



8-1-2010

# Are Relational Messages Fair? An Examination of the Relationships Among Classroom Justice and Relational Teaching Messages

Laura Young  
*DePaul University*

---

## Recommended Citation

Young, Laura, "Are Relational Messages Fair? An Examination of the Relationships Among Classroom Justice and Relational Teaching Messages" (2010). *College of Communication Master of Arts Theses*. 6.  
<https://via.library.depaul.edu/cmnt/6>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Communication at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Communication Master of Arts Theses by an authorized administrator of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact [wsulliv6@depaul.edu](mailto:wsulliv6@depaul.edu), [cmclure@depaul.edu](mailto:cmclure@depaul.edu).

*Are Relational Messages Fair?*  
**An Examination of the Relationships Among  
Classroom Justice and Relational Teaching Messages**

Laura Young

Master's Thesis

Submitted to the College of Communication  
at  
DePaul University

in partial fulfillments of the degree requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
Organizational and Multicultural Communication

Sean M. Horan, Ph.D., Advisor  
Leah Bryant, Ph.D.

College of Communication

Chicago, Illinois  
2010

## Abstract

Classroom justice has become a growing concern among instructional communication researchers. When students perceive their instructors are not concerned about justice, they report a host of negative outcomes; however, previous research also suggests that students and instructors have differing perceptions of justice. Further, many instructional communication scholars view the teaching process as having a large relational component. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what relationships exist among relational teaching messages (rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking) and classroom justice (distributive, procedural and interactional) and to find whether these relationships are positive or negative. Results indicated that all three relational teaching messages were significantly and positively related to all types of justice. It was further found that enjoyable interaction (a dimension of rapport) and response to questions (a dimension of confirmation) were positive predictors in understanding what most influences students' perceptions. Additionally, style of teaching (a dimension of confirmation) was found to be the sole significant, negative predictor for distributive justice, suggesting a potential backlash to relational teaching messages. Additional findings, limitations and future research are discussed.

*Keywords: Classroom Justice; Relational Teaching; Rapport; Confirmation; Affinity-Seeking*

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	4
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION.....	6
Classroom Justice (Distributive, Procedural & Interactional) .....	9
Relational Teaching .....	13
Rapport.....	15
Confirmation.....	17
Affinity-Seeking .....	21
Rationale .....	24
Research Question .....	30
Chapter 2: METHOD.....	30
Chapter 3: RESULTS .....	34
Chapter 4: DISCUSSION .....	35
A Closer Examination: Positive Predictors of Classroom Justice .....	36
Non-significant Factors, Yet Interesting Findings.....	39
Are Relational Messages Fair? .....	45
Theoretical and Practical Implications.....	48
Directions for Future Research .....	50
Limitations .....	51
Conclusion .....	52
References.....	55
Table 1 .....	62

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Sean Horan, for his continued patience, guidance and support throughout this process. Historically, I have centered my studies on critical, organizational and qualitative research, thus, needless to say, I have learned a great deal from writing this thesis. You have been an exceptional teacher, mentor and advisor. I greatly thank you, Sean, for your time and effort in constructive feedback and thoughtful encouragement. Most of all, thank you for believing in me. I truly have enjoyed our working relationship and look forward to working with you in the future.

Second, I would like to thank my second reader, Leah Bryant. I thank you for your feedback and direction throughout this new endeavor. You have been there from the beginning, reading my proposal, assisting through my first Local Review Board and Institutional Review Board reviews and finally critiquing my completed thesis. Your time and commitment through it all is greatly appreciated.

Third, I would like to thank those who offered support throughout my journey. To all of the professors at DePaul University who graciously offered class time for their students to complete my survey, I thank you. This research could not have been completed without your open arm. To my fellow graduate students at DePaul, thank you for continuing to support my writing even after you all were completed with your degrees. Our friendships are one of a kind and I appreciate them dearly. To my friends, thank you for continuing to support me throughout this time. Your laughter and company will never be forgotten. You all have been great cheerleaders along the way and I cannot thank you enough.

Finally, I would also like to thank my family for their constant support through this process. To my mom and dad, thank you for believing that I could do this and offering great

stories to get my mind off my 'to do' list in these last few months! To my brother Christopher and my sister Alisha, and their families, thank you for all of the great stories about the kids to brighten my mood when writing boggled my mind. To Beau, thank you, first for all, for your infinite wisdom on Microsoft Word and Excel. Your knowledge helped me in ways I cannot describe! But most of all, thank you for the love, comfort, support and praise which made this thesis seem all worthwhile. I appreciate you all more than I can explain. Again, I thank you!

*“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”*

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

Generally speaking, fairness, or justice is important. Justice is commonly valued among the American public, therefore, it is not surprising that justice in the classroom has become a growing concern for students and instructors alike (e.g., Chory-Assad, 2002; Horan & Myers, 2009). When students perceive their instructors are not concerned about classroom justice, they tend to report various negative outcomes, including resistance, deception and aggression (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). For instructors, communicating fairly has been identified as an important concern, whereas the distribution of outcomes is of least concern (Horan & Myers, 2009). Both groups, however, enter the classroom with an expectation of fair treatment; therefore, choosing to ignore relational fairness dimensions could potentially be problematic in the classroom context. This concern likely explains researchers’ interest in this area. Too often, injustice can disrupt the student classroom experience for all involved (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b). Thus, as Chory and Goodboy (2010) argue, understanding students’ perceptions of justice helps us to better understand students’ resistance decisions.

Rooted in organizational communication, justice refers to the idea of moral rightness between people (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Classroom justice, then, is based in the instructional context and refers to perceptions of fairness, or moral rightness, in regards to outcomes and processes in the classroom (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b). Classroom justice can be described as distributive, procedural or interactional. *Distributive justice* describes perceptions of fairness regarding outcomes (Deutsch, 1975), or rather when students compare their grade to grades of their peers, what they felt they

deserved or what they expected to achieve (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b). *Procedural justice* describes perceptions of fairness regarding the process used to determine outcomes (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001), which could include how the instructor chooses to conduct class session, grade papers or provide policies for student behavior – ultimately, any decision which determines how the classroom is designed and how assignments are evaluated (Chory, 2007). *Interactional justice* describes fairness perceptions regarding interpersonal treatment when classroom policies are implemented (Bies & Moag, 1986). Interactional justice is evaluated when students generate fairness judgments about the way their instructor communicates with them personally or the class as a whole (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a). Although rooted in organizational studies, this typology was recently qualitatively validated in the classroom. Horan, Chory, and Goodboy (in press) found that students perceive a wide range of unfair messages from their college instructors which fit the above three-dimensional treatment of classroom justice (distributive, procedural and interactional). Further, it was reported that instructors violated first procedural justice, followed by distributive and interactional. Thus, these results validated the three-dimensional conceptualization and operationalization of classroom justice (Horan et al., in press).

Horan and Myers (2009) suggest two reasons behind the importance of studying justice in the classroom. First, students who believe instructors are not concerned with fairness are more likely to react in a host of negative ways, such as resisting or enacting in revengeful ways, becoming verbally aggressive or reverting to deceptive acts with their instructors (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005; Paulsel, Chory-Assad & Dunleavy, 2005). Second, Horan and Myers (2009) suggest a more student-learning oriented idea, that students who believe the instructor acts with injustice will be less motivated



and less affectively engaged in the classroom (Chory-Assad, 2002). Therefore, given the importance of education and the instructor's responsibility on student learning, additional research should be conducted.

Moreover, many instructional communication scholars view the teaching process as having a large relational component (Frymier, 2007; Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Relational teaching messages could include building rapport with students, supporting them through confirming messages and continuing seeking affinity with students, all which have been argued to be ways of effective teaching (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Students enter the classroom with an expectation of fair treatment and Horan and Myers (2009) found that instructors may approach the classroom with a similar concern. Therefore, given this understanding, enhanced perceptions of classroom justice as related to relational teaching may exist; however, scholars have yet to explore the relationships among justice and the aforementioned encouraged relational behaviors. Thus, this study will explore the relationships among three relational teaching messages (e.g., rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking behaviors) and justice (e.g., distributive, procedural and interactional) in the classroom. To that end, literature will first be reviewed on classroom justice. Next, literature on rhetorical and relational classroom processes is examined to provide foundational background on the foundations of relational teaching. The specific rationale for exploring the relationships among relational teaching and fairness, then, is examined to position the significance of this research. Finally, the specific purpose of the research is explained, and the proposed method is reviewed.

## Review of Literature

### *Classroom Justice*

Using the aforementioned justice typology, a line of research has focused on uncovering how students perceive and/or react to perceptions of (un)fairness in the classroom. As previously stated, Horan et al. (in press) found that students reported instructors violated first procedural justice (almost three times as often as distributive or interactional justice), followed by distributive and interactional. This suggests that students find instructors to be unfair with grading practices (procedural) more frequently than with the evaluating, or rather, the actual grades given (distributive) or the making of insensitive comments (interactional) toward students. Furthermore, when students believed instructors had engaged in any type of injustice, emotions of anger, pain and frustration were reported as the most frequent student responses (Horan et al., in press).

This finding is in line with previous research on (in)justice in the classroom (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b; Paulsel et al., 2005). Yet, Horan et al. (in press) further found that students' responses to injustice in the classroom involved communicating dissent toward the instructor through negative instructor or course evaluations as well as complaining to other students. This is also consistent with prior justice studies where students reported a host of negative outcomes (e.g., resistance, deception or aggression) in responses to perceptions of instructors' unfairness (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). Furthermore, studies previously examining student responses to unfairness (aggression, hostility and teacher-owned strategies) may not be the most frequently reported reactions, but they do occur relatively often. Thus, students' perceptions of fairness are related to behavioral and perceptual outcomes and students are able to recall instances of unfairness from

the classroom. More times than not, students experience negative emotional and behavioral reactions to these messages (Horan et al., in press).

Although the primary focus of justice studies has been directed toward understanding students' perceptions of (un)fair instructors and their communicative responses toward (un)fair instructors, Horan and Myers (2009) recently studied college instructors in order to understand how they viewed justice. They found that instructors reported being primarily concerned with interactional justice, followed by procedural justice and distributive justice (the mean scores for these three measures did significantly differ); thus, it is clear that instructors report maintaining a vested interest in communicating fairly with students. This suggests, then, that perhaps students and instructors have differing perceptions of the importance of the different justice dimensions within the classroom. One factor that may influence the variation in students' justice concerns, as suggested by prior justice studies (Horan et al., in press; Horan, Martin, & Weber, 2010; Horan & Myers, 2009), is students' learning or grade orientation. Specifically, students with a *learning orientation* view attaining knowledge from the classroom experience as their goal, whereas students with a *grade orientation* are more driven by obtaining an adequate grade for their work (Milton, Pollio & Eison, 1986). Therefore, grade oriented students would have little interest in instructors who are interactionally fair (a primary concern for instructors; Horan & Myers, 2009) as they are likely more concerned with distributive and possibly procedural justice. Instructors report being concerned with fair treatment of students, which may be of little value to grade oriented students. Thus, students and instructors may maintain differing justice expectations. It is evident that the aforementioned discrepancies between students' and teachers' perceptions are important and further research is needed (Chory, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b; Horan & Myers, 2009; Horan et al., in press; Horan et al., 2010).

Supporting the previous claim, Paulsel and Chory-Assad (2005) examined students' perceptions of interactional justice as a predictor of their use of teacher-owned strategies. Results indicated that students who perceived less interactional justice in the classroom were more likely to enact teacher-owned strategies such as blaming the instructor, complaining to a higher authority about the instructor, modeling the lack of concern in their own classroom experience or by giving the instructor advice to remedy the problem. When an instructor fails to foster perceptions of interactional justice in the classroom, students, in turn, dislike that instructor and blame the instructor using these teacher-owned strategies (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). In addition, Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004a) found that, along with instructor interactional injustice, students' perceptions of instructors' use of antisocial behavior alteration techniques (BATs), or rather, power resources that teachers may use in their attempts to influence students (Kearney, 1994), also predicted increased student likelihood of indirect aggression toward instructors. This research also indicated that instructors who use antisocial BATs are considered unfair. Student perceptions of interactional justice and instructor antisocial BAT use were negatively correlated. More specifically, interactional justice was a stronger predictor of students indirectly aggressing against the instructor than antisocial BAT use by the instructor (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a). This is congruent with prior research conducted on procedural and distributive justice, which specifically found that when students perceived procedural and distributive injustice in the classroom, they also reported they were more likely to resist through acts of hostility, deception, revenge and indirect aggression (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b).

Paulsel and Chory-Assad (2005) theorized that students resist instructors in order to reciprocate for any injustice the student has experienced. This argument is grounded in Equity

Theory (Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978), which is a frequently adopted theoretical frame for classroom justice studies (e.g. Paulsel & Chory, 2005; Horan et al., in press). According to Equity Theory, if individuals feel they have been treated unfairly, they will likely experience dissatisfaction and distress. These feelings cause individuals to restore equity, or balance, and they do so by rebelling against the perceived source of the injustice. In the classroom context, then, if students perceive the instructor as unfair, they will act out to restore balance or inequity. In this way, students will decrease their level of compliance to a level that they deem as equal to the perceived unfair treatment the student has received. Equity Theory is a theoretical framework used in classroom justice research as it helps to ground reasons behind student resistance and aggression as it relates to classroom (in)justice. In this way, justice dictates resistance in the classroom (Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005; Chory & Goodboy, 2010). These studies suggest that students have emotional reactions to an instructor's lack of justice concerns. Horan et al. (2010) extended research when they found that emotions— specifically, feelings of arousal and pleasure – were better predictors of student cognitive learning and motivation compared to power use and justice messages. These authors suggest that perhaps students are more apt to engage in anti-social behaviors directed towards the teacher when faced with feelings of nonarousal, submissiveness, and displeasure.

Interestingly, students tend to perceive credible and competent instructors as fair or just in the classroom. Much like is suggested above, Chory (2007) claimed that not only should instructors avoid using antisocial BATs (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a) and coercive-based power strategies (Paulsel et al., 2005) but it is equally important for instructors to be competent, caring and maintain a high character level for students to perceive them as fair. Specifically related to justice, instructor competence was found to predict interactional justice, whereas

instructor caring predicted procedural and interactional justice. Instructor character, then, predicted all three types of justice, distributive, procedural and interactional.

Further, adding to our understanding of justice, Paulsel et al. (2005) found that if students believe their instructors are competent and knowledgeable in their content area, the grade received from those instructors is perceived as fair. In addition, competent instructors are also perceived by students to be fair in classroom procedures as well as in the interpersonal treatment received. This indicates the importance of expert power use in the classroom (Paulsel et al., 2005). In this sense, students' perceptions of competence and knowledge may be enhanced as related to distributive, procedural and interactional justice for the mere fact that they trust the instructor's ability for evaluating their work based on their competency in the area (although the previous studies were correlational in nature and do not allow for causal claims). Thus, the perception of competency of instructors is then expanded to include classroom procedures and interpersonal relationships as an extension of the instructor's expertise, and this, is also perceived as fair (Paulsel et al., 2005). Classroom justice has been researched from both a student and instructor perspective and for the purposes of searching whether (in)justice is relate to messages indicative of relational teaching, literature of relational teaching is next examined.

### *Relational Teaching*

Effective teaching has been suggested to be both a relational and a rhetorical process (Mottet, Richmond & McCroskey, 2006). To gain a deep understanding for the choice of relational teaching for the purposes of this research, foundational information regarding both rhetorical and relational processes is needed. From a rhetorical perspective, instructors use messages, both verbal and nonverbal, with the intention of influencing and/or persuading students. In other words, instructors use rhetorical communication to persuade others to do what

they want or what they need them to do in the classroom. This is more likely to create linear forms of communication where teachers are the source of messages and students are expected to be compliant receivers. To be effective, this must first begin with students' perceiving the instructor as credible. Rhetorical communication messages could be found in argumentative and aggressive communication traits or ways of an instructor conveying their level of credibility to students. These messages could be used in a strategic way inside the classroom, where instructors persuade students to believe that what they say is a 'truth'. Aggressiveness, or verbal aggression, conveyed from an instructor to the students may be viewed as a way to overpower, or persuade the students; rather, a rhetorical communication style. Further, students' orientations toward communicating, including willingness to communicate and communication apprehension, can all be perceived as rhetorical ways of communicating by the student (Mottet & Beebe, 2006).

A relational communication perspective, then, suggests, both students and teachers mutually create and use verbal and nonverbal messages to develop relationships with one another (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Many instructional communication scholars view teaching to have a large relational component (e.g., Frymier & Houser, 2000; Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Relational communication focuses on knowing your audience and adapting the teaching style to reflect that audience, as well as to the relationships that form between both the student and teacher. Relational forms of communication include affinity-seeking behaviors, rapport building, confirmation and sometimes humor between the instructor and the student. Affinity-seeking behaviors (Bell & Daly, 1984) aim to build relationships with students and create personal bonds that can enhance the learning atmosphere through a co-created reality (Mottet & Beebe). In doing so, instructors can establish long-lasting and memorable relationships with students in hope that they will gain more from the classroom setting and enhance their learning levels.

Further, student incivility and resistance in the classroom could be considered a relational level of communication from the student's perspective. Students can choose to resist against instructors to react to the relational escalation attempted within the classroom setting. This type of relational communication is dependent on both the student and the teacher, where an instructor's behavior influences how students perceive them and behave, thus certain instructor attributes and actions can cause students to lash out and resist both the against the instructor as well as in completing the required work (Mottet & Beebe, 2006).

Moreover, teacher job satisfaction and possible relational communication behaviors may be contributed to being satisfied as an instructor (Graham, West and Schaller, 1992). They found that interpersonal competence, immediacy (e.g., they defined this as accessibility, personableness and willingness to communicate to students) and negative humor all positively related to teacher job satisfaction. Teachers who reported using these behaviors were more involved with their students and appeared to be more satisfied with the job. Relational teaching is considered much more subjective to both faculty members and students, thus it is of interest to explore how students perceive the level of fairness associated with instructors who express relational messages in the classroom. To that end, this study explores three specific relational messages: rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking behaviors. Based on these three messages, it will be determined whether or not students perceive relational instructors to be fair in the classroom.

*Rapport.* Rapport has been defined as an overall feeling of mutual trust and respect between two people, or rather a pro-social bond between two communicators (Catt, Miller & Schallenkamp, 2007). Although students report that rapport is important in the classroom, when compared to other relational classroom variables such as immediacy, relatively little is known about rapport. Most rapport research focused on student perceptions of instructors and only



recently it has been argued that the classroom is not an environment restricted to a one-on-one interaction. Interestingly, however, establishing rapport has been suggested as an essential characteristic of an effective teacher (Frisby & Martin, 2009). This type of relationship between an instructor and student has been coined as an interpersonal one as both parties enter the classroom with rhetorical and relational goals (Mottet et al., 2006; Frymier, 2007). Rhetorical goals emphasize the teacher's focus on influencing students to learn and understand the content presented in class. These instructors have a clear agenda for students to learn and direct them on a path. Instructors with rhetorical goals disseminate information and rely heavily on lectures. On the other hand, relational goals involve the type of relationship sought by the instructor and many teachers are between the extremes of consciously avoiding knowing their students and consciously seeking liking with them. An instructor with relational goals seeks a closer relationship with students. These teachers often view learning as something the teacher and student do together (Mottet et al., 2006).

Teaching is actually argued to be a rapport-intensive field (Jorgensen, 1992), meaning that rapport may enhance perceptions of an interpersonal relationship in the classroom on two dimensions: a personal connection and an enjoyable interaction (Gremmler & Gwinner, 2000). Frisby and Martin (2009) studied both student-student rapport as well as student-instructor rapport. In doing so, they argued that rapport, on the whole, encourages social interactions of a positive classroom and fosters perceptions of a positive learning environment. These authors found that in a study examining the influence on a connected classroom, rapport, student participation and learning outcomes, perceived instructor rapport was the only variable that emerged as a predictor of participation from students as well as learning outcomes of both affective and cognitive learning. Instructor rapport, then, was found to play a significant role in

the classroom. Findings suggest that instructors should be aware that student-instructor rapport is valued from a student perspective, and thus, is part of the relational teaching process.

Interestingly, student-student rapport was influential only in eliciting classroom participation but not important in increasing affective learning and cognitive learning (Frisby & Martin, 2009).

Students enter the classroom with a need for both instructors and fellow students to like them, termed relational goals (Mottet, Frymier & Beebe, 2006). Frisby and Martin (2009) argued that instructors create a classroom atmosphere where students are encouraged to interact freely and be comfortable, one that “enhances student-student relationships and instructor-student relationships” (p. 18). Contrary to previous research, where the role of the instructor in the classroom was minimized, Frisby and Martin (2009) supported the idea that the instructor is crucial in building classroom rapport. Instructors can build rapport by creating a warm classroom atmosphere, relating well to and creating a harmonious relationship with students, maintaining a good sense of humor in the classroom context, and taking a personal interest in students.

Consistent with their arguments, this study aims to explore the potential relationships among relational teacher messages, including rapport, relational teaching and fairness. Given the important role instructors play in fostering student learning, it is of specific interest to also further research on instructors as a whole. Further, Frisby and Martin (2009) suggested the importance of paying particular attention to the instructional communication training for instructors as well as graduate teaching assistants and this research would continue that endeavor.

*Confirmation.* As Schrodt, Turman and Soliz (2006) proposed, confirmation is considered to be an interactional phenomenon where humans determine our identity.

Confirmation is needed to assure us of our worth and continuation for survival, and Buber (1957)

argued confirmation was the most significant aspect of human interaction. Within the classroom, Ellis (2000) explained confirmation to be:

The transactional process by which teachers communicate to students that they are endorsed, recognized and acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals...Contrastingly, teacher disconfirmation was defined as the process by which teachers communicate to students that they are not endorsed, recognized or acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals. (Ellis, 2000, p. 266)

Thus, in the classroom, Ellis (2000) defined teacher confirmation as occurring when teachers respond to students through questions in the classroom, demonstrating interest for student interests, and creating a teaching style which allows for positive arena for confirming and encouraging students. Also, teachers can confirm students by avoiding the use of disconfirming behaviors such as rude comments or discouraging or belittling students.

Further, Ellis (2000) provided strong support for the argument that confirmation is a critical communication variable in the classroom and further suggested it is important to continue studying the influence of confirming behaviors. Perceptions of confirmation are positively related to affective learning, immediacy and indirectly related to cognitive learning. Horan, Houser, Goodboy and Frymier (in press) support this claim, in further suggesting that components of confirmation, along with immediacy and conversational skills used in the earlier stages of the semester, enhance classroom perceptions of the instructor later in the semester which, again, shows the importance, particularly of confirmation, in the classroom. Schrodt et al. (2006) also discussed the contention that confirmation is rather substantial in influencing a positive relationship between instructors and students which may also result in increased classroom learning. Goodboy and Myers (2008) added that teacher confirmation is required for

one to be a competent instructor and found that student communication behaviors are more positive when instructors used either confirming or somewhat confirming conditions in the classroom. In their experimental study, the use of confirming behaviors yielded higher traditional learning outcomes by students, suggesting again the importance of both, the use of, as well as, further study of confirming behaviors. Further, Schrodt et al. (2006) found that teacher confirmation directly affects teacher credibility and classroom evaluations. Teacher confirmation also indirectly affects outcomes of students perceived understanding of course material. Confirmation plays a significant role in facilitating positive teacher-student relationships which ultimately affects the overall classroom learning atmosphere (Ellis, 2000, 2004; Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Schrodt et al., 2006). Thus, when instructors invite student interaction to the classroom and show sincere interest in students' questions as well as foster a learning atmosphere that has a much more interactive teaching style, students perceive the credibility of their instructors much higher than those that do not. This, in turn, is reflected on the classroom evaluations which are usually more positive as well. Likewise, Turman & Schrodt (2006) found that perceived teacher confirmation was positively associated with teacher power. When teachers communicate to students that they are endorsed, recognized and acknowledged as valuable to the classroom atmosphere, students are more likely to perceive that the instructor possesses pro-social forms of power (expert, reward and referent power). Thus, Turman and Schrodt (2006) suggested that instructors who communicate with their students that they are individuals of worth may be more likely to earn the student's respect. This, in turn, allows the instructor more opportunity to influence their students.

Recent work further supports the importance of confirmation. Campbell, Eichhorn, Basch and Wolf (2010) found a positive correlation between students' perceptions of teacher

confirmation and student effort; students who possessed more effort in the class rated their professor higher in teacher confirmation. These authors also found that students tend to put more effort into classes with which they are interested. Neither the sex of the professor nor the sex of the student influenced the perception of teacher confirmation. Thus, Campbell et al. (2010) suggested that sex differences did not affect positive relationships between teacher confirmation and student effort. Much like confirmation and student effort are positively related, Ellis (2000) advocated that there is a relationship between perceived teacher confirmation and students' cognitive learning. Past research has focused on the negative aspects of disconfirming messages, but Ellis described confirmation as a "dynamic, purposeful, active phenomenon comprised of specific communication behaviors" (p. 287) and therefore, suggested further research should adopt a positive lens. This research also indicated that confirmation may be a receiver-based variable, or rather, that the perception of confirmation is crucial and it is likely to be strongly related to outcomes that are more positive.

Interestingly, Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) found that as instructors confirm students, classroom connectedness is established. In this sense, these authors argued that instructors and students co-construct the learning environment which helps to promote active participation from everyone. Further, the feeling of connectedness enhanced positive teacher confirmation behaviors and was related to willingness to talk in the classroom. Thus, peer connectedness must first be established before instructors can use confirming behaviors (i.e. respond to questions) in the classroom. Once the connectedness is established within the classroom, additional positive instructional outcomes may occur.

Caring and understanding are an integral part of confirming conditions in the classroom (Goodboy and Myers, 2008). Based on their research, instructors who refuse to use confirming

classroom measures might actually suppress student participation (student communication behavior) and instead enable more challenging or objectionable behavior. Thus, instructors doing so can actually hinder student learning. Confirming messages communicate caring to students from a teacher which ultimately creates a positive communication atmosphere within the classroom; a benefit for both students and instructors that push learning in a positive linear progression. Not only does confirmation create a positive learning atmosphere, it also can increase perceived understanding from a student perspective. Most relevant to this study, Ellis (2000) suggested that confirmation can be operationally defined in terms specific to the college classroom context, most specifically through low-inference behavioral terms. Thus, this particular study aims to further the study of confirmation in the college classroom context, but more specifically in relation to justice.

*Affinity-seeking.* Affinity-seeking behaviors are types of communication that have a specific goal of generating liking (Bell & Daly, 1984). Although there are a number of affinity-seeking behaviors for communicators to choose from, researchers have identified a typology of 25 behaviors, including altruism, concede control, dynamism, facilitating enjoyment, inclusion of others, listening, nonverbal immediacy and trustworthiness, to name a few (Bell & Daly, 1984; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986; Frymier, 1994; Frymier, Houser & Shulman, 1995, 1996). Affinity-seeking behaviors performed by instructors in the college classroom context are considered relational behaviors (Frymier & Thompson, 1992).

McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) suggested the significance of examining teacher and instructor communication from an affinity-seeking perspective. These authors advocated that instructors need to influence students to engage in on-task behaviors. A lack of affinity is likely to reduce the influence from the instructor which could potentially reduce time spent on learning

tasks. If students have affinity for an instructor, it is possible for them to develop positive affect orientations toward the subject matter covered in the classroom. Conversely, if affinity is not present, the opposite could also occur, suggesting that students may build negative orientations to the content. Thus, it is suggested that increased affinity between instructors and students, then, might increase both cognitive and affective learning outcomes from students in the classroom context.

From an instructor-student standpoint, McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) found that eight strategies were used *most often*; in rank order, physical attractiveness, sensitivity, elicit other's disclosure, trustworthiness, nonverbal immediacy, conversational rule-keeping, dynamism and listening. On the contrary, the nine strategies that were seen to have comparatively *low use* include reward association, inclusion of other, self-inclusion, concede control, influence perceptions of closeness, similarity, openness, present interesting self and supportiveness. Of this group, inclusion of other, self-inclusion and reward association were found to be used by less than half respondents within schools (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986).

Because affinity-seeking is referred to as an active and strategic communication behavior, Bell and Daly (1984) suggested that instructors who use affinity seeking strategies are usually perceived positively by students. They explained that students may interpret this type of behavior as one way instructors welcome student participation, interaction, and involvement in communication exchanges that extend beyond the classroom. When students perceive instructors as friendly, they tend to be more motivated to willing to communicate with them beyond the classroom, for example, in situations such as obtaining information about the course assignments, materials and requirements (Myers, Mottet, & Martin, 2000), which ultimately creates a positive and trusting working atmosphere for both parties. Furthermore, teacher use of

affinity-seeking strategies with students may be similar to college student use of those strategies across a variety of contexts (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986), yet it is of interest to see whether or not these strategies have changed over time. For instance, as classrooms evolve and become more diverse, important behavioral tactics can greatly enhance the learning atmosphere. Some research suggests student affinity seeking preferences may differ between groups. For example, Houser (2005) found that both traditional and nontraditional students agreed on perceptions of teacher effectiveness. The use of verbal and nonverbal immediacy, affinity-seeking and clarity in the classroom all ranked of importance to both groups. That said, there was also a distinct difference between what each group considered the 'best' communication style. Interestingly, the message found most different between the two groups was affinity-seeking. Traditional students, or rather, students ranging in ages 18-24 (Bowl, 2001; Dill & Henley, 1998; Houser, 2005, 2006), prefer educators that are friendly and attentive to individual needs. Conversely, nontraditional students, or rather, those entering college after age 25 (Bowl, 2001; Dill & Henley, 1998; Houser, 2005, 2006), prefer educators who fill a "teacher-as-facilitator" (Houser, 2005, p. 224) role and create more of a self-directed learning environment, which is a violation of expectations of non-traditional students. Houser (2006) suggested that instructors that emit more affinity-seeking than desired by non-traditional students actually create "a negative value for state motivation and cognitive learning" (p. 344). Thus, professors who are too friendly and/or too concerned about being well-liked are viewed as poor educators in the minds of nontraditional students. This suggests that too much affinity-seeking may have negative repercussions. Houser (2005) argued time is of the essence to these students and they attend class for the information, not to be entertained by the professor. Thus, affinity-seeking preferences could be changing with time as traditional and nontraditional students have differing goals when



entering the classroom. Younger students (traditional) prefer instructors who they like and those who are willing to guide their learning. Nontraditional students, or rather older students, have a stronger learning orientation and desire straightforward instructors who respect their experiences and treat them as adults (Houser, 2005, 2006).

Though any relational messages could have been chosen for this study, rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking behaviors were deemed as the most important because all three messages may work together, building toward a common goal in the classroom – building relationships between teachers and students, which aims at the core of this research study – to find whether or not a relationship exists between relational teaching messages and perceptions of justice. Potentially, to build foundation, first rapport must be established to build trust between students and instructors which the basis of relationship construction (Frisby & Martin, 2009). Confirmation, then, helps to establish human identity which, in this case, reaffirms the trust built between the students and instructors (Schrodt et al., 2006). Affinity-seeking behaviors, then, comes from the instructor's choice to aid in the connection to the student for enhanced learning. This, too, works to build a relationship in the classroom (Frymier & Wanzer, 2006). It is suggested that these messages fit together to complete a circle of relational learning. To date, these three relational messages have yet to be researched together as related to justice, therefore, based on the relational connections necessary for relational learning, these were chosen for this study.

### Rationale

It seems intuitive and logical that pro-social relational messages such as rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking behaviors, would be positively associated with perceptions of instructors' justice concerns – namely, students would perceive a relational instructor as being

fair. However, a few scholars have begun to elucidate some of the pitfalls associated with being a relational instructor (Babad, 1995; Myers, 2006; Mottet et al., 2005, 2006). Therefore, it is of interest to study relational messages and justice in the classroom to see if there is a relationship and if so, whether that relationship is positive or negative.

Frymier and Houser (2000) suggested that communication between students and the instructor is both relational and content driven. These authors also provided empirical support documenting that students view relationships between students and instructors as interpersonal relationships. Therefore, knowing this, students attend class with the expectation of fairness (Colquitt et al., 2001). If instructors choose to ignore these dimensions, it could be problematic for the classroom experience for reasons listed above (e.g., resistance, aggression, etc.).

Therefore, it is clear that scholars have researched the backlash to injustice in the classroom and how beneficial fairness/justice messages relational are for the classroom experience (Chory, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a, 2004b; Chory, 2007; Horan & Myers, 2009; Horan et al., 2010; Horan et al., in press; Paulsel et al., 2005). Moreover, Frymier and Houser (2000) found that referential skill, ego support and conflict management were most important to effective teaching. They also found that referential skill, ego support and immediacy have strong relationships with student learning as well as motivation to learn. Referential skill refers to an instructor's ability to explain concepts clearly and facilitate understanding about that content (Burlison & Samter, 1990). Ego support refers to an instructor's communication skills that help students to not only believe in themselves but also to strive to be their best, whereas, immediacy supports the conclusion that teaching does, in fact, include a relational component (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Further, these authors posited a seminal study which positions the relationship of teachers and instructors as an interpersonal one, yet different from a typical interpersonal

friendship relationship. First, student-instructor relationships lack equality found in typical friendships and is also constrained to a specified time, which is not usually found in friendships. In addition, communication skills between friendships are much more important, whereas in a student-instructor relationship, communication is definitely relational, but also is content driven (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Therefore, relational learning, in this sense, has shown to be positive, or fair and just in nature, in regards to perceptions from students. Students know and understand the differences and boundaries between students and instructors and respect that will be reciprocated by the instructor in a fair manner. Other scholars, however, have uncovered that this is not always the case.

Relational teaching can promote perceptions of favoritism and curve grade assessments for students who are perceived to be 'closer' to a professor than those who are not. Babad (1995) found that students perceive that the teacher's pet phenomenon, or rather the "rate of student's consensus in identifying teachers' pets in the classroom", exists and differential treatment is given to high achievers who are relationally connected to the professor (p. 361). In turn, students also perceive that instructors give negative emotional treatment to low achievers, which ultimately causes low classroom morale and negative actions toward the instructor. Babad (1995) proposed that perceptions about differential privilege of learning support and pressure from instructors to students whom they have a relational friendship with, does exist as does different emotional support for said students. Therefore, it is suggested that relational teaching may have implications of (in)justice from a student perspective, particularly for those who perceive they have little relationship with an instructor. For instance, promoting favoritism and differential treatment to students violates all three types of justice. Preferential treatment given to students through grade distribution would violate both distributive and procedural justice, and favoritism

in the classroom would violate interactional justice. However, communicating relationally likely increases perceptions of instructor-teacher relationship, to naturally varying degrees; as such, some students may perceive that their peers are closer to their instructor, which would tarnish perceptions of fairness.

Myers (2006) investigated students' perceptions of relational quality with their professors as related to motives to communicate with them. He found that students who perceive in-group relationships with their instructors reported communicating more for relational (e.g., to develop interpersonal relationships with the instructor), functional (e.g., to learn more about the course requirements and assignments), participatory (e.g., to demonstrate they understand course material) and sycophantic (e.g., to make a positive impression on the instructor) motives more frequently than those who reported out-group connections. Myers (2006) argued that this is because student who believe they have an in-group relationship with their instructor mirror the same behaviors instructors expect from them, resulting in a positive impression made by the instructor. If these actions are supported by the instructors, students may view themselves as promoting a supportive classroom atmosphere (Myers, 2006). This research is linked with that of favoritism as in a superior-subordinate relationship, such as that of an instructor and student. Students may perceive creating a favorable impression as a requirement to be selected for inclusion into the in-group, which could be perceived as an additional act of injustice on the part of the instructor. Collectively, both the work of Babad (1995) and Myers (2006) suggest that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, instructors maintain differing levels of closeness/relationships with students, that students are aware of these differences, and these differences are related to both perceptual and communication differences—all situations that,

when expressing relational messages to promote relationships, could influence perceptions of (in)justice.

Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld and Paulsel (2005) agree that relational teaching may have a “dark side” that could be problematic. As suggested above, relational teaching is co-constructed by both the student and the instructor. Mottet et al. (2005) experimentally found that instructors grant expert power to students who initiate and respond in the classroom significantly more than to students who were less verbally responsive. This was impacted by both students’ verbal and nonverbal responsiveness. Furthermore, instructors also granted referent power to those students who were most responsive in class, which ultimately was reflected in grades given. Students that were granted referent (relational) power also received significantly higher essay grades than students who were not granted this type of power for the exact same work. Although justice was not studied in this experiment, students nonverbal responsiveness, which is the primary channel used to convey emotion and build relationships, was negatively associated with fairness in the classroom—namely, instructors violated components of distributive justice.

Though this research has a relational component, it was limited to researching the effects of students’ responsiveness on teachers who grant power to students rather than specifically finding the implications of relational teaching and whether or not it is students who perceive instructors who communicate from a relational base as also maintaining fairness concerns. Knowing this, however, it cannot be denied that relational teaching *could* have negative implications; although this has not been traditionally researched. From the previous review of research, readers can understand the importance of both relational teaching and justice in the classroom. Yet, in all of this research, it has never been discussed if students' perceptions of *relational teaching messages are associated with perceptions of (in)justice*. The link between

relational teaching and justice could enhance the claim that if both are used together, instructors will be even more impactful in the classroom.

Many times effective instructors, those who use both rhetorical and relational messages, are misperceived in their teaching style. Mottet et al. (2006) articulated these misperceptions, beginning by stating that anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers who are in demand, or rather those who have numerous students sign up for classes each semester, are seen as easy instructors with classes lacking rigor required elsewhere. However, Mottet et al. (2006) argue the opposite actually occurs. They suggest relational teachers are granted permission by students to intellectually challenge them and possibly even consider unrealistic demands as compared to other classrooms. In doing so, relational instructors have students in their classes who ultimately work harder and achieve larger goals, which in turn, is usually positively reflected in the given grade and—ideally—promote perceptions of justice and fairness. Similarly, Mottet, Parker-Raley, Cunningham and Beebe (2005) found that as the perception of teacher nonverbal immediacy increases, a well researched relational message, the willingness of students to tolerate more course workload demands also increases. This suggests that students are more lenient with instructors when a positive relationship exists between students and instructors. As Mottet et al. (2006), articulated, however, an effective teacher, then, may be perceived by his/her department as granting grades unfairly based on the combination of students' high grades, motivation, and increased affect, when in reality, their students have actually advanced exponentially as a result of their effective teaching style. Thus, it remains unknown whether relational teaching messages—confirmation, rapport, and affinity seeking—are positively or negatively related to perceptions of fairness.

Collectively, the body of research on classroom justice indicates that fairness in the classroom is important. Communicating from a relational perspective is also important in both fostering classroom relationships and perceptions of justice, yet the previous discussion highlights the potential backlash associated with communicating from a relational dimension. Therefore, based on the previous review of literature and the discussion of the problems associated with relational teaching messages, such as teacher's pet (Babad, 1995), in-group/out group status (Myers, 2006), and the work of Mottet et al. (2005, 2006), the following research question is posed:

RQ: What, if any, relationships exist among students' perceptions of relational teacher messages (e.g., rapport, confirmation, and affinity seeking) and justice (e.g., procedural, distributive, and interactional)?

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

After receiving IRB approval, a convenience sample of 124 students was recruited from communication classes at a large urban Midwestern private university. Volunteers were recruited from introductory communication courses. 44 men and 77 women participated (3 declined to report their sex), and the average age was 22.39 years ( $SD = 3.93$ ). Participants reported on 64 male and 58 female teachers (2 who declined to report teacher sex), representing 31 subject areas. The most commonly reported on subject was communication ( $n = 57$ ). For 77 students reported that the class was part of their major, whereas 47 reported that it was not. The majority of students reported class sizes of 30 students or less (61.3%), with 36.3% reported 31-100 students, 0.8% reported 101-200 students and 1.6% reported 220+ students.

The process was a self-report, convenience sample of college students who were asked to complete the 'teacher-before-method,' where students were asked to complete the surveys based on perceptions from the professor of the class that met immediately before the course in which the data was collected. This method is a widely used instructional communication method designed to capture students' perceptions of a wide variety of instructors, and was originally advocated by Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, and Richmond (1986).

### *Instrumentation*

Student perceptions of classroom justice were assessed using three different measures: distributive and procedural justice (Chory-Assad and Paulsel, 2004b) and interactional justice (Chory, 2007). Participants evaluated the items on the three justice measures on a Likert-type scale with response options ranging from 1 (*extremely unfair*) to 5 (*extremely fair*).

*Distributive and Procedural Justice.* The instruments for distributive and procedural justice were the measures from Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004b). Perceptions of distributive classroom justice were assessed on 12 items where participants reported perceptions of fairness about grades received or expected to receive in the course. This expanded version from the Chory (2002) version asked students to not only rank the grade they will probably receive in the course, the grade on the last exam, the grade predicted to be received in the course as compared to the grades of other students, and the grade on the last exam as compared to other students' grades on the last exam, but also included questions for students concerns regarding fairness of grades as compared to their own expectations, compared to what they feel they deserved and compared to their effort expended for completion of the assignments. Scores ranged from 12.00 – 60.00 ( $M = 49.32$ ,  $SD = 9.96$ ). Procedural justice was assessed on a 15-item survey where students evaluated fairness of the instructor's policies, scheduling, grading scale and topics.



Scores ranged from 28.00 – 75.00 ( $M = 63.11$ ,  $SD = 9.59$ ). The distributive ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and procedural ( $\alpha = .91$ ) scales have both achieved acceptable reliabilities in prior research (Chory, 2007). These scales were reliable in the present study (distributive justice  $\alpha = .95$ , procedural justice  $\alpha = .91$ ).

*Interactional Justice.* The instrument used for interactional justice was Chory's (2007) scale, a 7-item instrument which asked participants to evaluate the fairness of the instructor's interpersonal treatment of students. Items asked students to rank the way the instructor treated students, communicated with students, had interpersonal interactions with students, and how instructors listened, dealt with, and talked to students, etc. Scores ranged from 7.00-35.00 ( $M = 30.10$ ,  $SD = 6.43$ ). The interactional ( $\alpha = .95$ ) scale has been reported as an acceptable reliability in prior research (Chory, 2007), and was reliable in the present study ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

*Rapport.* To measure perceptions of rapport, Frisby and Martin's (2009) 11 item scale was used. The scale measured interaction participants may find enjoyable. This Likert-type scale asked participants to rank questions on a 7-point scale, 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) on two dimensions. The first dimension, enjoyable interaction contains six items (i.e. "My instructor relates well to me"), and scores ranged from 6.00 – 42.00 ( $M = 31.16$ ,  $SD = 7.80$ ). The second dimension, personal connection between students and instructors contains five items (i.e. "I have a close relationship with my instructor"), and scores ranged from 5.00 – 35.00 ( $M = 20.37$ ,  $SD = 7.12$ ). The internal reliability of this scale was reported to range between .93 to .96 (Frisby & Martin, 2009). These scale were reliable in the present study (enjoyable interaction  $\alpha = .93$ ; personal connection  $\alpha = .93$ ).

*Confirmation.* Perceived teacher confirmation was questioned using the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS; Ellis, 2000, 2004). The original 27-item, Likert-type scale measured

the extent students perceived an instructor to exhibit confirming and disconfirming behaviors (Ellis, 2004). Ellis' (2000, 2004) 16-item scale asked participants to report on the frequency instructors exhibit confirming behaviors in response to a 5-point scale, 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) as it measures low inference behaviors across three dimensions. The first dimension, how instructors responded to questions, includes five items (i.e. "The instructor took time to answer student's questions fully"; scores ranged from 2.00 – 35.00 ( $M = 16.86$ ,  $SD = 4.23$ ); the second dimension, demonstrated interest in students and their learning, includes six items (i.e. "The instructor made an effort to get to know students") scores ranged from 4.00 – 42.00 ( $M = 19.15$ ,  $SD = 5.17$ ); and the third dimension, instructor teaching style, includes five items (i.e. "The instructor used an interactive teaching style"; scores ranged from 1.00 – 35.00 ( $M = 15.40$ ,  $SD = 4.76$ ). Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .81 to .87 have been reported for all three subscales (Ellis, 2004; Schrodt et al., 2006; Turman & Schrodt, 2006; Goodboy & Myers, 2008). These scales were reliable in the present study (response to questions  $\alpha = .91$ ; demonstrated interest in students  $\alpha = .89$ ; teaching style  $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Instructional affinity-seeking behaviors.* Instructional affinity-seeking (IAS) was measured by Frymier et al.'s (1995) streamlined version of Bell and Daly's (1984) affinity-seeking typology. The 12 affinity-seeking strategies identified by Frymier (1994) served as the most relevant to the classroom and are basis for the IAS scale (altruism, assume equality, comfortable self, concede control, conversational rule-keeping, dynamism, elicit others' self-disclosure, facilitate enjoyment, listening, nonverbal immediacy, optimism and sensitivity). The IAS scale is comprised of 37 Likert-type items, each which reflects a single affinity-seeking behavior. Frymier et al. (1995) found the IAS measure to be a unidimensional instrument. Scores

ranged from 91.00 – 222.00 ( $M = 145.80$ ,  $SD = 19.18$ ). Frymier et al. (1995) reported the scale to be reliable and valid: the scale was reliable in the current study ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

### Results

The research question asked what relationships existed among students' perceptions of relational teaching messages (e.g., rapport, confirmation, and affinity-seeking) and justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional). All variables were significantly and positively related to one another. Table 1 reports the specific findings.

Given the strong correlations among the variables, a further understanding of the data was necessary. Consequently, three regressions were conducted in order to understand how each variable explained variance in students' perceptions of the three types of justice.

For distributive justice, a significant model was obtained  $F(6, 122) = 10.78$ ,  $p < .001$  explaining 33% (Adjusted  $R^2 = .325$ ) of the variance in perceptions of distributive justice. Enjoyable interaction (Beta = .36,  $p = .01$ ) and response to questions (Beta = .36,  $p = .03$ ) were significant positive predictors, whereas style of teaching (Beta = -.36,  $p = .02$ ) was a negative predictor of distributive justice. No other variables were not significant predictors in the model (personal connection Beta = .18,  $p = .16$ ; demonstrated interest Beta = .05,  $p = .77$ ; and affinity-seeking Beta = .01,  $p = .92$ )

For procedural justice, a significant model was obtained  $F(6, 117) = 16.41$ ,  $p < .001$  explaining 43% (Adjusted  $R^2 = .429$ ) of variance in perceptions of procedural justice. Enjoyable interaction (Beta = .47,  $p = .00$ ) and response to questions (Beta = .38,  $p = .01$ ) were significant positive predictors; no other variables were significant in the model (personal connection Beta = -.12,  $p = .29$ ; demonstrated interest Beta = .05,  $p = .74$ ; style of teaching Beta = -.10,  $p = .45$ ; and affinity-seeking Beta = .04,  $p = .70$ ).

For interactional justice, a significant model was obtained  $F(6, 117) = 24.18, p < .001$ , explaining 53% (Adjusted  $R^2 = .530$ ) of the variance in perceptions of interactional justice. Enjoyable interaction (Beta = .59,  $p = .00$ ) and response to questions (Beta = .38,  $p = .004$ ) were significant positive predictors; no other variables were significant predictors (personal connection Beta = -.16,  $p = .13$ ; demonstrated interest Beta = .07,  $p = .62$ ; style of teaching Beta = -.23,  $p = .07$ ; and affinity-seeking Beta = .09,  $p = .32$ ).

### Discussion

It would seem reasonable that relational messages would be positively associated with fairness in the classroom. The growing body of research exploring classroom justice shows that classroom justice is important to both students and instructors (Chory, 2002; Chory-Assad 2004a, 2004b; Chory, 2007; Horan & Myers, 2009; Horan et al., in press; Paulsel et al., 2005; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). Additional research also suggests that communicating from a relational perspective is important to foster classroom relationships (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Therefore, this study was designed to uncover whether or not there was a relationship between relational teaching messages and justice in the classroom and if so, whether that relationship was positive or negative.

Specifically, the present study explored the relationships among students' perceptions of three relational teaching messages (rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking behaviors) and perceptions of justice (distributive, procedural and interactional) in the classroom. Results indicate that all variables were positively and significantly correlated, providing empirical support for the previously hypothesized relationships between these variables. This relationship proposes that instructors who communicate to students from a relational base are more likely to be perceived as fair in grading outlines, classroom procedures used to assign those outcomes, and

as fairly interacting with the students. These findings add to the growing body of research on justice in the classroom (Chory, 2002; Chory-Assad 2004a, 2004b; Chory, 2007; Horan & Myers, 2009; Horan et al., in press; Paulsel et al., 2005; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005).

*A Closer Examination: Positive Predictors of Classroom Justice*

Given the number of positive of relationships among the variables, and the strength of the correlations among variables (Guilford, 1956; Williams, 1968), a better understanding of *how* these variables were related was needed. Therefore, three regressions were conducted with instructors' relational messages serving as the predictor variables and the three types of justice each serving as criterion variables. Based on the regression analysis, particular patterns emerged revealing the same results for all three types of justice (distributive, procedural and interactional). Two messages, *enjoyable interaction* (one of two rapport dimensions) and *response to questions* (one of three confirmation dimensions) were found to be significant positive predictors of all three types of justice (distributive, procedural and interactional). This pattern of results can, potentially, be explained in a two-fold manner. First, this suggests that instructors who create an atmosphere of *enjoyable interaction* through behaviors such as forming a relationship where students enjoy interacting with them, creating a feeling of 'warmth' in the relationship between the student and instructor, relating to the students, building a harmonious relationship with students, having a good sense of humor and for allowing comfortable interaction between them and their students are more likely to be perceived as fair. In this sense, the instructor is conducting the classroom in a rapport-building manner. The overall feeling of mutual trust between the instructor and student creates an atmosphere where students perceive the instructor to be fair, not only in grading, but also in classroom procedures and interactional communication with the instructor. Thus, the choices instructors make while creating the

syllabus and grading assignments all play a factor in how students perceive the *enjoyable interaction* within the classroom.

More specifically related to fairness, students who feel as though the instructor promotes an *enjoyable interaction* are more likely to perceive him or her as a fun, relational and all-around, good person. The positive feeling emitted through an enjoyable classroom, in this case, is more likely to create a positive perception on the instructor. Thus, as commonly hypothesized, this perception is more likely to allow students to naturally perceive instructors they like and respect to be fair in procedures, distribution of grades and interaction with students. In other words, instructors who relate to the students (creating an *enjoyable interaction* within the classroom) probably will tend to be more well-liked by students, therefore, would also be more likely to be perceived as fair. The positive light seen from the enjoyable classroom, then, is likely to be reflected in a positive perception of justice.

Second, students may be more likely to perceive instructors who respond well to classroom questions as acting in fair ways. Specifically, the regression results indicate that students' perceptions of fairness are explained by behaviors such as 1) instructors taking time to answer students' questions fully, 2) instructors listening intently when students asked questions or made comments during class, 3) instructors appreciating students' questions and comments, 4) instructors being available for questions before and after class and 5) instructors willing to deviate from lecture when students ask questions. Therefore, instructors who effectively respond to student questions are more likely to be perceived as fair. To further explain, many times, students ask questions to more clearly understand concepts. This could be true for both learning oriented or grade oriented students. Recall that students with a learning orientation view attaining knowledge from the classroom experience as their goal, whereas students with a grade

orientation are more driven by obtaining an adequate grade for their work (Milton et al., 1986). Thus, learning oriented students, for example, may ask questions to better understand concepts mostly for learning purposes. Contrarily, grade oriented students may ask questions to better understand concepts for an exam, and ultimately to gain a better test grade. In relation to justice, then, either type of student would be more likely to perceive instructors who respond thoroughly to questions as fair, as each student may believe the instructor is also interested in attaining their (the students') classroom goals – whether learning or grade oriented.

Ego support, or rather communication skills that help students believe in themselves and strive to perform their best (Burluson & Samter, 1990; Frymier & Houser, 2000), is conceptually similar to confirmation (recall *response to questions* is a dimension of confirmation). By providing ego support, instructors are helping students to feel worthwhile and ultimately helping them succeed. Prior research indicates that students want instructors to help them feel good about themselves, especially in the classroom context (Frymier & Houser, 2000). This argument is similar to students' need to succeed in the classroom (Richmond & Gorham, 1996). Therefore, instructors who respond well to questions, then, are confirming that students are worthwhile and their interest in the subject matter is important which aids in students being comfortable in asking about the unknown. Instructors who do so are more likely to be perceived as fair in the classroom because of the safe environment they have created in the classroom. Thus, this study suggests that distributive, procedural and interactional justice in the classroom is more likely to be perceived to be positive by students when instructors respond well toward individual student needs.

In this sense, when instructors take the time to foster enjoyable classroom interactions, including responding well to questions, students are more likely to perceive that the instructor is

creating a safe-zone atmosphere within the classroom. This means that enjoyable classroom interactions and positive responses to student questions create a comfortable atmosphere where students feel they will not be rejected. The feeling of comfort also aids in the positive perception of the instructor, which, again, plays a significant role in understanding positive perceptions of fairness. When students are part of a comfortable classroom environment, it is likely they will also be comfortable with grades received and perceive the instructors to be just in distribution, classroom procedures and interaction. Moreover, students who believe the instructor acts with injustice will report being less motivated and less affectively engaged in the classroom (Chory-Assad, 2002). Instructors who create an enjoyable atmosphere and confirm student learning through responding to questions, then, are ultimately creating a just environment which is more likely to be free from student resistance and aggression.

It seems logical that higher grades are more likely to be perceived as fair. As students ask for clarification of content concepts they are making an effort to gain a better understanding. In doing so, a higher grade would be probable because the student has a better understanding of the class concepts in which they are later tested over. Thus, though the student is actually earning the higher grade in the class by asking questions to better understand concepts, they may perceive the grades received to be fair based on the positive perception they have of the instructors, when, in reality, they have earned it. Therefore, based on the above arguments, perhaps when explaining students' perceptions of fairness, *response to questions & enjoyable interaction* may be of pivotal importance.

#### *Non-significant Factors, Yet Interesting Findings*

Interestingly, despite the strong correlations of all variables, the following dimensions were found to be non-significant predictors of all three types of justice: *personal connection* (one



of two dimensions of rapport), *demonstrated interest* (one of three dimensions of confirmation) and *affinity-seeking*. These are curious findings given how strongly correlated these dimensions were to classroom justice, yet do not offer much predictive power when attempting to further clarify the relationships among students' perceptions of classroom justice and relational teaching messages. To explain, when students feel a bond between them and the instructor, look forward to seeing the professor in class, strongly care about the instructor, feel the instructor has taken a personal interest in them or have close relationships with the instructor, their perceptions of fairness still are rarely affected. Thus, building a personal, intimate connection is not significant in predicting perceptions of justice. Similarly, the variable *demonstrated interest* in students seems to also aim at much of the same outcomes as personal connection, yet it furthers the explanation to include nonverbal communication. This suggests that nonverbal communication and personal connection have little to do with explaining perceptions of classroom justice. Perhaps also consider that *personal connection* and *demonstrated interest in students and learning* are fairly similar constructs even though dimensions of different variables (*personal connection* is one of two rapport messages and *demonstrated interest in students and learning* is one three confirmation messages). It is argued here that both non-significant variables play a larger role in interactional justice more than distributive and procedural. Thus, students may perceive fairness to be more linked to how the classroom is conducted and how students are handled rather than how well the instructor connects to them.

Similarly, *affinity-seeking* behaviors were not found to be significant predictors of perceptions of justice. Though affinity-seeking is still positively correlated with perceptions of justice, it does not account for a deeper understanding of the relationship between instructors and students, suggesting that instructors who long to create affinity with their students still may not

be perceived as fair in the classroom. This finding is similar to the findings in Houser's (2005, 2006) work on nontraditional students. These studies suggested that professors who are too friendly and/or too concerned with being well-liked in the classroom are viewed as poor educators by nontraditional students. This would say, then, that too much affinity-seeking may have negative repercussions. Much like Houser (2005, 2006), the findings of the present study are consistent which found that affinity-seeking, as related to all three types of justice, is not as significant within the classroom.

As Mottet et al. (2006) suggested instructors and students both enter the classroom with rhetorical and relational goals. Recall that from the instructor's perspective, rhetorical goals emphasize the teacher's focus on influencing students to learn and understand the content presented in class. These instructors have a clear agenda for students to learn and direct them on a path. Instructors with rhetorical goals disseminate information and rely heavily on lectures. Also from an instructor's perspective, relational goals involve the type of relationship sought by the instructor and many teachers are between the extremes of consciously avoiding knowing their students and consciously seeking liking with them. An instructor with relational goals seeks a closer relationship with students. These teachers often view learning as something the teacher and student do together (Mottet et al., 2006). On the contrary, additional research (Frymier, 2007; Mottet et al., 2006) suggests that students also enter the classroom with relational goals. Student goals may be best understood in terms of individual needs. Students tend to use communication to ensure their needs are met (Mottet et al., 2006). However, students even enter the classroom with differing goals. For instance, traditional students prefer instructors who are friendly and attentive to their needs. Nontraditional students, however, tend enter the classroom with the want to be educated, not necessarily to generate a liking the instructor teaching the

content (Houser, 2005, 2006). If the goals between the instructor and student fail to align, the disconnect could potentially become problematic for instructors who fail to acknowledge the difference. Additional research could examine the relationships between learning orientation, traditional and nontraditional student differences and classroom justice perceptions.

These results uncover an interesting complex. As briefly stated before, *personal connection*, *demonstrated interest* and *affinity-seeking* (non-significant predictors of the variance) could be categorized as more connected to interactional justice constructs more than distributive and procedural, whereas *enjoyable interaction* and *response to questions* (significant predictors) are more procedurally centered. Though *enjoyable interaction* could be argued to be interactional in nature, it is contended here that the *enjoyable interaction* is anchored from the choices put forth in the procedures (syllabus, policies, grades, etc.) decided by the instructor, or rather, the *enjoyable interaction* is not as much connected with an interpersonal relationship, but instead, how fair the instructor is in making the classroom atmosphere enjoyable for all when considering all of the above procedures. For instance, *enjoyable interaction* includes behaviors such as creating an atmosphere where the students enjoy interacting with the instructor, relating to the students and comfortably interacting with the instructor. Procedural justice is comprised of instructor choices such as the course schedule of topics, how the instructor conducts class discussions, the way the instructor calls on students, the instructor's expectations of students and the course syllabus. Thus, how the instructor decides to design the class (i.e. syllabus, the way they call on students, etc.) could potentially affect how enjoyable (or not) the interaction within the classroom is perceived.

The contention that students' perception of procedural justice is more important than interactional justice is congruent with Chory's (2002) work on relationships between students'

perceptions of classroom justice and student motivation. It was found that students' perceptions of justice are predictive of student outcomes. The strongest relationships that emerged within the study were between students' perceptions of fair procedures and student motivation, affective learning and likelihood of aggressing toward instructors. When students perceived that their instructors engaged in fair practices and had fair policies, students reported they were more interested and enthused about the course and viewed the course content, instructor and recommended behaviors more positively. Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004b) further found that procedural justice predicted students' likelihood of indirectly aggressing against and expressing hostility toward the course instructor (it should be noted that interactional justice was not measured in this particular study). Thus, as research has suggested, the present study supports the claim that procedural justice is of high importance to students. Thus, when considering justice in the classroom, students may be more concerned with procedures and grading rather than the interactions with the instructor. This finding is also similar to research (Milton et al., 1986) on grade oriented students, which says grade oriented students may have little interest in instructors who are interactionally fair as they are likely more concerned with distributive and procedural justice. Thus, the present study supports the claim that students may place more importance on procedural justice more than interactional or distributive justice.

These perceptions could be for a variety of reasons. For example, students may perceive they have more control over the interactional justice in the classroom, therefore, may see less significance in even trying to predict how interactional justice is perceived. On the contrary, then, students know and understand classroom grading methods and procedures are out of their control. This is where the perception of justice in the classroom could be mostly affected. Students have more reason to perceive procedural and distributive justice differently from

interactional because they feel the instructor has entire control procedures and grading. Because this research suggests that *enjoyable interaction* and *response to questions* (more procedural in nature) are both significant predictors of justice, it could be a start to the understanding where students feel they belong in classroom justice. This finding, however, could be potentially problematic when considering the findings of Horan and Myers (2009) who found that instructors reported being primarily concerned with interactional justice, followed by procedural justice and distributive justice. Thus, the present study supports previous research (Mottet et al. 2006; Horan & Myers, 2009) suggesting students and instructors do indeed have differing perceptions of the importance of the different justice dimensions in the classroom. Further, Horan et al. (in press) found that students reported that students reported instructors violated first procedural justice, followed by distributive and interactional. This, too, is potentially problematic because if instructors first violate procedural justice, the student perception of classroom justice may initially be fairly low, with little room to increase. This present results support this claim by also suggesting that students are more concerned with procedural justice (*enjoyable interaction* and *response to questions*) over interactional justice (*personal connection, demonstrated interest in students and learning* and *affinity-seeking*).

In regards to significant and non-significant predictors, this study suggests that the original constructs of rapport and confirmation are split; that is, given that one dimension of rapport and one dimension of confirmation performed in a consistent pattern, the other dimension of each variable should have been equally present. In this study, however, only one of two rapport variables and one of three confirmation variables were found to be positively consistent. This is an interesting finding because it draws a line between not only the variables of this study, but actually between the variables of the larger constructs of rapport and confirmation.

All questions of the survey of rapport are geared toward understanding the mutual trust and respect between instructors and students (Frisby & Martin, 2009), however, in regards to all three types of classroom justice, it is evident that possibly students are more concerned with the *enjoyable interaction* dimension rather than creating a *personal connection*. Similarly, the confirmation construct was also split. This, too, plays a part in understanding that students perceive how the instructor responds to them in class to be more connected with justice rather than the interest of students from instructors. However, the rapport and confirmation constructs have only recently become of interest to instructional scholars, thus, further study of these constructs, in regards to classroom justice, should be conducted.

#### *Are Relational Messages Fair?*

Most intriguing in this study was the connection to the backlash of relational teaching as presented through the work of Mottet et al. (2005, 2006). In the present study, *style of teaching* (one dimension of confirmation) was found to be a significant negative predictor of distributive justice and although it was non-significant, *style of teaching* was also found to be a negative predictor of procedural and interactional justice. Recall that Mottet et al. (2005) experimentally found that instructors grant expert power to students who initiate and respond in the classroom significantly more than to students who were less verbally responsive. Students who were granted referent (relational) power also received significantly higher essay grades than students who were not granted this type of power for the exact same work. As related to the present study, it is contended that this choice is a *style of teaching* chosen by the instructor. Instructors who choose to react more to verbally responsive students are creating an atmosphere possible of favoritism which could potentially violating all types of justice, but particularly resulting in distributive injustice. First, procedurally, the design of the class would naturally promote active

participation from students. Those students who feel comfortable enough to respond, then, will receive more attention (interactional injustice) from the instructor. This additional attention would lead to higher grades for those who have responded more than those that do not (distributive injustice). This explains the results of the present study which found *style of teaching* as a significant negative predictor of distributive justice. Thus, the *style of teaching* chosen by the instructor sets up the students to potentially fail simply based on responsiveness in class. Students may perceive this relational teaching message as unfair as well as view it as limiting their chance of success in the classroom.

Also consider additional work of Mottet et al. (2006), who argued that instructors who are well liked by students and are in higher demand are able to challenge students to work harder. These instructors choose a *style of teaching* that forces students to push the limits and strive to work much harder to achieve a higher grade. Though this type of teaching can be viewed as a positive *style of teaching* from the instructor's point of view, students may perceive the *style of teaching* to be unfair. In this sense, instructors may perceive their *style of teaching* to reflect the learning process, rather than just by grades received. Students, however, may perceive this as unfair because they may not understand the larger reasoning behind the instructor's choice. Thus, this type of relational teaching message (recall *style of teaching* is a variable of confirmation) could potentially be perceived as unfair because students may feel they should not have to go above and beyond simply to receive a grade they should be able to earn by merely completing the required tasks.

These perceptions of injustice are best explained as an expectancy violation by students as proposed by Burgoon (1978). In Expectancy Violations Theory, Burgoon described prescriptive expectations as "idealized standards of conduct" (p. 196) that are perceived as

required, expected and desired. Behavioral violations to these expectations create violation valence (a primary component of the theory) which is a positive or negative response to a behavior resulting from accepted social norms (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). In this regard, the work of Mottet et al. (2006) suggested students could perceive the instructor to be effective, but a harsh grader, therefore view them as unfair. If instructors utilize relational teaching messages such as rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking, yet never inform students of where the grading procedures originate and, thus, grade harshly, they could be violating the expectation set forth by the students. As research suggests, students may naturally believe that a relational teacher would be fair. However, once again, as the present study suggests, the *style of teaching* was found to be a significant negative predictor for distributive (outcome of class as compared with others, i.e. grades), which means, the style choices by the instructor (i.e. undocumented, harsh grading policies) could potentially violate the student expectations, and therefore, relate to a perception of (un)fairness in the classroom.

Finally, an additional explanation of student perceptions of classroom injustice could be explained by cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). The cognitive dissonance theory suggests that individuals desire balance and comfort. When individuals encounter two inconsistent thoughts, they experience psychological discomfort (i.e. dissonance). Thus, perhaps students perceive the instructor's *style of teaching* as unfair because of dissonance. As stated before, the instructor who is well-liked, yet a strict, harsh grader may create dissonance with the students. In this sense, the student is receiving two inconsistent messages: 1) the instructor is relational and therefore well-liked but 2) he/she is a harsh, strict grader. These inconsistent messages, then, could play a role in students perceiving the instructor to be unfair because in their mind, these messages do not line up. Thus, in this sense relational teaching messages could



potentially be perceived by students to be unfair. This finding supports existing research on the potential backlash of relational teaching messages (Babad, 1995; Mottet et al., 2005, 2006; Myers, 2006). Future research should be conducted to find if additional relational teaching messages are also potentially problematic.

Though style of teaching offers a glimpse into potential backlash of relational teaching messages, the present study still provides empirical support that the above relational teaching messages are perceived as fair from all three types of justice. Recall, based on the positive correlations of *all variables (enjoyable interaction, personal connection, response to questions, demonstrated interest in students and learning, style of teaching and affinity-seeking)*, it was found that all are perceived as fair from a student's perspective. The regression analysis, then, offered a closer look at potential predictors of the perceived fairness. Thus, continued research is needed to understand further into the differences between these variables.

#### *Theoretical and Practical Implications*

The results gathered in this investigation present particular theoretical implications. Mottet et al. (2006) suggest both instructors and students enter the classroom context with the purpose to 1) influence and/ or achieve goals and 2) develop and maintain relationships, however, instructor and students specific goals and needs differ. The present study supports this theory in also suggesting that the rhetorical and relational goals of instructors and students are different. Past research has also found that instructors are primarily concerned with interactional justice (Horan & Myers, 2009), whereas, students are concerned mostly with procedural justice (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b). This study supports the claim that students may be more procedurally concerned in how the instructor prepares the class to be enjoyable (or not) and how they respond to questions. As Frymier (2007) speculated, instructor goals influence

their classroom procedures. Future research should examine if and how instructors' justice messages and goals are related.

In addition to the proceeding theoretical implications, these results also have practical implications. Frymier and Houser (2000) suggested that once formal instructor/student roles are removed from the classroom context, interpersonal relationships can begin to form. This argument tends to be more related to that of instructor's perceptions of what is important in regards to classroom justice – more of an interactional justice concern. The present study suggests, however, that students' perceptions of justice may be more influence by the procedural and distributive choices. Therefore, if instructors want to effectively manage their classrooms, they should be fair when preparing procedures (i.e. syllabus, grading, expectations, etc.). Most specifically, creating an enjoyable atmosphere and responding well to student questions should be considered. Relational teaching can be related with how students will behave in the classroom. An instructor's behavior and choices for classroom management influences how students perceive them and their behavioral patterns (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Certain attributes that instructors choose for their classroom may influence how students will react and behave during class time based on what these students perceive to be fair from instructors, depending on how relational or not the instructor chooses to be. Thus, as related to the present study, positive procedures outlined prior to the beginning of class may help to shape positive student behaviors. Therefore, if instructors want to be considered fair, they should strongly consider their choices in classroom procedures. This is not to say, however, that interactional justice becomes obsolete. When mutual trust is created between the students and instructors, the openness factor creates an atmosphere where students feel more able to ask questions (Frymier & Houser, 2000). This, then, creates a safe learning environment for all and students who feel they are part of a safe

environment may perceive the instructor to be fair on the whole. Regardless, instructors should take into great consideration of the choices they make in preparing the classroom, understanding that their actions could influence the reactions and behaviors from their students.

In addition, this study has additional practical implications in the form of instructional training. Much like suggested in Horan and Myers (2009), more often than not, college instructors are trained as content experts in their specialized area yet rarely receive much instructional or pedagogical training. Many times, if any training is received at all, it is while the instructor is a graduate teaching assistant which typically focuses on policy and procedure (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Gray, 1992). This study strengthens Horan and Myers' argument in suggesting that instructors should be aware of the effects of classroom effects of classroom justice, particularly, in this sense, when linked to relational teaching. Instructors should receive training that informs them that their students may have different goals when entering the classroom, and therefore, instructors should take time to get to know their 'audience' and keep their goals in mind when preparing class for them.

#### *Directions for Future Research*

As this research was defined in terms of constructs that have never been studied together in the past, future research should be continued on these variables. Most importantly, researchers should consider furthering this research to uncover what, if any, differences exist in perceptions of justice between traditional and nontraditional students. Based on the previous discussion, it is clear that traditional and nontraditional students have differing perceptions of affinity-seeking from the instructor. Additional research should investigate if traditional and nontraditional students differ in perceptions of 1) the remaining relational teaching behaviors (rapport and

confirmation) and 2) the perception of justice within the classroom. It is of interest, specifically, if the different groups believe different classroom behaviors to be fair.

Moreover, as Horan and Myers (2009) previously suggested, it is also contended here that research should be extended on whether or not the perceptions of justice changes with differing learning orientations. It is evident that students enter the classroom with differing learning orientations, therefore, depending on the desired outcome that the student wants out of the class, what is perceived as justice may also differ. Additional research could explore what category of justice each type of learning orientation would deem more important. Because classroom justice is relatively undiscovered territory, the understanding of different student perceptions will only help scholars to better understand instructional communication. Thus, it is suggested that student learning orientation to be used in continued research.

Lastly, as suggested in prior research (Mottet et al. 2006; Houser, 2005, 2006), the affinity-seeking scale needs to be continued to be investigated. Very few studies have focused on affinity-seeking in the instructional context. The present study supports similar findings of affinity-seeking as researched by Houser (2005, 2006) and Frymier et al. (1995, 1996), however, additional research should aim to focus solely on affinity-seeking behaviors in the classroom to solidify an instructional affinity-seeking scale that can be continually used in the future.

### *Limitations*

As with any research study, it is important to view the results of this research in the context of the limitations of the study. First, because this research was correlational in nature, causality cannot be inferred. Thus, though there is a relationship between justice and relational teaching messages in the classroom but these results can, in no way, speak to what causes perceptions of (in)justice in the classroom. Many of the relational constructs can suggest what is

positively or negatively correlated, however, this study cannot predict what students perceive as fair. Only experimental design can sort out this issue.

Second, this study was conducted with an undergraduate student population at a private university with small class sizes, limiting the generalizability of the results. It can be seen from the descriptive details of the participants that about 60% of students reported that the class size reported on was 30 students or less. This is clearly a function of a private institution. Therefore, understanding the factors of a small classroom setting may limit the understanding of the results which could provide a generalized idea. In this sense, perceptions of classroom justice could be amplified because of the small classroom setting. Given that perceptions of any relational dimensions with instructors are likely enhanced in smaller class settings, future research should explore this study's questions utilizing larger classes.

Third, given the complexity of the design of the study using three justice variables (distributive, procedural and interactional) and a total of six relational teaching variables (rapport, including enjoyable interaction and personal connection; confirmation, including response to questions, demonstrated interest in students and learning and style of teaching; and affinity-seeking) caused the length of the survey was extensive. Therefore, the third limitation to this study was survey fatigue by the participants. To ensure all variables were completely covered, the participants were asked to answer over 60 questions. The length of the survey could have potentially caused participants to lose energy resulting in lack of enthusiasm for the ending questions.

### Conclusion

It is evident that both relational teaching and classroom justice are important to both students and instructors. Collectively, the body of research on classroom justice indicates that

fairness in the classroom is important. Communicating from a relational perspective also is important in both fostering classroom relationships and perceptions of justice. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what relationships exist between relational teaching messages (*rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking*) and classroom justice (*distributive, procedural and interactional*) and to find whether these relationships were positive or negative. Because results indicated that all three relational teaching messages were significantly and positively related to all types of justice, it is apparent that relational teaching is more likely to have a positive effect on classroom justice. Based on the regression analysis, however, a closer examination was taken to better understand which variables were better predictors of all three types of justice. *Enjoyable interaction* (one of two rapport variables) and *response to questions* (one of three confirmation variables) were found to be significant positive predictors of the variance of all three types of justice. *Personal connection* (one of two rapport variables), *demonstrated interest in students and learning* (one of three confirmation variables) and *affinity-seeking* were all found to be non-significant predictors. It was contended here that the significant predictors are more procedurally based, whereas the non-significant predictors are more interactional. Therefore, it is argued that students are more concerned with procedural justice, rather than distributive and interactional justice. This supports previous research who suggests procedural justice is a primary concern for students (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b). This finding is potentially problematic as additional research suggests instructors are mostly concerned with interactional justice, followed by procedural and distributive (Horan & Myers, 2009). Thus, the present study supports the idea that students and instructors have differing perceptions of classroom justice.

Finally, the present study found *style of teaching* (one of three confirmation variables) to be the sole significant, negative predictor for distributive justice, which supports previous research (Babad, 1995; Mottet et al. 2005, 2006; Myers, 2006) suggesting a potential backlash to relational teaching messages. The results of the present study provide empirical support for both the previously hypothesized relationship between classroom justice and rapport, confirmation and affinity-seeking (relational teaching messages) as well as previously researched claims. These findings add to the growing body of research on classroom justice and relational teaching messages.

## References

- Babad, E. (2005). Guessing teachers' differential treatment of high- and low-achievers from thin slices of their public lecturing behavior. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 29*, 125-134.
- Bell, R. A., & Daly, J. A. (1984). The affinity-seeking function of communication. *Communication Monographs, 51*, 91-115.
- Bies, R. J., & Moag, J. S. (1986). Interactional justice: Communication criteria of fairness. *Research on Negotiation in Organizations, 1*, 43-55.
- Bowl, M. (2001). Experiencing the barriers: Non-traditional students entering higher education. *Research Papers in Education, 16*, 141-160.
- Buerkel-Rothfuss, N. L., & Gray, P. L. (1992). Models of TA training programs. In J. D. Nyquist & D. H. Wulff (Eds.), *Preparing teaching assistants for instructional roles: Supervising TAs in communication* (pp. 128-138). Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Burgoon, J. K. (1978). A communication model of personal space violations: Explication and an initial test. *Human Communication Research, 4*, 129-142.
- Burgoon, J. K., & Hale, J. L. (1988). Nonverbal expectancy violations: Model elaboration and application to immediacy behaviors. *Communication Monographs, 55*, 58-79.
- Burleson, B. R., & Samter, W. (1990). Effects of cognitive complexity on the perceived importance of communication skills in friends. *Communication Research, 17*, 165-182.
- Byrne, Z. S., & Cropanzano, R. (2001). The history of organizational justice: The founders speak. In R. Cropanzano (Ed.), *Justice in the workplace: From theory into practice, 2* (pp. 3-26). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Buber, M. (1957). Distance and relation. *Psychiatry, 20*, 97-104.



- Campbell, L. C., Eichhorn, K. C., Basch, C. & Wolf, R. (2010). Exploring the relationship between teacher confirmation, gender, and student effort in the college classroom. *Human Communication, 12*, 447-464.
- Catt, S., Miller, D., & Schallenkemp K. (2007). You are the key: Communicate for learning effectiveness. *Education, 127*, 369-377.
- Chory. R. M. (2007). Enhancing student perceptions of fairness: The relationship between instructor credibility and classroom justice. *Communication Education, 56*, 89-105.
- Chory-Assad, R. M. (2002). Classroom justice: Perceptions of fairness as a predictor of student motivation, learning, and aggression. *Communication Quarterly, 50*, 58-77.
- Chory-Assad, R. M., & Paulsel, M. L. (2004a). Antisocial classroom communication: Instructor influence and interactional justice as predictors of student aggression. *Communication Quarterly, 52*, 98-114.
- Chory-Assad, R. M., & Paulsel, M. L. (2004b). Classroom justice: Student aggression and resistance as reactions to perceived unfairness. *Communication Education, 53*, 253-273.
- Chory, R. M., & Goodboy, A. K. (2010). Power, compliance, and resistance in the classroom. In D. L. Fassett & J. T. Warren (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of communication and instruction* (pp. 181-199). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cohen-Charash, Y., & Spector, P. E. (2001). The role of justice in organizations: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 86*, 278-321.
- Colquitt, J. A., Conlon, D. E., Wesson, M. J., Porter, C. O. L. H., & Ng, K. Y. (2001). Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 425-445.
- Deutsch, M. (1975). Equity, equality, and need: What determines what value will be used as the

- basis of distributive justice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 31, 137-149.
- Dill, P. L. & Henley, T. B. (1998). Stressors of college: A comparison of traditional and nontraditional students. *The Journal of Psychology*, 132, 25-32.
- Ellis, K. (2000). Perceived teacher confirmation: The development and validation of an instrument and two studies of the relationship to cognitive and affective learning. *Human Communication Research*, 26, 261-291.
- Ellis, K. (2004). The impact of perceived teacher confirmation on receiver apprehension, motivation, and learning. *Communication Education*, 53, 1-20.
- Festinger, L. (1957). A theory of cognitive dissonance. Stanford University: Stanford, CA.
- Frisby, B. N., & Martin, M. M. (2009). *Instructor-student and student-student rapport in the classroom*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago, IL.
- Frymier, A. B. (1994). The use of affinity-seeking in producing liking and learning in the classroom. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 22, 87-105.
- Frymier, A. B. (2007). *Instructors' and students' goals in the teaching-learning process*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL.
- Frymier, A. B., & Houser, M. L. (2000). The teacher-student relationship as an interpersonal relationship. *Communication Education*, 49, 207-219.
- Frymier, A. B., Houser, M. L., & Shulman, G. (1995). *A measure of affinity-seeking: An alternative to the Bell and Daly typology*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Communication Association, Pittsburg, PA.

- Frymier, A. B., Houser, M. L., & Shulman, G. (1996). *Using affinity seeking to empower students*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Communication Association, New York, NY.
- Frymier, A. B., & Thompson, C. A. (1992). Perceived teacher affinity in relation to perceived teacher credibility. *Communication Education, 41*, 388-399.
- Frymier, A. B., & Wanzer, M. B. (2006). Teacher and affinity-seeking in the classroom. In T. P. Mottet, V. P. Richmond & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Handbook of instructional communication: Rhetorical and relational perspectives* (pp. 195-211). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Goodboy, A. K., & Myers, S. A. (2008). The effect of teacher confirmation on student communication and learning outcomes. *Communication Education, 57*, 153-179.
- Graham, E. E., West, R., & Schaller, K. A. (1992). Association between the relational teaching approach and teacher job satisfaction. *Communication Reports, 5*, 11-22.
- Gremlar, D. D., & Gwinner, K. P. (2000). Customer-employee rapport in service relationships. *Journal of Service Research, 3*, 82-104.
- Guilford, J. P. (1956). *Fundamental statistics in psychology and education*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Horan, S. M., Chory, R. M., & Goodboy, A. K. (in press). Understanding students' classroom justice experiences and responses. *Communication Education*.
- Horan, S. M., Houser, M. L., Goodboy, A. K., & Frymier, A. B. (in press). Students' first impressions of instructors: Understanding the role of relational messages. *Communication Research Reports*.

- Horan, S. M., & Myers, S. A. (2009). An exploration of college instructors' use of classroom justice, power, and behavior alteration techniques. *Communication Education, 58*, 483-496.
- Horan, S. M., Martin, M. M., & Weber, K. (2010). *Understanding Emotional Response Theory: The role of instructor power and justice messages*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Communication Association, Baltimore, MD.
- Houser, M. L. (2005). Are we violating their expectations? Instructor communication expectations of traditional and nontraditional students. *Communication Quarterly, 53*, 213-228.
- Houser, M. L. (2006). Expectancy violations of instructor communication as predictors of motivation and learning: A comparison of traditional and nontraditional students. *Communication Quarterly, 54*, 331-349.
- Jorgenson, J. (1992). Social approaches: Communication, rapport, and the interview: A social perspective. *Communication Theory, 2*, 148-156.
- Kearney, P. (1994). Student resistance strategies. In R. B. Rubin, P. Palmgreen, & H. W. Sypher (Eds.), *Communication research measures: A sourcebook* (pp. 347-351). New York: The Guilford Press.
- McCroskey, J. C., & McCroskey, L. L. (1986). The affinity-seeking of classroom teachers. *Communication Research Reports, 3*, 158-167.
- McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1983). Power in the classroom I: Instructor and student perceptions. *Communication Education, 32*, 175-184.
- Milton, O., Pollio, H. R., & Eison, J. A. (1986). *Making sense of college grads*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Mottet, T. P., & Beebe, S. A. (2006). Foundations of instructional communication. In T. P. Mottet, V. P. Richmond & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Handbook of instructional communication: Rhetorical and relational perspectives* (pp. 3-32). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Mottet, T. P., Beebe, S. A., Raffeld, P. C., & Paulsel, M. L. (2005). The effects of student responsiveness on teachers granting power to students and essay evaluation. *Communication Quarterly*, 53, 421-436.
- Mottet, T. P., Frymier, A. B., Beebe, S. A. (2006). Theorizing about instructional communication. In T. P. Mottet, V. P. Richmond & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Handbook of instructional communication: Rhetorical and relational perspectives* (pp. 255-282). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Mottet, T. P., Parker-Raley, J., Cunningham, C., & Beebe, S. A. (2005). The relationships between teacher nonverbal immediacy and student course workload and teacher availability expectations. *Communication Research Reports*, 22, 275-282.
- Mottet, T. P., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (2006). Assessing instructional communication. In T. P. Mottet, V. P. Richmond & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Handbook of instructional communication: Rhetorical and relational perspectives* (pp.283-307). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Myers, S. A. (2006). Using leader-member exchange theory to explain students' motives to communicate. *Communication Quarterly*, 54, 293-304.
- Myers, S. A., Mottet, T. P., & Martin, M. M. (2000). The relationship between student communication motives and perceived instructor communicator style. *Communication Research Reports*, 17, 161-170.

- Paulsel, M. L., & Chory-Assad, R. M. (2005). Perceptions of instructor interactional justice as a predictor of student resistance. *Communication Research Reports, 22*, 283-291.
- Paulsel, M. L., Chory-Assad, R. M., & Dunleavy, K. N. (2005). The relationship between student perceptions of instructor power and classroom justice. *Communication Research Reports, 22*, 20017-215.
- Plax, T. G., Kearney, P., McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1986). Power in the classroom VI: Verbal control strategies, nonverbal immediacy and affective learning. *Communication Education, 35*, 43-55.
- Richmond, V. P., & Gorham, J. (1996). Communication, learning, and affect in instruction (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Edina, MN: Burgess.
- Schrodt, P., Turman, P. D., & Soliz, J. (2006). Perceived understanding as a mediator of perceived teacher confirmation and students' ratings of instruction. *Communication Education, 55*, 370-388.
- Sidelinger, R. J., & Booth-Butterfield, M. (2010). Co-constructing student involvement: An examination of teacher confirmation and student-to-student connectedness in the college classroom. *Communication Education, 59*, 165-184.
- Turman, P. D., & Schrodt, P. (2006). Student perceptions of teacher power as a function of perceived teacher confirmation. *Communication Education, 55*, 265-279.
- Walster, E., Walster, G. W., & Berscheid, E. (1978). *Equity: Theory and research*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Williams, F. (1968). Reasoning with statistics: Simplified examples in communication research. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Table 1  
*Correlation Matrix of Variables*

	M	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Distributive	49.32	9.96	0.95	-----								
2. Procedural	63.11	9.59	0.91	0.70**	-----							
3. Interactional	30.10	6.43	0.96	0.55**	0.73**	-----						
4. Enjoyable Interaction	31.16	7.80	0.93	0.55**	0.60**	0.68**	-----					
5. Personal Connection	20.37	7.12	0.93	0.47**	0.42**	0.46**	0.78**	-----				
6. Response to Questions	16.86	4.23	0.91	0.41**	0.59**	0.59**	0.58**	0.47**	-----			
7. Demonstrated Interest	19.15	5.17	0.89	0.38**	0.54**	0.54**	0.61**	0.56**	0.86**	-----		
8. Teaching Style	15.40	4.76	0.89	0.26**	0.46**	0.43**	0.53**	0.53**	0.81**	0.84**	-----	
9. Affinity Seeking	145.81	19.18	0.86	0.42**	0.51**	0.57**	0.71**	0.60**	0.62**	0.60**	0.58**	-----

*Note.* \*\* $p < .01$ .