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# Perception Becomes Reality: Student-Teacher Relationships and Verbally Aggressive Messages

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PERCEPTION BECOMES REALITY:  
STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS AND  
VERBALLY AGGRESSIVE MESSAGES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of verbal aggression toward students when recalling a hurtful incident between a teacher and a student. Specifically, this study investigated the relationship between students reported verbally aggressive incidents with teachers, self-esteem and student-teacher relational satisfaction. A total of 83 participants were surveyed to obtain recollections of verbally aggressive incidents and their reported impact. Verbally aggressive messages were represented by Infante's (1987) typologies of verbally aggressive messages, which included character attacks, competence attacks, background attacks, physical appearance attacks, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, threats, profanity and nonverbal emblems. The researcher also included a "never experienced" category for respondents who expressed never having experienced a verbally aggressive incident with a teacher.

Generally, the findings indicated that a statistically significant relationship existed between experiencing verbal aggression and decreased student-teacher relational satisfaction and decreased self-esteem. Additionally, it was found that character attacks, competence attacks, ridicule and background attacks were the most frequently perceived forms of verbal aggression. Furthermore, results indicated that respondents who had moderate to high levels of verbal aggression were more likely to report experiencing a verbally aggressive incident with a teacher.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The student- teacher relationship is a sensitive one in that students often look to their teachers, instructors and professors for validation of their competencies, abilities, skills and even potential success. Teachers often don't realize the power, impact and influence they have over students' aspirations, dreams and development of future plans and goals. Researchers have studied a number of communication dynamics within the student-teacher relationship in the college classroom, such as instructor immediacy and verbal aggression (Rocca, 2004); teacher clarity (Avtgis, 2001); perceptions of teacher power in the classroom (Richmond & McCroskey, 1984); teachers' immediacy, solidarity and communicative styles (Anderson, Norton & Nussbaum, 1981); teacher clarity and immediacy (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001); the amount, relevancy and negativity of teacher disclosure (Cayanus & Martin, 2008); teacher affinity seeking (Myers, 2003); teachers' expressions of anger (McPherson & Young, 2004); and inappropriate and appropriate teacher humor (Frymier, Wanzer & Wojtaszczyk, 2008). Verbal aggression has been and continues to be widely researched and studied as a communicative trait and message type. The effects of aggression have been found to be

constructive and destructive; verbal aggression, specifically, has been consistently found as an inappropriate, destructive, or incompetent form of communication (Rocca & Vogl-Bauer, 1999).

The dynamics of verbal aggression have been studied in a number of interpersonal relationships such as parent-child (Beatty, Zelle, Dobos & Rudd, 1994; Booth-Butterfield & Sidelinger, 1997; Martin & Anderson, 1997; Weber & Patterson, 1997), siblings (Myers & Bryant, 2008; Martin, Anderson & Rocca, 2005; Martin, Anderson, Burant & Weber, 1997) the marital dyad (Infante, Chandler & Rudd, 1989; Infante, Sabourin, Rudd & Shannon, 1990; Sabourin, Infante & Rudd, 1993) and superior-subordinate (Gorden, Infante & Graham, 1988; Gorden, Infante & Izzo, 1988; Infante & Gorden, 1985). Amid the growing body of research on verbal aggression, the area of verbal aggression in the instructional setting, specifically K-12 education, is uncertain.

This study expands upon existing research by examining the impact of teacher's verbally aggressive messages toward students. Specifically, this study is interested in students reported impact, if any, of teachers' verbally aggressive messages on self-esteem, student-teacher relational satisfaction and future interaction with other teachers. Relational satisfaction, self-esteem and trait verbal aggression were selected as variables in this study for the following reasons: First, trait verbal aggression has been found to have a relationship to one's perception of other's verbal aggression (Schrodt, 2003). Second, verbal aggression involves an inherent attack on one's self-concept (Infante & Wigley, 1986) and self-esteem has been identified as a component of self-concept; however, research identifying exactly which aspects of the self-concept are impacted is unclear. Third, assertions that students benefit from positive relationships with teachers

have been found in the literature (Frymier, 2007); however, the specific academic benefits directly related to relational satisfaction are unclear.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

A number of studies have examined the student-teacher relationship in relation to other variables such as teacher self-disclosure (Cayanus & Martin, 2008), attachment style (Riley, 2009), outcomes of African American students (Decker, Dona & Christenson, 2007), student differential behavior in the classroom (Newberry & Davies, 2008; Myers & Pianta, 2008), boundaries (Givens, 2007) and resiliency (Johnson, 2008). The student- teacher relationship has been considered an interpersonal relationship (Schrodt, 2003) as well as a superior-subordinate relationship (Myers, 2002). Whichever type of relationship it is considered to be, the expectations of students for their teachers to be both predictable, as the secure base, and appropriately challenging, as well as facilitate learning experiences to help them explore the world, is self-evident (Riley, 2009).

Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins (1995) asserts that a quality student-teacher relationship can protect the child from academic failure and is fundamental to the healthy development of all students in school (Myers & Pianta, 2008). The student- teacher relationship is not unlike the parent-child, in that the teacher provides firm support as the

care-giver, enabling the student to learn not only about the world around them but their self-efficacy within it (Riley, 2009). It is also important to note that the quality of the student-teacher relationship contributes to both academic and social-emotional development (Hamre & Pianta, 2001); can create of a foundation for successful adaptation to the social and academic environment (Myers & Pianta, 2008); and help maintain students' interest in academic and social pursuits, which in turn leads to better grades and more positive peer relationships (Wentzel, 1998). Positive student-teacher relationships also serve as security for students in that they feel more comfortable approaching a teacher if things get difficult or if they get upset (Myers & Pianta, 2008).

Considering the potential magnitude and value that the student-teacher relationship holds, it makes sense that Decker et al. (2007) found that as the quality of the relationship increases, there were also increases in positive social, behavioral and engagement outcomes for students. Additionally, it was found that students wanted to be closer to their teachers, suggesting that students' relationships with teachers may still be a source and a factor that can promote positive student outcomes (Decker et al., 2007). Literature has also recognized the role that the quality of relationships inside the classroom plays in the learning environment (Davis, 2003; Lambert & McCombs, 1998; McCombs, 2004), participation (Wentzel, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) and motivation to achieve (Wentzel, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The assertion that positive student-teacher relationships play a vital role in shaping the educational experience of students leads the researcher to explore the impact of the perception of teacher verbal aggression on relational satisfaction.

## **Verbal Aggression**

A great deal of research on verbal aggression has emerged over the past few decades. Described as “symbolic aggression” (Rocca & McCrosky, 1999), verbal aggression is primarily defined in the research as “verbal or nonverbal communication channels in order, minimally, to dominate and perhaps damage or, maximally, to defeat and perhaps destroy another person’s position on topics of communication and/or the other person’s self-concept” (Infante, 1987, p. 164). Symbolic aggressive behavior is considered constructive if it facilitates interpersonal communication satisfaction, and enhances a relationship by increasing understanding, empathy, and intimacy. Symbolic aggressive behavior is considered destructive if it produces dissatisfaction, leads to less favorable self-perceptions on the part of at least one person in the dyad, and if relational quality is reduced; verbal aggression is placed on the destructive side of the aggressive communication continuum (Infante, 1987).

Several ways in which verbal aggression may emerge have been identified as character attacks, competence attacks, background attack, physical appearance attacks, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, threats, profanity, nonverbal emblems (Infante, 1987; Infante, Riddle, Horvath & Tumlin, 1992), blame, personality attacks, commands, disconfirmation, global rejection, negative comparison and sexual harassment (Infante, 1995). Despite the manner in which verbal aggressive messages may emerge, they have potentially damaging effects (Rocca & McCrosky, 1999) such as humiliation, embarrassment, anger, depression, feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness and despair (Infante et al., 1992; Infante, 1995) and hurt (Martin, Anderson & Horvath, 1996). Research on verbal aggression has consistently drawn five conclusions: a.) individuals

who are rated high in verbal aggression report that verbally aggressive messages are less hurtful than individuals who are rated low in verbal aggression, b.) individuals who are rated high in verbal aggression are more likely to use particular messages, c.) verbally aggressive individuals believe that the use of verbal aggression is justified, d.) verbally aggressive messages received from friends are generally rated as being more hurtful than those received from acquaintances and e.) verbal aggression is generally associated with decreased relational satisfaction and negative relational outcomes (Myers & Knox, 1999).

What makes verbal aggression somewhat difficult to define is the possibility of verbal aggression occurring on one or more of the four levels of viewpoints as proposed by Infante's (1987) model of aggressiveness. According to the model, the four perspectives that determine whether a message is constructive or destructive is that of the dyad or group, an observer, the individual and society; all of these perspectives are valid and depend on the circumstances under which the potential verbal aggressiveness occurs (Infante, Myers & Buerkel, 1994). Defining verbal aggression thus depends on which point of view is being considered and the perspective in which one is interested (Infante et al., 1994). Because the interest of this study is the viewpoint of the student, student perceptions of teachers' verbal aggression is what becomes important (Rocca & McCrosky, 1999).

Infante et al. (1994) posits that all perspectives can prove informative to a researcher, as agreement may or may not occur across all perspectives. While examining perceptual differences of constructive (argumentativeness) and destructive (verbal aggression) conduct between observers and participants, Infante et al. (1994) found participants were more likely to perceive more argumentative and verbally aggressive

behaviors than observers; the role, whether a participant or observer, significantly affected the rating of the disagreement as constructive or destructive; and that participants rated the disagreement more argumentative and verbally aggressive than the observers. Additionally, the participants were more likely to observe behaviors associated with goal attainment than observers. This suggests that participants perceive a wider range of strategies than observers who are not personally involved. These findings are especially important to consider while attempting to examine the impact of verbally aggressive messages on students. Perhaps when students perceive a message to be verbally aggressive, they ascribe additional destructive goals of the teacher to that message. While this is not the focus of this particular study, it suggests that the attributions that students make while evaluating a teacher's verbal aggression could in fact be more detrimental than research has suggested thus far.

### **Students' Trait Verbal Aggression**

A number of studies have researched students' perceptions of teachers' verbally aggressive messages, but few have looked at the impact of student trait verbal aggression on the perception of teacher verbal aggression. Researchers should consider those characteristics that students bring with them to the classroom that influence both the student-teacher relationship and student perception of teacher verbal aggression (Schrodt, 2003). Research found that students with moderate to high levels of verbal aggression reported their instructors as being more verbally aggressive than students with low levels of verbal aggression (Schrodt, 2003).

Traits or predispositions have been found to account for significant variance in both observed communication behavior and communication-based perceptions (Infante,



1987; McCroskey & Daly, 1987). While Beatty and McCroskey (1997) assert that trait verbal aggressiveness is one's expression of inborn, biological differences, Infante (1987) argues that a personality approach to understanding aggression accommodates various explanations of aggressive behavior, including learning. "Infante (1987) also points to Berkowitz's (1962) view that a trait is learned and then energized by cues reminding the individual of the learning context" (Chory & Cicchirillo, 2007). These polar opposite assertions leads the research to examine the role that students' trait verbal aggression plays in their perception and response to teachers' verbally aggressive messages.

### **Reciprocal Nature of Verbal Aggression**

Infante et al. (1990) suggest that "a norm of reciprocity operates for verbal aggression"; in other words, "verbal aggression begets the same" (p. 364). Continuation of verbal aggression after it is initiated is largely due to reciprocity (Infante, 1995). Numerous studies have found a reciprocal relationship between verbal aggression in adult (Infante et al., 1989; Infante et al., 1990; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993) and adolescent relationships (Atkin, Smith, Roberto, Fediuk & Wagner, 2002). Consistent with previous research studies which found verbal aggression to be reciprocal in nature, Haynie, Nansel, Eitel, Crump, Saylor, Yu & Simons-Morton (2001) suggest that victims of verbal aggression are often likely to engage in verbal aggression themselves. Intuitively, people often feel compelled to return acts of aggression to save face and discourage future attacks (Felson, 1978, 1982). According to Rocca & Vogl-Bauer (1999), an individual's level of trait verbal aggression interacts with situational factors which may inhibit or disinhibit verbal aggression, ultimately impacting an individual's response or behavior (Infante, 1987). Apparently, an attack by one person instigates a

response, thus perpetuating a pattern over time where the interactants share the roles of perpetrator and victim (Atkin et al., 2002). This assertion leads the research to further investigate how students respond to teachers' verbally aggressive messages.

### **Verbal Aggression and the Classroom**

Verbal aggressiveness is generally associated with negative student outcomes as demonstrated by research findings of decreased student affective and cognitive learning, student state motivation, satisfaction, perceived teacher credibility (Myers, 2002; Myers & Knox, 2001; Schrodt, 2003; Teven, 2001) and limited student involvement, in and out of the classroom (Myers, Edwards, Wahl & Martin, 2007). Instructors may communicate in either a negative manner or a manner that conveys negative things for a number of reasons, including student discipline, evaluation of student performance or to discourage certain student behavior (Rocca, 2002). Certain types of negative communication, whether intentional or without awareness, is considered verbal aggression (Rocca, 2002). Verbal aggression in the classroom can emerge in a number of ways; instructors may attack students' character, competence, background and/or physical appearance (Rocca, 2002). Instructors may also resort to the use of insults, malediction, teasing, ridicule, profanity, threats (Infante, 1987; Infante et al., 1992), putdowns, rudeness, sarcasm and/or verbal abuse (Kearney, Plax, Hays & Ivey, 1991). Those behaviors harm the classroom environment and can negatively impact student attendance, participation and interaction with the instructor (Rocca, 2002, 2004).

Researchers found that perceived instructor verbal aggression is related to student perceptions of other instructor communication behaviors (Myers & Knox, 1999). Student perceptions of instructor verbal aggression have been studied in relation to students'

perceptions of teacher immediacy and homophily (Rocca & McCrosky, 1999), student state motivation, learning and satisfaction (Myers, 2002), student involvement (Myers et al., 2007), teacher affinity seeking (Myers, 2003) and teacher caring (Teven, 2001). College students' involvement in the classroom is often associated with perceptions of their instructor's communicative behavior (Myers et al., 2007). Myers and Knox (1999) found that although instructor use of verbally aggressive messages is infrequent, when verbal aggression does emerge students report lower levels of affect toward both the instructor and the behaviors recommended by the instructor.

Additionally, research has found that students who perceive their instructors to be verbally aggressive also perceive them to be inappropriate, disconfirming and nonsupportive (Myers et al., 2007); less immediate, less similar to students, less interpersonally attractive (Rocca & McCrosky, 1999), less competent (Martin, Weber & Burant, 1997) and less caring and lower in credibility (Teven, 2001). Research has also shown that the type of verbally aggressive message an instructor employs has a direct impact on the potential effect on the student. Character and competence attacks were found to decrease student attitudes toward the course content, the recommended course behaviors and teacher evaluation; malediction was found to only decrease student attitudes on teacher evaluation; among the 10 types of messages, character and competence attacks were found to have the strongest impact (Myers, 2003; Myers & Knox, 1999; Myers & Rocca, 2000). Research has examined the impact of specific types of verbally aggressive messages on students. This research seeks to build upon those findings by examining the specific messages that students identify as most memorable. A

considerable addition to these findings would be to identify which messages students recall as being most significant.

### **Teacher Communicative Behaviors and Communicative Style in the Classroom**

Communicator style refers to “the way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered or understood” (Norton, 1977, p. 378). According to Anderson, Norton & Nussbaum (1981), communicator style can be conceptualized through various subconstructs such as dominant, dramatic, animated, open contentious, relaxed, friendly, attentive, impression-leaving, precise and communicative image (Norton, 1977, 1978). This becomes important considering potential relationships between perceived teacher communicator style as a predictor of student learning and perceived teacher effectiveness (Anderson et al., 1981). Anderson et al. (1981) found that teachers who are perceived as more immediate, as having more positive communicator style and as having more solidarity with students are also perceived more positively.

Teachers, professors, instructors, or any education professional for that matter, should strive to create a learning environment where communication is positive, nurturing and productive (Rocca, 2002). While teachers would hope to communicate clear and concise messages, making learning enjoyable, the reality is that it doesn't always happen that way (Rocca, 2002). Rocca (2002) makes the following recommendations to instructors trying to avoid or reduce verbal aggression in the classroom: avoid sarcasm and humor, monitor reactions to incorrect student responses, be aware of your own frustration and be straightforward and empathetic.

Students report greater motivation when they perceive their teachers as communicating clearly and relevantly (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Frymier & Shulman, 1995). According to Richmond & McCroskey (1984), “there is a difference between knowing and teaching, and that difference is communication in the classroom” (Hurt, Scott & McCroskey, 1978, p.3). Richmond & McCroskey (1984) assert that if students perceive the teacher to have power, that teacher does indeed have it, according to that student; likewise, if the perception is absent, the power is absent. This research argues that the same should be true for verbal aggressive messages. If students perceive verbal aggression to be present on the part of the teacher, then that does in fact become that student’s reality, thereby negatively impacting student learning as a result of damaged self-concept.

### **Boy and Girl Differential Interaction in the Classroom**

Differential classroom interaction in terms of gender has been researched for decades. Previous research has found males to be more verbally aggressive than females. Infante and Wigley (1986) found that male college students were significantly more verbally aggressive than female college students. Similarly, Atkin et al. (2002) and Roberto & Finucane (1997) both found that adolescent boys were significantly more verbally aggressive than adolescent girls. Research has consistently shown that elementary and adolescent male students receive more attention in class from teachers than female students (Bailey, 1993; Brophy, 1985; Askew & Ross, 1988; Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp, 2006) and are called on more frequently than girls (Drudy & Chathain, 2002). Research also found that teachers directed more interactions toward high school male students and were more likely to comment, sometimes criticizing

sometimes accepting, on the academic responses of high school male students than females; teachers were also more likely to criticize the conduct of high school male students (Duffy, Warren & Walsh, 2001).

Boys, of all ages, have been shown to dominate classroom talk, demand more attention and receive more praise (Duffy et al., 2001). Howe (1997) asserts that the confidence of being listened to and responded to within the public domain stimulates them to participate more. Reisby (1994) concluded that boys dominate in the classroom and are therefore more visible. There has been much support in the literature on the dominance of males in the classroom, including the assertion of male-centered curriculum and the exclusiveness of grammar “that insists on a masculine generic” (Condravy, Skirboll & Taylor, 1998, p.18).

Considering the significant amount of research supporting boys’ dominance in the classroom, one might assume that boys’ achievement would be reflective of this. However, a considerable body of literature concentrates on the widespread ‘underachievement’ of boys in the classroom (Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Daniels, Creese, Hey, Leonard & Smith, 2001; Stroud, Smith, Ealy & Hurst, 2000). Underachievers appear to display negative attitudes toward school, teachers, and classes (Preckel, Holling & Vock, 2006). Prior research suggests that middle school students who perceived their relationships with their teachers as supportive tended to report enhanced motivation (Davis 2006) and receive higher grades (Davis 2001). The literature around underachievement coupled with the numerous assertions in the literature that students benefit academically from positive student-teacher relationships prompts the

researcher to examine the impact of verbally aggressive messages on the student-teacher relationship in this specific population.

On the basis of the underachievement literature and findings related to boys' classroom interaction, specifically their dominance as it relates to teacher attention, teacher interactions and participation, this study will survey only the male student population for their perceptions of teachers' verbally aggressive messages and their impact. To Howe's (1997) point of boys being stimulated to participate more as a result of the confidence that comes from being listened and responded to in a public domain, the current study is interested in what the impact of teacher's verbally aggressive messages might be on boys' self-esteem, as a dimension of self-concept, in addition to other variables such as the student-teacher relationship.

### **Self-Esteem and Communication**

Rancer, Kosberg & Silvestri (1992) assert that self-concept has occupied a central position among scholars who support the relationship between self-concept and communication. While self-concept and self-esteem are multidimensional constructs, self-esteem is a pervasive component of the self-concept, defined as an "individual's overall feelings of personal worth, usefulness and degree of liking for self" (Glauser, 1984, p.117). Ferkany (2008) asserts that self-esteem is a crucial element of the confidence and motivation children need in order to engage in and achieve educational pursuits. Self-esteem and self-concept are typically discussed as one being the building blocks of the other, respectively; the present study will focus on students' self-esteem as a significant component of self-concept.

In order to adequately understand the interaction of self-concept and self-esteem, the researcher finds it necessary to provide a brief overview of what the literature says about self-concept. Kinch (1963) defines the self-concept as the organization of qualities that the individual attributes to himself. "It should be understood that the word "qualities" is used in a broad sense to include both attributes that the individual might express in terms of adjectives (ambitious, intelligent) and also the roles he sees himself in (father, doctor, etc.)" (Kinch, 1963, p. 481 ). When individuals are verbally aggressive, they attack the self-concept of their adversary instead of, or in addition to, the adversary's position on controversial issues (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Self-concept is based on an individual's perception of the way others are responding to him, it functions to direct behavior and the individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects the actual responses of others toward him (Kinch, 1963).

Another aspect of the self-concept that the current research considers significant is the transition from late adolescence to adulthood; it has been argued that before or shortly after the transition to adulthood a person's self perception should gradually stabilize, in turn helping shape an individual's future (Adamson, Ferrer-Wreder & Kerpelman, 2007). This becomes important considering the destructive impact of verbal aggression on the self-concept, particularly on adolescents. A lack of self-concept consistency may be an indication of risk for adolescent and adult adjustment difficulties (Adamson et al., 2007). Adamson et al. (2007), in their study of self-concept consistency and the future, found indications that late adolescents' views of themselves were related to how they thought about their own futures.



According to Daly (1987), self-concept theories posit that the self-concept is formed in large part on the basis of social interaction with others. Considering this hypothesis, an important expression to note would be that of Glauser (1984), who states the relationship between the self-concept and communication as: "If people who have had positive 'communicative experiences' develop positive self-impressions, then such individuals should be more verbal and more effective communicators than those with negative self impressions" (p. 116). It was further discovered that individuals with low self-esteem find social interaction tasks difficult, that they would rather receive than provide information, and have great discomfort in expressing themselves (Glauser, 1984). Glauser (1984) further suggests that the self-concept is comprised of multiple self-perceptions, and that the use of "global measures which sum multiple facets of self may cloud research findings" (p. 130). "The self is often used not as a legitimate construct in itself, but rather as a prefix to a seemingly endless number of constructs (e.g. self-image, self-experience, self-esteem, etc.)" (Adamson et al., 2007, p. 94).

The standard account of self-esteem, as described by Ferkany (2008), asserts that self-esteem can be high, low and somewhere in between. However, high self-esteem is claimed to have a variety of behavioral benefits including independence, responsibility taking, toleration of frustration, resistance to peer pressure, willingness to attempt new tasks and challenges, ability to handle positive and negative emotions, and willingness to offer assistance to others (Ferkany, 2008). Intuitively, these behaviors are desirable in students; people able to handle frustration, take risks and work independently make good learners (Ferkany, 2008). Wadman, Durkin & Conti-Ramsden (2008) point to a recent meta-analysis that demonstrated self-esteem is continuous over time and that it becomes

more stable throughout adolescence. Given the increased stability of self-esteem in adolescence, the establishment of low self-esteem at this time may have long-term implications.

It's interesting to note that although self-esteem refers to one's overall evaluation of value, it is possible to have differentiated feelings about their capacities in specific domains of functioning (Harter, 1996). For example, an individual's evaluation of the self in the academic domain may differ from his or her evaluation of the self in the social domain. Another difference that's been well documented in the self-esteem literature is the difference in self-esteem measures among boys and girls. The literature has made claims in both directions- that generally girls have lower self-esteem than boys and vice versa (Kling, Hyde, Showers & Buswell, 1999). Specifically, in the instructional setting boys are believed to have higher self-esteem than girls as a result of receiving more attention in class from teachers than female students (Bailey, 1993; Brophy, 1985; Askew & Ross, 1988; Beaman et al., 2006) being called on more frequently than girls (Drudy & Chathain, 2002) and teachers directing more interactions toward boys (Duffy et al., 2001). Kling et al. (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of a number of studies that presented conflicting findings of self-esteem measures among boys and girls; they did in fact find a "small but statistically significant" gender difference in self-esteem, favoring boys. It is important to note that most studies have solely evaluated global self-esteem and not domain-specific self-esteem, including Kling et al. (1999). This implies the possibility of boys having overall higher self-esteem, but not necessarily in the classroom. The findings outlined in the literature on differentiating self-esteem measures

of boys and girls leads the researcher to explore the impact of verbally aggressive messages on male students' self-esteem.

### **Student-Teacher Relational Satisfaction**

Frymier (2007) argued that students benefit from a positive relationship with their instructor but it is not entirely clear *how* these relationships are built or *how* these relationships benefit students academically. Based on this argument, this study asserts that for these benefits to be realized student relational satisfaction is key. Additionally, it is likely that the absence of a positive student-teacher relationship could in fact be to a student's detriment. As Prisbell (1986) states, students perceiving high degrees of communication satisfaction would generally perceive instructors as genuine, giving necessary feedback, expressing interest in the students, providing support, and sharing information about the self. Previous studies have looked at student satisfaction in relation to teacher rapport (Frisby & Myers, 2008), teacher argumentativeness and verbal aggression (Myers, 2002) and teacher confirmation (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Confirmation messages typically are grouped in three ways: recognition, acknowledgement, and endorsement (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Consistent with Prisbell's (1986) statement, Goodboy & Myers (2008) found that students reported greater levels of satisfaction when teachers employed at least two of the three dimensions of teacher confirmation: positive teaching style messages, responding to questions and demonstrating interest.

Additional findings support the necessity for student relational satisfaction with instructors. Frisby & Myers, (2008) found that when instructors are perceived as establishing rapport with their students, students report increased class participation, as

well as gains in their affective learning, state motivation, and satisfaction. Myers (2002) found that when teachers are low in verbal aggressiveness, students are highly motivated, evaluate instructors highly, report cognitive learning, are highly satisfied, and have positive affect toward the course content to a lesser degree.

Graham, West, & Schaller (1992) note that rapport is considered a relational teaching strategy and relational teaching facilitates students' learning outcomes in a positive way (Frymier, 2007). This is consistent with the belief that instructors who maintain positive relationships with students also achieve a sense of liking from them, increase students' state motivation, and enhance students' satisfaction, in part because student's feelings of liking for instructors often evolves into liking for the course and increased learning (Roach, Cornett-Devito, & Devito, 2005). Additionally, it is likely that when students like the course and the instructor, are motivated, and are satisfied, they will report a higher frequency of class participation (Frisby & Myers, 2008).

According to Prisbell (1990), Hecht (1978) "conceptualizes communication satisfaction as the presence or absence of affect at the conclusion of an interaction" (p. 20). This becomes especially important when examining communication satisfaction, in the instructional communication context, as a student's outcome perception resulting from the presence or absence of affective experiences with an instructor. Observably, the degree of satisfaction experienced by students after interpersonal encounters will affect the student-instructor relationship (Prisbell, 1990). This research seeks to further explore the relationship, if any, of relational satisfaction and perceived teacher verbal aggression.

## **Research Questions**

Previous communication research has primarily examined verbal aggression within student-teacher relationships at the college level; a limited amount of study has taken place at the K-12 level. Additionally, the impact of verbal aggression on students has predominately been investigated in relation to various teacher characteristics (i.e. immediacy, clarity, teacher self-disclosure), however fewer studies have sought to identify which messages students classify as verbally aggressive. Similarly, students' trait verbal aggression has not been widely-examined. It is important to understand how students' own verbal aggressiveness interacts with their perceptions of others' verbal aggressiveness. Students' trait verbal aggression has been studied, however not in the context of response.

Long-term effects of verbal aggressiveness toward students have been well documented in the literature (i.e. Myers, 2002; Myers & Knox, 2001; Schrodt, 2003; Teven, 2001). Though, little is known about immediate effects on students, particularly effects on the student-teacher relationship and self-esteem.

The importance of understanding positive student-teacher relationships continues to grow across various disciplines. In communication research, reaching a deeper understanding of the role of verbal aggression in the student-teacher communicative relationship could provide better insight to the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship overall. Studies have evaluated the student-teacher relationship in terms of communication satisfaction (i.e. Prisbell, 1990) and teacher evaluation (i.e. Myers, 2003), but little is known about relational satisfaction, which has been argued to have academic

and social benefits for the student (i.e. Frymier, 2007). Based on the reviewed studies, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ 1: What types of verbally aggressive messages, directed toward the reporting student, do students report as most memorable?

RQ 2: How do students describe their responses to perceived verbally aggressive messages by teachers?

RQ 3: What is the relationship between perceived teacher verbally aggressive messages and relational satisfaction?

RQ 4: Is there a relationship between students' self-esteem and student perception of teacher verbal aggression?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### **Purpose**

Specifically, this study investigated the role of verbally aggressive messages in the student-teacher relationship and its impact on students' self-esteem and student-teacher relational satisfaction. The impact of the verbally aggressive incident on respondents' future interactions with teachers and the respondents' trait verbal aggression were also examined.

#### **Participants**

The present study used a convenience sample that consisted of male high school students from various schools in the Greater Cleveland area. There were a total of six collection sites, all of similar socioeconomic status. Four sites were high schools in an urban school district reporting its households as being 100% poverty; another site was a college preparatory program for students from low-income families; the sixth site was a suburban school district, mostly made up of low to middle class families. A total of 86 participants were surveyed, of which 3 were not used because of incomplete responses (n=83).

The participants' were 14 years old (6%), 15 years old (41%), 16 years old (28.9%), 17 years old (14.5%) and 18 years old (9.6%). Within the sample, 25.3% were currently freshmen, 30.1% sophomores, 20.5% juniors and 24.1% seniors. The racial/ethnic demographics were reported as follows: 74.7% Black, 14.5% White, 3.6% Hispanic and 7.2% reporting their race as Other.

## **Procedures**

Upon receiving written IRB approval and written consent from site administrators, the researcher visited each site to provide a thorough briefing of the research and what participation would entail. Students were then asked to volunteer to complete a written survey. Interested students were told that in order to participate, a consent form needed to be signed by their guardian. Students who agreed to participate and returned a signed parental consent form were allowed to complete the survey. Approximately 1,000 consent forms were passed out between the six collection sites. The response rate was 8.6%.

On the day of data collection, before beginning the survey, students reviewed and signed a minor assent form and were additionally told that at any point they could withdraw their participation without consequence. They were further told that the survey would take 15-20 minutes to complete. Some site administrators offered incentives to the students for their participation. After the surveys were completed and returned to the researcher, minor assent forms were removed from the survey.

## **Instruments**

### **Relationship assessment scale. (RAS-6)**



This self-report scale was created by Susan Hendrick (1988). The RAS is a 7-item general measure of relational satisfaction, consisting of responses on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). According to Hendrick (1988), the scale is a “unifactorial measure of relationship satisfaction with a reported mean inter-item correlation of .49 and an alpha of .86.” Additionally, Hendrick (1998) reported reliability estimates across several studies to be within the range of .73 and .93. Furthermore, a study of test-retest reliability produced test-retest reliability of .85 (Hendrick, 1995).

Previous studies found that the RAS had reliability within the range of .82 and .86 (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994; Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Lamke, Sollie, Durbin, & Fitzpatrick, 1994; Doohan & Manusov, 2004; Shi, 2004; Fisher & Corcoran, 1994). Academic research (i.e. theses and dissertations) has also used the RAS, reporting reliability measures of .85 (Steuber, 2005) and .86 (Robbins, 2005). For the present study, “partner” will be replaced with “teacher” and “student-teacher” will precede the word relationship. Additionally, the wording in item 4 was been altered and item 6 eliminated.

#### **The adolescent verbal aggressiveness scale.**

This 8-item scale developed by Roberto and Finucane (1997) is a modified version of the Infante and Wigley Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (1986). The original scale has an 11<sup>th</sup> grader readability level and was modified to a 6<sup>th</sup> grader readability level. The internal consistency of the ADVA Scale was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha. The coefficient alpha for these items was .76. Item-total correlations ranged from .50 to .72 (M = .61; SD = .06;  $p < .001$ ).

**Rosenberg self-esteem scale.**

The scale is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale was originally developed by Rosenberg (1965) as a unidimensional self-report measure of feelings of global self-esteem in adolescents. The original sample for which the scale was developed consisted of 5,024 high school juniors and seniors from 10 randomly selected schools in New York State. The wording of the test items is regarded as appropriate for 12-yearolds (Keith & Braken, 1996). Previous researchers have reported reasonable levels of internal consistency for their samples with Cronbach’s alphas of between .72 and .88 (see Byrne, 1996, for a review). The test–retest correlation on 28 participants after a 2-week interval was .85 (Silber & Tippett, 1965).

Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated to test the reliability of the pre and post scales of self-esteem ( $\alpha=.987$ ) and relational satisfaction ( $\alpha=.937$ ). Cronbach’s Alpha was also calculated to test the reliability between all measures, resulting in  $\alpha= .887$ . High reliability were found for all three measurements.

Table I

Descriptive Statistics for Instruments (*RAS, AVA, SES*)

<b>Scales</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>(<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
Relationship Assessment Scale	6	.937
Self-esteem Scale	10	.987
All instruments (RAS, AVA, SES)		.887

### **Verbally Aggressive Messages.**

Infante's (1987) typology of verbal aggressive messages was used in this study.

This typology included character attacks, competence attacks, background attacks, physical appearance attacks, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, threats, profanity and nonverbal emblems. These typologies are defined as follows: *character attacks* are verbal attacks that are directed against a person rather than his/her arguments, *competence attacks* are defined as verbal attacks directed at another person's ability to do something, *background attacks* are verbal attacks directed at another person's racial, ethnic or cultural background, *physical appearance attacks* are verbal attacks directed at another person's physical appearance, *malediction* is defined as speaking evil of or to curse another person, *teasing* is an act of harassing someone playfully or maliciously or provoking someone with persistent annoyances, *ridicule* is defined as a deliberate, malicious belittling, to make an object of laughter, *threats* are a declaration of an intention to inflict harm on another, *profanity* is defined as profane or obscene expression usually of surprise or anger, and *nonverbal emblems* are non-verbal messages that have a verbal counterpart.

### **Open-ended Responses.**

Each respondent was asked to describe a time when a teacher said something hurtful to them. Each respondent received a full piece of blank paper and was asked to write out their responses in as much detail as possible. Additionally, each respondent was asked how this incident changed their interaction with other teachers.

The incident descriptions were content analyzed and coded using Infante's ten typologies of verbally aggressive messages—character attack, competence attack,

background attack, physical appearance attack, malediction, teasing, ridicule, threat, profanity and nonverbal emblem. An 11<sup>th</sup> category, *never experienced*, was created for respondents that indicated never experiencing an incident of verbal aggression. All responses (n=83) were found to fit into one of the categories. Two coders categorized the incidents into the most appropriate category. Intercoder reliability was 88%.

After reviewing all survey responses for how future interaction changed with teachers, three categories were developed to code responses: *positive change reported*, which included increased respect, higher motivation, etc.; *negative change reported*, which included responses such as decreased respect and lack of motivation; or *change not reported*, which included responses that indicated the incident had no effect on their interaction with other teachers. Two coders categorized the responses into the most appropriate category. Intercoder reliability was 97%. Based on what research scholars have deemed acceptable reliabilities standards-- .75 to .80 (Ellis, 1994)—the intercoder reliability was sufficient in this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The first research questions asked:

RQ 1: What types of verbally aggressive messages, directed toward the reporting student, do students report as most memorable?

Frequencies were run to identify frequency distributions of students' reported incidents of teacher verbal aggression. 21.7% of respondents reported experiencing a competence attack, the most frequent verbally aggressive message. The next most frequent were character attacks 12.0%, ridicule 12.0% and background attacks 10.8%. The lowest reported frequency was teasing, 1.2%. There were also 26.5% of respondents who reported never having experienced a verbally aggressive incident with a teacher.

Table II

Frequencies for Reported Verbally Aggressive Messages

<b>Verbal Aggressive Message</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Character Attack	10	12.0
Competence Attack	18	21.7
Background Attack	9	10.8
Physical Attack	3	3.6
Teasing	1	1.2
Threats	2	2.4
Ridicule	10	12.0
Malediction	2	2.4
Profanity	3	3.6
Nonverbal Emblems	3	3.6
Never Experienced	22	26.5
Total	83	100.00

Additionally, a crosstabs was run to detect the relationship between the students' trait verbal aggressiveness and experiencing a verbal aggressive incident. A moderately strong relationship exists between trait verbal aggression and the perception of verbal aggression, with respondents with high trait verbal aggression being more likely to perceive verbal aggressiveness. The relationship between trait verbal aggression and the perception of verbal aggression is not statistically significant, as indicated by the chi-square test of significance.

Table III

Crosstabs for Trait Verbal Aggression and Experiencing Verbal Aggression

	<b>Hi</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Lo</b>	<b>Total</b>
Yes	9 (90.0%)	39 (70.9%)	13 (72.2%)	61 (73.5%)
No	1 (10.0%)	16 (29.1%)	5 (27.8%)	22 (26.5%)
Total	10 (100.0%)	55 (100.0%)	18 (100.0%)	83 (100.0%)

The second research question asked:

RQ 2: How do students describe their response to perceived verbally aggressive messages by teachers?

Descriptive statistics were run to identify frequency distributions of students' immediate responses to the verbally aggressive message. Of the valid percentage of responses, 26.2% of respondents responded in 'silence', with the second largest response being 'walked away' at 21.3%; nearly half, 47.5%, of students responded in these two manners.

Table IV

Frequencies for Immediate Response

<b>Immediate Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Silence	16	26.2
Walked away	13	21.3
Cried	4	6.6
I don't remember	10	16.4
Other	5	8.2
Verbal response	13	21.3
Total	61	100.0

Additional descriptive statistics were run to identify frequency distributions to identify if students would respond differently today. Of the valid percentage of responses, 39.3% of respondents reported they would not respond differently today, 31.1% of respondents reported they would respond differently today and 29.6% of respondents did not know if they would respond differently today.

Table V  
Frequencies for Responding Differently Today

<b>Respond differently today</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	19	31.1
No	24	39.3
I don't know	18	29.6
Total	61	100.0

Lastly, a crosstabs was run to detect the relationship between trait verbal aggression and immediate response. Respondents 'cried' and 'other' responses were combined into one 'other' category for this analysis. Respondents who did not remember how they responded were eliminated from this analysis. A strong relationship exists between trait verbal aggression and the immediate response of the student, with respondents with high to moderate trait verbal aggression being more likely to 'verbally respond' (74.2%) or 'walk away' (50.0%); respondents low in trait verbal aggression were more likely to respond in 'silence' (66.7%). The relationship between trait verbal aggression and the perception of verbal aggression is not statistically significant, as indicated by the chi-square test of significance (.081).



Table VI

Crosstabs of Trait Verbal Aggression and Immediate Response of Student

	<b>Hi</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Total</b>
Silence	1 (16.7%)	7 (21.2%)	8 (66.7%)	16 (31.4%)
Walked away	1 (16.7%)	11 (33.3%)	1 (8.3%)	13 (25.5%)
Other	1 (16.7%)	7 (21.2%)	1 (8.3%)	9 (17.6%)
Verbal response	3 (50.0%)	8 (24.2%)	2 (16.7%)	13 (25.5%)
Total	6 (100.0%)	33 (100.0%)	12 (100.0%)	51 (100.0%)

The third research question asked:

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between student-teacher relational satisfaction and perceived verbal aggression?

A multiple linear regression was calculated to determine the relationship between the type of perceived verbal aggressive message and student-teacher relational satisfaction. All ten levels of the verbal aggressive message variable were coded as dummy independent variables, while also controlling for the teacher's normal communication style and the pre relational satisfaction score. The 'never experienced' variable was left out of the regression model as a reference category. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(12,70) = 25.907, p < .05$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .816. The normal communication style of the teacher, nor the ten levels of verbal aggressive messages, were found to be statistically significant. The pre relational satisfaction score was found to be statistically significant. Results indicate that students' post relational

satisfaction score was found to be .771 points higher than those that did not experience a verbally aggressive message.

Table VII

Multiple Regression Dependent Variable: Post Relational Satisfaction

<i>Variables</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
(Constant)	.212		.797
Character Attack	3.068	.125	2.473
Background Attack	.597	.023	2.648
Competency Attack	-.292	-.015	2.175
Physical Attack	-3.240	-.076	2.986
Teasing	2.534	.035	3.961
Threats	2.569	.049	3.295
Ridicule	1.894	.077	2.543
Malediction	-3.317	-.064	3.328
Profanity	.981	.023	3.096
Nonverbal Emblems	-1.714	-.040	2.345
Pre relational satisfaction score	.771	.844*	.116
NormComm	-.516	-.028	1.120

**Note: \*  $p < .05$**

Additionally, a paired-samples *t* test was calculated to compare the mean pre relational satisfaction score to the mean post relational satisfaction score. The pre relational satisfaction mean was 12.77 (sd = 8.787), and the mean of the post relational satisfaction score was 10.37 (sd = 8.053). A statistically significant decrease from pre to post relational satisfaction was found ( $t(82) = 5.356, p < .05$ ).

Table VIII

T-Test for Pre and Post Relational Satisfaction Scores

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>t</i>
Pre Relational Satisfaction	12.77	8.787	5.356
Post Relational Satisfaction	10.37	8.053	

A crosstabs was run to detect the relationship between the normal communication style of the teacher and a change in relational satisfaction. A moderately strong relationship exists between the normal communication style of the teacher and a change in relational satisfaction, with respondents who reported the incident not being the normal communication style of the teacher being more likely to experience decreased relational satisfaction. The relationship between normal communication style of the teacher and a change in relational satisfaction is not statistically significant, as indicated by the chi-square test of significance.

Table IX

Crosstabs for Normal Communication Style of Teacher and Relational Satisfaction

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Total</i>
Satisfaction increased	5 (25.0%)	2 (8.0%)	7 (15.6%)
Satisfaction decreased	12 (60.0%)	20 (80.0%)	32 (71.1%)
Satisfaction unaffected	3 (15.0%)	3 (12.0%)	6 (13.3%)
Total	20 (100.0%)	25 (100.0%)	45 (100.0%)

Lastly, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the strength of the relationship between relational satisfaction and the type of perceived verbally

aggressive message. This analysis only examined the four most frequently reported verbally aggressive messages. A weak positive relationship was found ( $r(81) = .250$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between background attack and relational satisfaction; a weak positive relationship was found ( $r(81) = .292^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between ridicule and relational satisfaction; a moderate positive relationship was found ( $r(81) = .306$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between character attack and relational satisfaction; lastly, no significant linear relationship between competence attack and relational satisfaction was revealed.

Table X

Correlation for Verbal Aggressive Messages and Relational Satisfaction

<i>Verbal Aggressive Message</i>	<i>Pearson's r</i>
Character Attack	.306**
Background Attack	.250*
Ridicule	.292**
Competence Attack	.149

**Note:** \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

The fourth research question asked:

RQ 4: What is the relationship between perceived teacher verbally aggressive messages and self-esteem?

A multiple linear regression was calculated to determine the relationship between the type of perceived verbal aggressive message and students' self-esteem. All ten levels of the verbal aggressive message variable (character attack, competence attack, background attack, physical appearance attack, malediction, teasing, ridicule, threat, profanity and nonverbal emblem) were coded as dummy independent variables, while also controlling for the respondent's current age and the pre self-esteem score. A

significant regression equation was found ( $F(12,70) = 128.427, p < .05$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .957. The respondents' pre self-esteem score and experiencing malediction were found to be statistically significant. The results indicate that students who experience malediction would have a post self-esteem score of 5.039 lower than respondents who did not. Additionally, results indicated that respondents' post self-esteem score would be 1.054 points higher than their pre self-esteem score if they had not experienced teacher verbal aggression.

Table XI

Multiple Regression Dependent Variable: Post Self-Esteem

Variables	B	Beta	Std. Error
(Constant)	.207		.607
Current age of respondent	-.024	-.003	.199
Pre self-esteem score	1.054	1.068*	.062
Character Attack	-1.308	-.054	1.175
Background Attack	-1.618	-.064	1.239
Competency Attack	-1.806	-.095	1.076
Physical Attack	-2.095	-.050	1.521
Teasing	-.136	-.002	1.824
Threats	-1.021	-.020	1.641
Ridicule	-1.586	-.066	1.248
Malediction	-5.039	-.099*	1.651
Profanity	-1.392	-.033	1.493
Nonverbal Emblems	-.096	-.002	1.136

Note: \*  $p < .05$

Additionally, a paired-samples  $t$  test was calculated to compare the mean pre self-esteem score to the mean post self-esteem score. The pre self-esteem mean was 11.72 (sd = 7.991), and the mean of the post self-esteem score was 11.30 (sd = 7.886). A

statistically significant decrease from pre to post self-esteem was found ( $t(82) = 2.140, p < .05$ ).

Table XII

T-Test for Pre and Post Self-Esteem Scores

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>t</i>
Pre Self-esteem	11.72	7.991	2.140
Post Self-esteem	11.30	7.886	

Lastly, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the strength of the relationship between self-esteem and the type of perceived verbally aggressive message. This analysis only examined the four most frequently reported verbally aggressive messages. A weak positive relationship was found ( $r(81) = .239, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between background attack and self-esteem; a weak positive relationship was found ( $r(81) = .230, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between competence attack and self-esteem; a weak positive relationship was found ( $r(81) = .279, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between ridicule and self-esteem; lastly, a weak positive relationship was found ( $r(81) = .222, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between character attack and self-esteem.

Table XIII

Correlation for Verbal Aggressive Messages and Self-Esteem

<i>Verbal Aggressive Message</i>	<i>Pearson's r</i>
Character Attack	.222*
Background Attack	.239*
Ridicule	.279*
Competence Attack	.230*

**Note: \*  $p < .05$**

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### **Research Question One**

Research question one investigated the types of hurtful verbal aggressive messages students perceived their teacher using in a classroom setting. On average, students' reported recollections of teacher verbal aggression dated back six years, with the oldest recollection dating back 11 years. Additionally, white female teachers were the most frequently reported gender and race of the offending teacher.

The results revealed that, based on Infante's (1987) typology of verbally aggressive messages, respondents perceived *competence attacks* (21.6%) as the most frequently received message; correspondingly, Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) note that memorable messages often reflect competence attacks. Competence attacks are defined as verbal attacks directed at a student's ability to do something. Two examples of actual survey responses collected during this study are, "This is a waste of my time, you'll never amount to anything" or "You'll never be successful".

The next most frequent were character attack (12.0%) and ridicule (12.0%). Character attacks are verbal attacks that are directed against a student rather than his/her arguments. Two examples of actual survey responses collected during this study are, “You’re sneaky and untrustworthy” or “You’re a cheater”. Ridicule is a deliberate, malicious belittling, to make a student an object of laughter. An example of an actual survey response collected during this study is, “How could you not score higher on such a low-level exam? Geez!”

The fourth most frequently reported message was background attack (10.8%). Background attacks are verbal attacks directed at a student’s racial, ethnic or cultural background. Two examples of actual survey responses collected during this study are, “I thought all Asians were smart” or “Black kids can’t learn”.

Physical appearance attacks (3.6%), profanity (3.6%) and nonverbal emblems (3.6%) are the next most frequent. Physical appearance attacks are verbal attacks directed at a student’s physical appearance. Two examples of actual survey responses collected during this study are, “You’re ugly” or “You’re so fat”. Profanity is a profane or obscene expression, usually of surprise or anger. An example of an actual survey response collected during this study was a teacher calling a student a “stupid ass”. Nonverbal emblems are non-verbal messages that have a verbal counterpart, reported by a respondent during this study as a teacher giving a student the middle finger.

The least frequent messages were threats (2.4%), malediction (2.4%) and teasing (1.2%). Threats are a declaration of an intention to inflict harm on a student. An example of an actual survey response collected during this study is, “I’m going to kill you”. Malediction is defined as speaking evil of or to curse a student. An example of an actual



survey response collected during this study is, “I wish you nothing bad luck and misery in your life”. Teasing is an act of harassing someone playfully or maliciously or provoking someone with persistent annoyances, reported by a respondent during this study as a teacher persistently poking fun at a student for not making the basketball team.

Based on these findings, and the assertion of Baxter and Braithwaite (2008), the researcher puts forth the claim that competence attacks are the most frequently perceived, and memorable, form of verbal aggression because the classroom environment is primarily performance-based. Previous research shows that character attacks, followed by competence attacks, were the most frequently used verbally aggressive messages in marriages (Infante, Sabourin, Rudd & Shannon, 1990), another type of interpersonal relationship. It is speculated that this is the case in marriages because character attacks are believed to do the most psychological harm (Infante et al., 1990). Although marital dyads are considered a romantic relationship, the findings are still applicable as it further supports the notion of competence attacks being more prevalent in the classroom setting because the classroom is performance-based and competence attacks would likely do the most psychological harm in a classroom setting. Myers (2003) also found that character and competence attacks have the strongest impact in the classroom. Thus the findings of this research are consistent with previous findings.

Additional findings in this research showed that 26.5% of respondents reported never having experienced teacher verbal aggression. Further, respondents with high trait verbal aggression were more likely to perceive a verbally aggressive message. These findings are supported by Schrodts (2003), who found that students with moderate to high levels of verbal aggression reported their instructors as being more verbally aggressive.

Another finding to note is that of Myers & Knox (1999), whose research suggests that perceived instructor verbal aggressiveness is related to student perceptions of other instructor's communication behaviors. The current research explored this claim and it's not surprising that results revealed that 68.0% of respondents who reported a change reported an unaffected or positive change in interaction with other teachers. Positive changes reported were, "increased motivation", "increased respect" and "a new level of understanding for my teacher". The remaining 32.0% reported a negative change in interaction with other teachers. Negative changes were reported as, "decreased motivation", "lack of respect", and "a generalized attitude that all teachers were the same and didn't care". This further demonstrates that, in some cases, students will continue to expect their teachers to be predictable regardless of their experience with other teachers.

### **Research Question Two**

The second research question examined how students responded to the perceived hurtful teacher verbally aggression. The results revealed that nearly half (47.5%) of students responded in 'silence' or 'walked away', with 39.3% of respondents reporting they would not respond differently today—the largest percentage among respondents reporting if they would respond differently today, not respond differently today or unsure if they would respond differently today.

Results also revealed that respondents who were moderate to high in trait verbal aggression were more likely to 'verbally respond' to the verbal aggression or 'walk away', while respondents low in trait verbal aggression were more likely to respond in 'silence'. The following is a discussion of these findings.

Supporting the findings of this particular portion of the study is Infante's (1990) assertion that "a norm of reciprocity operates for verbal aggression"; in other words, "verbal aggression begets the same" (p. 364). Myers and Knox (1999) drew five conclusions about verbal aggression, one being that those who are rated moderate to high in verbal aggressiveness are more likely to use such messages. True to this point, respondents in this study that were moderate to high in trait verbal aggression were more likely to respond verbally. While the focus of this portion of the research did not explore the exact verbiage that students used, the researcher suggests a safe assumption that verbal aggression was met with verbal aggression. As Rocca & Vogl-Bauer (1999) point out, an individual's level of trait verbal aggression interacts with situational factors that ultimately impact an individual's response.

Previous studies have supported the assertion that verbal aggression is reciprocal in nature (Infante et al., 1989; Infante et al., 1990; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993; Atkin, Smith, Roberto, Fediuk & Wagner, 2002) and the general findings of this study suggest the same, as demonstrated by 'verbally responded' being one of the highest reported responses. Additionally, one might also argue that walking away is a form of verbal aggression, in that it abruptly puts an end to communication and could achieve the same believed effects of verbal aggression (i.e. damaged or defeated self-concept).

In conclusion, the general findings of this research support previous research findings. Individuals rated moderate to high in trait verbal aggression are more likely to respond in the same manner; with the added research findings that point to the reciprocal nature of verbal aggression, the researcher believes that these findings present a solid foundation for research around trait verbal aggression and how students respond to verbal

aggression in the classroom setting. Additional research is needed to further explore the verbal responses of students.

**Research Question Three:**

The third research question investigated the role of perceived verbal aggression on student-teacher relational satisfaction when asked to recall a hurtful incident between a student and a teacher. The results revealed an overall significant relationship; however the ten levels of verbal aggressive messages, or the normal communication style (the typical, expected communicative behavior of the teacher) of the teacher, did not yield a significant relationship to relational satisfaction. The results did, however, reveal that perception of a competence attack, physical appearance attack, malediction, nonverbal emblem or the normal communication style of the teacher was associated with a decrease in relational satisfaction. The four most frequently reported messages (character attack, competence attack, ridicule and background attack) were also found to be correlated to relational satisfaction. Although it was a weak correlation, results indicate that this is a reliable relationship. Interestingly, this research also revealed that 16.4% of respondents indicated an increase in relational satisfaction. These respondents were recipients of character attack, competence attack, background attack and ridicule.

Additionally, the mean pre and post relational satisfaction scores revealed a statistically significant decrease in mean relational satisfaction scores, following perception of a verbally aggressive incident with a teacher. The largest difference from pre to post relational satisfaction scores was seen in respondents who experienced *physical appearance attack* (7.66), with *malediction* (7.00) revealing the next largest difference in pre and post scores. This was a surprising revelation in this research, as

physical appearance attacks usually seek to damage the self-concept. While a damaged self-concept is one goal of verbal aggression, it was interesting to find that physical appearance attack had a greater impact on relational satisfaction than self-esteem. Perhaps this can be attributed to the mutual across the board respect that must be present in relationships. Attacking the physical appearance of an individual shows a lack of respect and consideration for someone, and this could point to why the results revealed a decrease in relational satisfaction for this particular attack. The difference in mean scores for relational satisfaction was much larger than those for self-esteem, showing a greater overall impact on the student-teacher relationship.

Furthermore, when exploring the relationship between relational satisfaction and the normal communication style of the teacher, results revealed that respondents who reported that the verbally aggressive incident was *not* the normal communication style of the teacher experienced greater decreases in relational satisfaction (80.0%). Riley (2009) points out that students expect their teachers to be predictable, and the results of the current research support that assertion. Below is a discussion of these findings.

Supporting the general findings of this study is existing literature that points to decreased satisfaction (Myers, 2002; Myers & Knox, 2001; Schrodt, 2003; Teven, 2001) and student-teacher interaction (Rocca, 2002, 2004) as a result of verbal aggression. While there is limited research that directly compares the impact of verbal aggression on self-esteem and relational satisfaction, the current research provides a strong argument that the impact might be greater on relational satisfaction, based on mean score differences and the strength of the relationships.

There is no shortage of research that explores the potential benefits and suspected academic value of positive student-teacher relationships; while this research does not specifically investigate this relationship, this research is supported by Myers & Knox' (1999) assertion that verbal aggression is generally associated with decreased relational satisfaction and negative relational outcomes. This is important to note when considering the claim that a quality student-teacher relationship is fundamental to the healthy development of students in school (Myers & Pianta, 2008). At the same time, the 16.4% of respondents that reported increased relational satisfaction following teacher verbal aggression must be addressed. The researcher attributes this to the value that some students place on teacher's opinions about students as individuals and their classroom behavior and performance. If students look to their teachers for affirmation and approval, then perhaps, in some cases, verbal aggression is viewed as a positive thing on the part of the students. And just maybe, some students perceive these messages as "tough love" of some sort, pointing out a student's shortcomings in an effort to make that student better.

The strongest correlation (.31) was found between character attack and relational satisfaction. This leads the researcher to believe that verbal aggression has the strongest impact on relational satisfaction due to the nature of a character attack. Relationships are typically built around mutual respect for an individual's morals, values, ethics, integrity, etc.—all of which a character attack seeks to offend. Therefore, it is not surprising that one would feel less satisfied with the relationship if they felt personally attacked in the relationship.

In conclusion, there is not much previous research that specifically looks at the impact of verbal aggression on relational satisfaction in the classroom setting. The

findings of this research provide additional support that verbal aggression in the classroom does impact student-teacher relational satisfaction. By evaluating the impact of verbal aggression on relational satisfaction, there is now insight to an additional element that could potentially have a negative effect on the classroom environment and student's overall academic experience.

Further research is needed to identify how decreased student-teacher relational satisfaction impacts classroom performance, if at all.

#### **Research Question Four:**

The fourth research question investigated the relationship between perceived hurtful teacher verbally aggressive messages— coded as Infante's (1987) typology of verbal aggressive messages (character attack, competence attack, background attack, physical appearance attack, malediction, teasing, ridicule, threat, profanity and nonverbal emblem)— and self-esteem. The results revealed an overall significant relationship; however nine of the ten levels of verbal aggressive messages did not yield a significant relationship to self-esteem. The results did, however, reveal that perception of a character attack, competence attack, background attack, physical appearance attack, teasing, ridicule, threat, nonverbal emblems or profanity was associated with a decrease in self-esteem. Malediction was found to be statistically significant.

The four most frequently reported messages (character attacks, competence attack, ridicule and background attack) were also found to be correlated to self-esteem. Although it was a weak correlation, results indicate that this is a reliable relationship. Additionally, the mean pre and post self-esteem scores revealed a statistically significant decrease in mean self-esteem scores, following perception of a verbally aggressive

incident. The largest difference from pre to post self-esteem scores was seen in respondents who experienced *malediction* (4.00), with *competence attacks* (.84) revealing the next largest difference in pre and post scores. Although the difference in pre and post mean scores was found to be statistically significant, the difference in mean scores for nine of ten categories was less than 1 point. It should also be noted that 34.4% of respondents did not experience a change in self-esteem.

Furthermore, when evaluating the impact on self-esteem strictly across the four most frequently reported verbally aggressive messages (character attack 12.0%, competence attack 21.7%, background attack 10.8% and ridicule 12.0%), it was found that the largest percentage of respondents, in comparison to the other two categories, reported a decrease in self-esteem. In other words, when evaluating reports of an increase, decrease or unaffected self-esteem across respondents who perceived a character attack, competence attack, background attack or ridicule, the highest percentage of responses indicated a decrease in self-esteem. The following is a discussion about these findings.

Supporting the general findings of this study is previous research that points to the detrimental effects of teachers' use of verbally aggressive messages in the classroom (Myers, 2002; Myers & Knox, 2001; Schrodt, 2003; Teven, 2001); however an explicit causal relationship between verbal aggression in the classroom and decreased self-esteem has not been declared. Based on these findings, one might suggest that specific types of verbally aggressive messages have the most impact in the classroom. 72% of those that reported decreased self-esteem experienced one of the four most frequently reported perceived messages. Having said that, one might additionally argue that a character



attack, competence attack, background attack and ridicule are the more personal types of verbally aggressive messages, directly targeting an individual's most valued attributes (i.e. background/family, race/ethnicity, skills/ability, etc.) and possibly having the greatest impact. Taking this approach toward identifying the impact of verbal aggression on self-esteem might also lend itself to further understanding respondents that reported an unaffected self-esteem, and even increases in self-esteem.

As Harter (1996) points out, it is possible to have differentiated feelings about capacities in specific domains. For example, an individual's evaluation of the self in the academic domain may not mirror evaluations in the social domain, or elsewhere. This leads the researcher to suggest, perhaps, a threat, nonverbal emblem or other type of verbally aggressive message that might have less of a 'personal' impact may not have the same effect on self-esteem in the classroom as a competence attack, character attack, background attack or ridicule. Further, those teachers strategically chose to use messages that would result in the most psychological harm, negatively impacting a student's self-concept.

Additionally, previous research has suggested and shown a "small but statistically significant" gender difference in self-esteem, favoring boys (Kling et al., 1999). If in fact boys are thought to already have higher levels of self-esteem, then perhaps a decrease in self-esteem following a verbally aggressive incident may not be as detrimental as one might think. While a decrease in self-esteem may in fact be experienced, perhaps it's not significant enough to have a realizable effect.

In conclusion, the impact of verbal aggression on self-esteem in the classroom setting remains unclear. The findings of this research that evaluated the relationship between verbal aggression and self-esteem do support the assertion that verbal aggression in the classroom does impact self-esteem. Previous research studies have evaluated the impact of verbal aggression on student affective and cognitive learning, student state motivation, satisfaction, perceived teacher credibility (Myers, 2002; Myers & Knox, 2001; Schrodt, 2003; Teven, 2001) and limited student involvement, in and out of the classroom (Myers, Edwards, Wahl & Martin, 2007), but few studies have directly looked at self-esteem. By evaluating the impact of verbal aggression on self-esteem, this study provides insight to an additional element that could potentially have a negative effect on the classroom environment and student's overall academic experience. The importance of these findings point to very specific messages that impact self-esteem, as well as the value in training teachers on the potential harm around use of these particular messages. Further research is needed to identify how decreased self-esteem impacts classroom performance, if at all. Additionally, further examination of classroom environment at the time of the incident is needed to identify the role of observers and their effect on perception of verbal aggression and impact on self-esteem.

### **Limitations**

The present study had several limitations. While the findings did reveal a significant difference across mean pre and post scores for both self-esteem and relational satisfaction, respondents were asked to complete both pre and post scales at the same time *and* in retrospect. This process may have compromised some of the exactness of the respondents' reporting. Some social science researchers have noted that beyond six

months, memories of a traumatic experience become distorted, while others argue that conflict in communication is “attention-getting and memorable, sometimes in a traumatic sense” (Infante et al., 1990. p. 368). The latter of the two assertions is not surprising noting the oldest recollection dates back 11 years.

An additional limitation was the response rate. Previous research around verbal aggression in the classroom has primarily been at the college level, with limited research at the K-12 level. This research sought to fill that gap in existing literature. However, there were challenges around sampling minors, which included obtaining parental consent. This greatly impacted the response rate (8.6%). It should also be noted that surveys were completed in one day with little communication between the researcher and respondents taking place beforehand. This may have impacted students’ responses in terms of having the opportunity to mentally reconnect to the incident to enable a well thought-out written account. Additional pre-communication may have provided students with an opportunity to reach a thorough understanding of verbal aggression and evaluate the impact of their experience at a deeper level.

While the Susan Hendrick (1988) relational satisfaction scale received a reliability measure of .937, it should be noted that the scale was originally developed for use in romantic relationships. Although student-teacher relationships are considered interpersonal relationships, as romantic relationships are, the rewording of certain items in the scale may have presented a degree of awkwardness for the respondents, as indicated by questions posed by respondents throughout the surveying process. Based on this observation, the researcher believes that confusion with certain items on the scale may have impacted responses. Perhaps a more effective alternative would have been

holding focus groups with students to first identify what the student-teacher relationship *should* look like, and then based on those responses, developed a measurement tool for respondents to more adequately convey their dissatisfaction with the student-teacher relationship.

The crosstabs analysis was used for interpreting a considerable amount of data. While row differences were recognized, the results were a mix of statistically significance. This could be attributed to the small cell values in a number of the analyses, impacting the significance of the results. Crosstabs work best with cell values greater than 5. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was run to determine the relationship between self-esteem, relational satisfaction and verbal aggression. Both regression models included the pre scores for relational satisfaction and self-esteem. The researcher believes that while the regression model yielded a statistically significant regression equation, the pre scores accounted for most of the variance, compromising the statistical significance of other variables.

Also, the classroom environment was not taken into consideration. Although this study did not examine that aspect of the incident— atmosphere— it would be interesting to investigate the effect that atmosphere has on the perception, impact and response of respondents.

Lastly, a random sample was not established within the present study. Therefore, results were not generalizable to the population of male high school students. Additionally, while the researcher presented the current research opportunity to approximately 1,000 high school male students, sample size ended up being somewhat

small (n=83). Further, the collection sites all shared similar socioeconomic demographics which lessened the variability of the sample. Therefore, the findings are not necessarily applicable to male students with different socioeconomic status. Considering what impact environmental factors (i.e. household and family dynamics) may have on one's perceptions of verbal aggression, this was considered a limitation.

### **Directions for Future Study**

The current research is supported by existing literature in a very general manner. Through this study, we learned that self-esteem and relational satisfaction are both impacted by what respondents perceived as hurtful incidents of teacher verbal aggression. Additional variables such as the normal communication style of the teacher, trait verbal aggression and future interaction with other teachers, in relation to the perception and impact of teacher verbal aggression, were also evaluated. Future research efforts should be directed toward establishing a deeper understanding about the academic impact of decreased relational satisfaction and decreased self-esteem. Sufficient research exists that demonstrates verbal aggression has a negative impact on self-esteem and relational satisfaction. Research now needs to progress to investigate the relationship between decreased relational satisfaction and decreased self-esteem, as a result of teacher verbal aggression, on a student's academic performance. The "what" (negatively impacts the classroom environment and academic experience) has already been established in previous research, the "how" (academic detriments) should now be examined.

Additionally, examination of classroom environment at the time of the incident is needed to identify the role of observers and their effect on perception of teacher verbal

aggression and impact on self-esteem and relational satisfaction. Existing literature points to the reciprocal nature of verbal aggression stemming from a need to save face and discourage future attacks (Felson, 1978). Additional research in this area may provide insight about what environmental factors are present when students are more likely to engage in verbal aggression with a teacher.

Myers & Knox (1999) assert that individuals rated moderate to high in trait verbal aggressiveness are more likely to engage in such messages. Current research findings identified a large percentage of students that ‘verbally responded’; however, specific verbal responses were not explored in this research study. The researcher would challenge verbal aggression researchers to explore the idea of including walking away and silence as acts of aggression. Considering one of the goals of verbal aggression is to cause psychological harm, the researcher suggests that both walking away and silence seek to do this. Both forms of response—walking away and silence—can be perceived as “I don’t care what you’re saying” or “What you’re saying is not important to me”, which could be damaging to the self-concept. Future research should explore these potential additional forms of aggression.

Lastly, the current research revealed that the most frequently reported race and gender of the offending teacher was white females. Future research should explore the role that race and gender play in not only the perception of verbal aggression, but the long-term impact. Are students more forgiving of teachers of the same race or different gender? These are certainly questions that communication literature would benefit from having insight on.

## **Conclusion**

The present study demonstrated how perceived teacher verbal aggression negatively impacts student self-esteem and student-teacher relational satisfaction. The findings further demonstrated the potentially detrimental effects of verbal aggression. The results, although mixed in terms of statistical significance, suggests that individuals with moderate to high verbal aggressiveness were more likely to perceive verbal aggression, resulting in a decrease in relational satisfaction. Also, the perception of verbal aggression by students was not found to negatively impact interaction with other teachers, an important finding to note.

The present study provides relevant findings to existing literature in this area, specifically interpersonal communication in a classroom setting. Much prior research around verbal aggression focuses on the college level; however this research contributes and extends the limited literature about verbal aggression at the K-12 level.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix 1

### The Adolescent Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (8)

Instructions: This survey is concerned with how we try to get people to do what we want. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally when you try to change a friend's mind. Use the following scale:

- 1 = Almost never true
- 2 = Rarely true
- 3 = Sometimes true
- 4 = Often true
- 5 = Almost always true

1. When people are very stubborn, I use insults to soften their stubbornness. \_\_\_\_\_
2. When others do things I think are stupid, I try to be very gentle with them. \_\_\_\_\_
3. When I want my way and someone won't listen, I will call them names and let them know I think they are stupid. \_\_\_\_\_
4. When people behave badly, I insult them in order to get them to behave better. \_\_\_\_\_
5. When people will not budge on an important issue, I get angry and say really nasty things to them. \_\_\_\_\_
6. When people criticize my faults, I do not let it bother me and do not try to get back at them. \_\_\_\_\_
7. When people insult me, I like to really tell them off. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I like making fun of people who do things which are very stupid in order to make them smarter. \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your assistance and cooperation is truly appreciated. Please ensure all questions have been answered. Please set this aside and go on to the task.

## Appendix 2

### Verbal Aggression Questionnaire

Please take 10-15 minutes to review and complete this questionnaire. There are three (3) sections that will collect various pieces of information. Please read the instructions for each section carefully. Please do not include your name or any identifiable information on this questionnaire. All information collected is anonymous and will not be shared outside the purposes of research.

#### **Section 1: Verbally Aggressive Incident**

Please take a moment to recall an incident when a teacher said something hurtful to you; the incident can be as recent or old as you'd like. Please describe below, in as much detail as possible, exactly what happened. Most important is to write verbatim (the teacher's exact words), if possible, what the teacher said.

**Section 2: Follow-up Single Items**

Please answer the below items in reference to the incident that you have written about above. Circle the number next to the most appropriate answer.

1. Thinking back to how you responded to the teacher immediately following the incident, which item best describes your response:

1 Silence      2 Walked away      3 Cried      5 I don't remember      6 Other \_\_\_\_\_

7 Responded verbally saying (please describe):

2. In general, was this the normal communication style of this teacher? In other words, did this teacher speak this way to students on a regular basis?

1 Yes      2 No      9 I don't know

3. Was this the first time this teacher said something hurtful to you?

1 Yes      2 No      9 I don't know

4. Was this the only time this teacher said something hurtful to you?

1 Yes      2 No      9 I don't know

5. Was this the last time this teacher said something hurtful to you?

1 Yes      2 No      9 I don't know

6. Would you respond differently today?

1 Yes      2 No      9 I don't know

7. Following this incident, how did your interaction with other teachers change? (**For example, increased or decreased respect for teachers, felt motivated to do better, lacked motivation to do work, overall attitude change towards teachers, etc.**)

8. What grade were you in when this incident occurred? \_\_\_\_\_ 9 I don't remember

9. Which best describes the sex of the teacher?

1 Male 2 Female 9 I don't know



10. Which best describes the race of the teacher?

1 Black      2 White      3 Hispanic      4 Asian American      5 Indian

6 Other \_\_\_\_\_      9 I don't know

11. How old were you when this incident occurred? \_\_\_\_\_      9 I don't remember

**Section 3: Demographic Information**

Please answer the below items as of today. Circle the number next to the most appropriate answer.

12. What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is your race?

1 Black      2 White      3 Hispanic      4 Asian American      5

Other \_\_\_\_\_

14. What is your current grade level? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Which best describes your sex?      1 Male      2 Female

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your assistance and cooperation is truly appreciated. Please ensure all questions have been answered. Please set this aside and go on to the next task.

### Appendix 3

#### The Hendrick Relational Satisfaction Scale (6)

Instructions: Using the following 6 items please rate the student-teacher relationship **prior** to the hurtful incident. Items should be rated using the following scale:

- 1 = Low satisfaction
- 2 = Not satisfied
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Satisfied
- 5 = High satisfaction

- 1.) How well does your teacher meet your needs? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.) In general, how satisfied are you with your student-teacher relationship? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3.) How good is your student-teacher relationship compared to your other student-teacher relationships? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4.) How often do you wish you hadn't gotten this teacher? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Originally- how often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?)
- 5.) To what extent has this student-teacher relationship met your original expectations?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6.) How many problems are there in your student-teacher relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Using the following 6 items please rate the student-teacher relationship **immediately following** the hurtful incident. Items should be rated using the following scale:

- 1 = Low satisfaction
- 2 = Not satisfied
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Satisfied
- 5 = High satisfaction

- 1.) How well does your teacher meet your needs? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.) In general, how satisfied are you with your student-teacher relationship? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3.) How good is your student-teacher relationship compared to your other student-teacher relationships? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4.) How often do you wish you hadn't gotten this teacher? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Originally- how often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?)

5.) To what extent has this student-teacher relationship met your original expectations?

\_\_\_\_\_

6.) How many problems are there in your student-teacher relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your assistance and cooperation is truly appreciated. Please ensure all questions have been answered. Please set this aside and go on to the next task.

Appendix 4

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (10)

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please rate each item based on your feelings **prior** to the hurtful incident. Please do not include your name or any identifiable information on this questionnaire. All information collected is anonymous and will not be shared outside the purposes of research. Fill in the circle below your selected answer. Items should be rated using the following scale:

Strongly agree = SA  
 Agree = A  
 Disagree = D  
 Strongly disagree = SD

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD
1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I certainly feel useless at times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. At times I think I am no good at all.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please rate each item based on how you felt **immediately following** the hurtful incident. Items should be rated using the following scale:

Strongly agree = SA  
 Agree = A  
 Disagree = D  
 Strongly disagree = SD

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD
1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I certainly feel useless at times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. At times I think I am no good at all.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your assistance and cooperation is truly appreciated. Please ensure all questions have been answered. Please gather all four (4) completed materials and return them to the moderator.

Appendix 5

Assent Form

Dear Student:

We are asking you to help us with questionnaires about the impact of hurtful messages. The purpose of these questionnaires is to gain a better understanding of student-teacher relationships.

Completing these questionnaires is voluntary, which means you do not have to take part if you don't want to. Nothing will happen to you if you decide not to participate. Participation will last approximately 20 minutes. The questionnaires will be completed during your English class, so you will not be pulled out of class or required to miss a class.

If you agree to participate, the questionnaires will ask questions about how you feel about yourself and your feelings about a specific incident with a teacher. You will not be able to put your name on the questionnaires or the name or other identifying information about the teacher you will write about. Your answers will be completely private. There is no way to know which student filled out an individual questionnaire.

Please read the following and sign below if you agree to participate.

I understand that:

- if I don't want to take the questionnaire that's ok and I won't get into trouble
- anytime that I want to stop participating that's ok
- my name will not be known and my answers will be completely private

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Print)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

There are two copies of this letter. After signing them, keep one copy for your records and return the other one to your school in the provided envelope. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

For further information regarding this research please contact Angela Buford at 216-965-5932, email: [am\\_buford@yahoo.com](mailto:am_buford@yahoo.com), or Dr. Jill Rudd at (216) 687-3993, email: [j.rudd@csuohio.edu](mailto:j.rudd@csuohio.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216)687-3630.

Appendix 6

Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Angela Buford. I am a graduate student at Cleveland State University conducting research as part of my master's thesis. I am conducting research on the impact of teacher's hurtful messages toward students. We are asking your permission for your child to complete four questionnaires being administered to students in school. The purpose of these questionnaires is to gain insight into student's perceptions of teacher's hurtful messages and their impact. The questionnaires will ask demographic questions as well as questions related to a situation where a student may have felt hurt by a teacher's comment, regardless of intentionality. The questionnaires will also measure the student's trait verbal aggressiveness, self-esteem and satisfaction with the student-teacher relationship. It is our hope that data collected from this research will contribute to a better understanding of student-teacher relationships in order to create learning environments that are most conducive to academic achievement.

There are little, if any, risks associated with this research. Participation in this study will last for approximately 20 minutes. Your child's responses to the questionnaires will be anonymous. Your child's name will not be collected or appear anywhere on the questionnaire and complete anonymity will be guaranteed.

Your child will not be required to miss a class or be pulled from class to complete the study. Rather, the questionnaires will be administered during English class.

Your consent and your child's participation are completely voluntary and your child may withdraw at any time. There is no reward for participating or consequence for not participating.

For further information regarding this research please contact Angela Buford at (216) 965-5932, email: [am\\_buford@yahoo.com](mailto:am_buford@yahoo.com) or Dr. Jill Rudd at (216)687-3993, email: [j.rudd@csuohio.edu](mailto:j.rudd@csuohio.edu).

If you have any questions about your child's right as a research participant you may contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216)687-3630.

There are two copies of this letter. If you agree to allow your child to participate, please sign below. After signing them, keep one copy for your records and return the other one to your child's school in the provided envelope. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

After signing your name, return this sheet to your child's school.

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Print)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 7

### Fact Sheet

#### Cleveland State University

*Title of Study:* Perception becomes reality: Student-teacher relationships and verbally aggressive messages

*Investigator Information:* The researcher, Angela Buford, is conducting a research study for the completion of a master's thesis, under the direction of Dr. Jill Rudd, professor in the School of Communication, Cleveland State University.

*Purpose:* This study is intended to result in a better understanding of the student-teacher relationship and the impact of teachers directing verbally aggressive messages toward students.

*Consent:* I will be provided a consent form for my parent/guardian to sign, as well as assent form for myself. I will return a signed copy of each, in the provided envelope, to the main office at school.

*Duration and Location:* Participation in this study will last for approximately 20 minutes. The study will be conducted during various English class periods at Ginn Academy.

*Procedures:* As a participant, I will complete a questionnaire about an incident that involved a verbally aggressive message delivered by a teacher. I will also complete 3 additional questionnaires that measure relational satisfaction, trait verbal aggression and self-esteem. This session today will be the only session I will be asked to participate in.

*Risks/Discomforts:* I have been told there is little, if any, risk in participating in the study.

*Benefits:* As a participant, I will receive candy for my participation in this study. Participation will also assist the researcher to collect data as part of her master's thesis.

*Anonymity:* As a participant, my name will not be attached to any of the materials I complete during the study. Thus, all information I provide is anonymous. I have also agreed not to include any identifiable information about the teacher involved in the incident I choose to write about.

*Right to Refuse or Withdraw:* I understand that I am not required to complete this survey and there will be no penalty if I do not complete the survey. I may also withdraw from this study any time.

*Offer to Answer Questions:* This research study is for a master's thesis. If I have questions about this study, I can ask Angela Buford before, during, or after I complete the questionnaires.

*Agreement to Participate:* I understand that participating in this study is completely voluntary.



## Appendix 8

### Introduction Narrative

Good morning/afternoon students. My name is Angela Buford. I am a graduate student at Cleveland State University conducting research as part of my master's thesis. I am conducting research on the impact of teacher's hurtful messages toward students. Prior to today, you all should have received a parental consent form as well as a minor assent form. These forms explained exactly what we will be doing today and gathered you and your parents and/or guardians permission for your participation. If you did not receive this form, or failed to return it signed by your parent or guardian, please raise your hand at this time. Those students that raised their hands will not be able to participate in this study.

Participation in this study will last for approximately 20 minutes. Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your participation at any time. Meaning, if you no longer wish to participate, you do not have to and there will be no penalty or consequence for this decision. As a participant, your name will not be attached to any of the materials you complete during the study. Thus, all information you provide is anonymous. I also ask that you do not include any identifiable information about the teacher involved in the incident you will write about.

Are there any questions at this time?

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to ask me at anytime. If you have questions about your participation as a human subject in this study please contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216)687-3630. (write number on the board)

If there are no questions at this time, we will now begin.

## Appendix 9

### Infante's Typology of Verbally Aggressive Messages

1. Character Attack
2. Competence Attack
3. Background Attack
4. Physical Appearance Attack
5. Teasing
6. Threats
7. Ridicule
8. Malediction
9. Profanity
10. Nonverbal Emblems