connectedness. We found that student perceptions of inconsiderate and harassing student misbehaviors are inversely related to classroom connectedness. Specifically, students' perceptions that the students in their class engage in *inconsiderate* misbehaviors such as passive disruptions (e.g., coming to class unprepared), leave-taking disruptions (e.g., making book bag sounds), time-taking disruptions (e.g., arriving late for class), side-conversation disruptions (e.g., whispering to another student during a lecture), and inattentive disruptions (e.g., ignoring or not turning in assignments) are inversely related to student perceptions of classroom connectedness. We also found that student perceptions that their classmates engaged in *harassing* misbehaviors such as physical disruptions (e.g., throwing things), verbal disruptions (e.g., using foul language), teacher challenging disruptions (e.g., asking counter productive questions), harassment disruptions (e.g., making vulgar, racist, or sexist comments), and ethical disruptions (e.g., lying or cheating) are inversely related to their perceptions of a connected classroom climate. These results were obtained both when the individual student and the class section were used as the unit of analysis.

We also investigated instructor responses to student misbehaviors in relation to classroom connectedness. Previous research on connected classroom climate suggested that student perceptions of verbal and nonverbal teacher immediacy are positively associated with per-

ceptions of student-to-student connectedness (Bingham et al., 2004). This suggests the possibility that certain instructor behaviors may enhance the development of connectedness among students in a class. In the present study, we further investigated this possibility by examining the relationship between instructor responses to student misbehaviors and connected classroom climate. We reasoned that if positive instructor behaviors are positively associated with student-to-student connect- edness, then negative or offensive instructor behaviors might be inversely related to this variable.

Regarding whether the manner in which instructors intervene in student misbehaviors makes a difference in student perceptions of classroom connectedness, our findings were inconsistent. Using the individual student as the unit of analysis across sections of the course, we found that student perceptions of *offensive* interventions by their instructor (e.g., embarrassing the student, yelling, making threats, verbal aggression, and nonverbal displays of frustration) were weakly correlated inversely with student perceptions of classroom connect- edness while student perceptions of *constructive* inter- ventions by the instructor (e.g., pointing out the misbe- havior, asking the student to stop, making sustained eye contact, calling on the student to participate, and silently approaching the student) were weakly corre- lated positively with student perceptions of classroom connectedness. However, these results were not sup- ported when the class section was used as the unit of analysis. Thus, the constructive or offensive nature of an instructor's intervention in student misbehaviors could possibly be a key to understanding the relation- ship between instructor intervention and student per-

ceptions of classroom connectedness, but this relationship needs further investigation and confirmation.

### ***Pedagogical Implications for the Basic Course***

These findings have implications for basic course instructors and basic course directors. Student misbehaviors do occur in basic course classrooms (Meyer, et al., 2007) and the frequency with which they occur is related to student perceptions of a connected classroom climate. In addition, perceptions of increased connected classroom climate in the basic course have been related to desirable educational outcomes including reduced communication anxiety (Carlson, et al., 2006) and increased cognitive and affective learning (Prisbell, et al., 2009). Consequently, instructors need to consider how to reduce student inconsideration and harassment misbehaviors in their classes and how to positively respond to them when they do occur. While our findings do not definitively show whether the nature of a teacher's response to student misbehaviors is associated with connected classroom climate, it is still important for instructors to manage student misbehaviors effectively.

Meyer, et al. (2007), who qualitatively examined graduate teaching assistants' (GTAs) concerns for managing student misbehaviors as well as typical student misbehaviors they face, call for classroom management training (CMT) to be an integral part of GTA training programs. They suggest that CMT for GTAs in basic course programs should target three areas, including (1) the use of videotapes (to demonstrate student misbehaviors and ineffective and effective reactions), (2) official campus guest speakers (to recommend campus poli-

cies and procedures for handling student misbehaviors), and (3) training packet handouts (to explain possible student misbehaviors, advice on appropriate management of the incivilities, and literature related to the instructional communication concepts).

We echo the recommendation from Meyer, et al. (2007) that basic course directors need to include increased focus on CMT in GTA training programs. We also recommend offering CMT in workshops for adjuncts and instructors. GTAs and instructors alike want to be effective classroom teachers and classroom managers; CMT may help them foster a classroom climate that is conducive for student learning. Incorporating CMT into instructor workshops would also help basic course directors, who, for assessment purposes, are increasingly asked by their universities to maintain consistency in instruction across all sections in a basic course. CMT can promote consistent responses to student misbehaviors and continued use of behaviors that may enhance the classroom climate.

All basic course instructors and GTAs need a plan for handling student misbehaviors so that they do not respond with anger, frustration, and ridicule, or use other negative verbal or nonverbal behaviors that contribute to perceptions of diminished classroom connect- edness. We make the following suggestions to instruc- tors based on communication and educational scholar- ship (Boice, 1996; Cooper & Simonds, 2007; Emmer & Evertson, 1981; Evertson & Harrison, 1992; Feldman, 2001; Good & Brophy, 2002; Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991; Kearney, Plax, & McPherson, 2006; Kear- ney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984; Kearney, Plax, Sorensen, & Smith, 1988; Kounin, 1977; Rich-



mond, Wrench, & Gorham, 2001; Sorcinelli, 1994; Thompson, 2007). These suggestions can serve as basic guidelines for new instructors or as starting points for dialogues about responding to student misbehaviors among new and seasoned instructors:

1. Develop a personal communication response plan to follow when a student behaves in an inconsiderate or harassing way. For example, walk a bit closer to the student, point to your lips or shake your head, ask a question, or use humor. For minor disruptions, any of these responses will often diffuse misbehaviors.
2. If misbehaviors continue, call the student by name. Using a courteous, kind, and respectful manner and remaining as calm as possible, ask the student to stop the misbehavior. Try not to take the misbehavior personally and never respond in an angry or disrespectful way. Point out the misbehavior and the classroom expectation the student is violating. Explain how the misbehavior affects you and others, using “I” and “Our” terms. Ask for a verbal commitment from the student to change the behavior (e.g., “Will you please stop talking while others are speaking?”) and if needed, explain the consequence (e.g., “If you continue to talk while others are speaking, you will be asked to leave the room”). Lastly, thank the student for changing the behavior and continue with your instruction in a calm way.
3. For serious disturbances with students who engage in violent actions or emotional outbursts, look to your college administration or department for a specific plan and guidelines. For example, you could go to the nearest phone or departmental office and

ask the secretary to call campus security and/or student affairs. You could take a break from the class and ask another faculty member to come to your class. If you are in your office, do not stay alone with a student who you believe could behave in a violent manner.

4. Read the instructional communication literature on student misbehaviors, teacher misbehaviors, effective use of BATs and BAMs, teacher immediacy, instructor perceived caring and effective classroom management techniques (such as those discussed in this article) so that you understand and can apply the concepts.
5. Convey in your syllabus and clearly explain during the first days of class all expectations and policies for considerate student behavior, how the policies will benefit students, and possible consequences for misbehaviors (e.g., students who engage in side conversations or who allow a cell phone to sound in class will lose points on their next assignment).
6. Try not to engage in teacher misbehaviors such as incompetence, offensiveness, and indolence. These misbehaviors precipitate student misbehaviors. Instead, focus on your students, come prepared to class, and teach in a way so that your presentational style is interactive, dynamic, expressive, and motivating.
7. Use a variety of instructional activities so that all learners with various learning styles have an opportunity to learn in a variety of ways.
8. Display immediacy and caring to your students. Know their names and use them. Maintain appro-

priate eye contact with each student during class, smile, and use an open body position, close proximity, and nodding.

9. Use pro-social BATs and BAMs (e.g., “It will help you to find a good job or to prepare for future assignments or classes,” “You are capable, you can do a good job,” “The class depends on you and you have to do your share of the work”).
10. Ask students for feedback and respond to their feedback (e.g., “How am I doing?”) They may tell you what will help them learn.

In addition to these recommendations for handling student misbehaviors, basic course instructors should continue to focus on ways to give students opportunities to develop a sense of connectedness. Based on the CCCI items that measure student perceptions of a connected classroom climate, basic course instructors should continue to incorporate instructional strategies that encourage students to engage in small talk, share stories, support and praise one another, take part in class discussions, and communicate mutual respect.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

Results from this study were obtained using participants in multiple sections of a basic public speaking course. A question of interest is whether these results can be replicated using public speaking classes at other universities. Future research should collect data at other institutions and from a larger number of class sections when the class section is used as the unit of analysis in order to increase statistical power.

In addition, other courses should be investigated. Students in the present study were asked to focus on the instructor in their current public speaking class when completing the questionnaires. This limited the variety of courses and instructors assessed and, thus, limited the generalizability of results. Future research could ask students to focus on the class and instructor of their previous or subsequent class when completing the survey (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, Richmond, 1986).

The reliability for the offensive intervention factor of the newly created Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior Scale needs further inquiry. With a reliability of .67, the scale was deemed "minimally acceptable" for this study (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2008, p. 195). A reliability of .67 may have "obscure[d] differences or relationships that would be revealed by use of more reliable instruments" (p.184). However, unreliability does *not* increase the probability of obtaining spuriously significant results (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 70). Therefore, our study represents a conservative examination of relationships between offensive intervention in student misbehaviors and other variables. Nunnally (1978) considers a reliability of .70 to be acceptable, and future research using the offensive intervention measure should aim to surpass that standard. Adding additional items of a similar nature is likely to increase reliability (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 415).

Future research also needs to explore the predictive validity of the Teacher Response to Student Misbehavior instrument used in this study. For instance, is instructors' use of verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors associated with their use of offensive versus constructive intervention strategies? As previous re-

search notes (Kearney, Plax, & Burroughs, 1991; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998), teacher misbehaviors and teacher immediacy are inversely related. Thus, it may be that teachers who use constructive intervention strategies are perceived as more immediate than teachers who use offensive intervention strategies.

Another area for future research is the study of classroom connectedness over time. Researchers should explore how classroom connectedness changes over the course of a semester and what factors are associated with those changes. Given the results of this study, one could determine if and when during the semester perceptions of classroom connectedness increase or decrease as a result of student misbehaviors (inconsideration and/or harassment) and teacher responses to student misbehaviors (constructive and/or offensive intervention).

The findings on the relationships among student-to-student connectedness, student misbehaviors, and teacher responses to student misbehaviors add to the body of literature on classroom climate. Other measures of teacher responses to student misbehaviors such as the use of behavior alteration techniques (Roach, Richmond, & Mottet, 2006), interactional classroom justice (Chory, 2007), teacher expressions of anger (McPherson, Kearney, & Plax, 2003) and other measures of student-to-student behavior such as immediacy (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006) and affinity-seeking (Myers, 1995) deserve more attention in the instructional communication literature.

One important way teachers may be able to foster student perceptions of a connected classroom climate is to develop classroom management skills in an effort to

decrease student misbehaviors and respond appropriately when students misbehave. For now, we urge basic course instructors to continue to consider ways to help students experience connectedness in the classroom, thereby potentially increasing their well-being and success in the course.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Student Misbehaviors Survey*

Directions: Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which you see these behaviors occurring in this speech 1110 classroom this semester.

1	2	3	4	5
Almost Never (or Never)	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always (or Always)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Students in my class engage in physical disruptions (such as throwing things, spitting, fighting).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Students in my class engage in verbal disruptions (such as speaking with foul language, name calling, yelling, blaming others for poor performance, communicating in an unfriendly, aggressive, or intimidating behavior).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Students in my class engage in nonverbal disruptions (such as eating during class, making ugly or obscene gestures).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Students in my class engage in noise disruptions (such as beepers or cell phones sounding, sighing out loud, smacking, making unusual sounds).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Students in my class engage in teacher challenging disruptions (such as active resistance

of teacher's wishes, asking counter productive questions, refusing to do what the teacher requests, complaining about grades to the teacher).

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Students in my class engage in harassment disruptions (such as making vulgar, racist, or sexist comments to others).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Students in my class engage in passive disruptions (such as coming to class unprepared, sleeping, day dreaming, reading unrelated materials, listening to headsets).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Students in my class engage in leave-taking disruptions (such as making book bag sounds or packing up prior to dismissal).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Students in my class engage in time-taking disruptions (such as arriving late for class or leaving class early or monopolizing class discussion).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Students in my class engage in side-conversation disruptions (such as whispering or talking to another during the lecture or when another student is speaking).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Students in my class engage in ethical disruptions (such as lying, cheating, stealing, or plagiarizing).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Students in my class engage in inattentive disruptions (such as ignoring or not turning in assignments, not attending class, not prepared for class).

## APPENDIX B

### *Teacher Response to Student Misbehaviors Survey*

Directions: Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which you see these behaviors occurring in this speech 1110 classroom this semester.

1	2	3	4	5
Almost Never (or Never)	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always (or Always)

Whenever a student misbehaves in this class:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. My instructor points out the student misbehavior and asks it to stop.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. My instructor ignores the student misbehavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. My instructor uses verbal aggression to confront the misbehaving student.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. My instructor politely asks the student to stop the misbehavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. My instructor uses humor to minimize and stop the student misbehavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. My instructor embarrasses the student engaged in the misbehavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. My instructor threatens to punish the misbehaving student.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. My instructor approaches the misbehaving student silently.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. My instructor makes sustained eye contact with the misbehaving student.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. My instructor nonverbally displays frustration toward the misbehaving student (sighs, rolls eyes, shakes head, etc.).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. My instructor calls on the misbehaving student to participate in class discussion, lecture, or activity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. My instructor yells or raises voice at the misbehaving student