2023

# The Application of Interpersonal Concepts to Reframe Instructor Misbehaviors

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### Recommended Citation

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**Abstract**

The research literature surrounding instructor misbehaviors has been largely influenced by two typologies of misbehaviors. Kearney et al. (1991) introduced the first typology of instructor misbehaviors, which included *incompetence*, *offensiveness*, and *indolence*. Goodboy and Myers (2015) later revisited this initial typology, finding additional misbehaviors that reflected changes in the classroom climate, including *antagonism* and misbehaviors enacted during *lectures*. Much of the research on instructor misbehaviors utilizes these typologies, using a framework of interpersonal theories as a means of understanding instructor misbehaviors. In my review of the literature, common theories applied included expectancy violations theory, communication privacy management theory, and attribution theory. Through the application of these theories, instructors have been painted in a negative light. However, I argue that these theories can be applied to misbehaviors to reframe those misbehaviors as an opportunity to enhance the interpersonal climate of the classroom and the student-teacher relationship.

*Keywords:* Instructor misbehaviors, expectancy violations, communication privacy management, attribution theory

**The Application of Interpersonal Concepts to Reframe Instructor Misbehaviors**

Though interpersonal communication is a significant umbrella of study in the overall communication discipline, a more specific area of noteworthy study is the instructional context. Stated simply by Beebe and Mottet (2009), "*instructional communication* is the label researchers have given to the formal study of communication between teachers and students" (p. 349). Research in the communication discipline has largely been guided by two traditions: the rhetorical tradition and the relational tradition (Mottet et al., 2006). The rhetorical approach to instructional communication views learning as occurring unilaterally from teacher to student, where the teacher uses verbal and nonverbal messages with the intent to persuade, or teach, students (Beebe & Mottet, 2009). Alternatively, the relational approach to instructional communication views learning as occurring through a mutual relationship between the student and teacher, where the teachers' and students' emotions, feelings, and well-being are taken into consideration as part of the learning process (Beebe & Mottet, 2009).

Given the mutual nature of communication, instructional research falls into the relational approach more often than the rhetorical approach to instructional communication. Waldeck et al. (2001a) argued that instructional communication research often draws on theories from other communication contexts, such as interpersonal communication. Additionally, McCroskey (1998) argued that the sub-discipline of instructional communication has been largely influenced by interpersonal communication theory. Because instructional communication is influenced so strongly by interpersonal theory, the behaviors, or misbehaviors, of instructors is the topic of much of the research literature. In my review of research on instructor misbehaviors, it appears that research on instructor misbehaviors has been guided by two significant typologies of misbehaviors: the groundbreaking research of Kearney et al. (1991), and the typology introduced by Goodboy and Myers (2015). Using these typologies, researchers have applied the interpersonal theoretical frameworks of expectancy violations theory,

communication privacy management theory, and attribution theory to instructor misbehaviors as a means of explaining and understanding instructor misbehaviors.

While informative, it is of note that these frameworks paint instructors in a negative light. A large reason for this is because instructional scholars studying interpersonal variables rely on self-reported data from one perspective, which is the perspective of the student (Goodboy & Kashy, 2017). Interpersonal research focuses on the perspectives of both individuals in a dyad, allowing for a more holistic view. If interpersonal theories are going to be applied to the instructional context and the student-teacher relationship, then the research should also consider all parties involved. In doing so, we can better understand why teachers may misbehave, or even reframe the way we interpret these misbehaviors.

Following a review of the two instructor misbehavior typologies, I review the three previously mentioned interpersonal theories and the application of these theories in the current research literature on instructor misbehaviors. I then utilize these three theories as an opportunity to reframe instructor misbehaviors as an opportunity to enhance the interpersonal nature of the classroom and the student-teacher relationship. To begin, it's important to understand the origins of the research on misbehaviors: misbehavior typologies.

## Misbehavior Types

In the initial research surrounding instructional misbehaviors, focus was often placed on the behaviors of students and the causes of student behaviors (Doyle, 1986). Research conducted by Kearney et al. (1991) sought to explore teachers as a potential source of student misbehavior in the classroom. Teacher misbehaviors were defined as the behaviors enacted by teachers that interfered with instruction and learning (Kearney et al., 1991). While this initial typology of instructor misbehaviors was groundbreaking for understanding the interactions between students and teachers, the research was based in the classroom dynamics of 1990 and prior. Goodboy and Myers (2015) acknowledged that

changes in the classroom environment occur, specifically that technology has become more present in

the college classroom and that the culture and attitudes of college students has changed. Goodboy and

Myers (2015) replicated Kearney et al.'s (1991) study utilizing data that reflects the current classroom

climate in order to revise Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology of instructor misbehaviors.

**Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey (1991) Typology of Misbehaviors**

The research conducted by Kearney et al. (1991) is one of the most cited studies in the literature

surrounding instructor misbehaviors (Banfield et al., 2006; Bolkan et al., 2022; Borzea & Goodboy, 2016;

Broeckelman-Post et al., 2016; Claus et al., 2012; Goodboy et al., 2010, 2018; Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009;

Goodboy & Myers, 2015; Hazel et al., 2014; Kelsey et al., 2004; MacArthur & Villagran, 2015). This

typology of instructor misbehaviors was pioneering in the discipline of instructional communication,

providing a deeper understanding of the role and impact that teacher behaviors have on students and

the classroom environment. Using the classroom management approach, which places the primary

responsibility for classroom control on the teacher, Kearney et al. (1991) conducted two studies. The

results of the first study indicated 28 categories of teacher misbehaviors; the purpose of the second

study was to validate the 28 categories of teacher misbehaviors and determine if there were overarching

dimensions of teacher misbehaviors. Three dimensions of teacher misbehaviors emerged for the 28

categories of teacher misbehaviors: incompetence, offensiveness, and indolence.

***Incompetence***

One dimension of instructor misbehaviors in Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology is *incompetence*.

From the 28 categories of instructor misbehaviors, nine of those categories fall under the incompetent

dimension: unfair testing, confusion/unclear lectures, apathy toward students, boring lectures, not

knowing the subject matter, information overload, foreign or regional accents, inappropriate volume,

and bad grammar/spelling (Kearney et al., 1991). Incompetent instructors lack basic teaching skills and

can be accused of making the assignments and exams too difficult (Kearney et al., 1991; MacArthur &

Villagran, 2015; Vallade, 2021; Vallade & Myers, 2014). Additionally, incompetent instructors are

unenthused about materials, often perceived by students as ignorant, confused, and vague (Kearney et

al., 1991).

Not only does incompetent instructor behavior impact student learning outcomes, but

incompetent behavior from instructors also impacts the relationship between students and instructors.

Instructors who are perceived as incompetent are perceived to not care about the course and students

(Kearney et al., 1991; Sidelinger et al., 2011). MacArthur and Villagran (2015) note that incompetent

instructors often do not know their students' names and discourage student participation in class, which

students perceive the instructor as having a lack of affect for the students. With this perception of lack of

affect, the instructor-student relationship is impacted negatively.

### *Offensiveness*

The second dimension of teacher misbehavior as outlined by Kearney et al. (1991) is

*offensiveness*. Offensive teachers are perceived to lack basic interpersonal skills, are generally

condescending, and are ultimately considered to be rude (Banfield et al., 2006; Goodboy & Myers, 2015;

MacArthur & Villagran, 2015). Categories of misbehaviors that fall under the dimension of offensiveness

are sarcasm/putdowns, verbal abuse, unreasonable and arbitrary rules, sexual harassment, negative

personality, and showing favoritism in the classroom (Kearney et al., 1991). These misbehaviors insinuate

that teachers have the ability to be mean and cruel; for example, one offensive behavior noted by

research is humiliating students in front of their peers by publicly insulting them (Kearney et al., 1991).

Offensive behaviors from instructors can have the strongest impact on their relationship with

students. Berkos et al. (2001) found that offensive misbehaviors from instructors are the most troubling

to students. Offensive teachers may use profanity, yell at their students as a form of intimidation, and

even may use a condescending tone by acting arrogant and superior (Kearney et al., 1991). Although

there is a difference in power between students and teachers, students perceiving an instructor abusing

that power leaves a negative impression on students.  Ultimately, students notice offensive behaviors

and will respond negatively, which sours the student-instructor relationship.

### Indolence

The third dimension of instructor misbehaviors according to Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology is

*indolence*. The indolent instructor is conceived as the stereotypical absent-minded professor who lacks

basic procedural skills (Goodboy & Myers, 2015; Kearney et al., 1991; Vallade & Myers, 2014). Absent,

tardy, unprepared and disorganized, deviating from the syllabus, returning work late, and information

underload are the six categories of misbehaviors that fall under the dimension of instructor indolence

(Kearney et al., 1991). Instructors exhibiting indolent behaviors may forget test dates, neglect to grade

assignments, change course structure mid-semester, or may even be considered the "easy" teacher that

everyone wants to take (Banfield et al., 2006; Kearney et al., 1991; MacArthur & Villagran, 2015).

Indolent teachers are perceived to have a lack of interest in students and their students'

education, which can also impact the student-teacher relationship (Kearney et al., 1991). Indolent

instructors are those who fail to show up for class consistently, and when they do, they arrive late or

dismiss the class early (Banfield et al., 2006; Kearney et al., 1991; MacArthur & Villagran, 2015). Banfield

et al. (2006) noted that not all students would consider indolent behaviors as negative; however, some

students do recognize these behaviors as a hinderance to their education. When the student plays an

active role in pursuing their education, such indolent behaviors negatively impact the student-teacher

relationship. Additionally, when an instructor fails to show up or cuts their time with students, there is

less opportunity for a relationship to form between students and teachers. Although not the most

impactful of the teacher misbehaviors, indolent behaviors from instructors still can weaken or prevent

the student-teacher relationship.

Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology of instructor misbehaviors was groundbreaking for the

instructional communication discipline, but it is important to remember that these findings are based in

the early 1990s. Although many of the behaviors described in their findings still hold true today, they do not take into account the changing landscape of the learning environment and advancing technologies that have affected contemporary practices in the classroom. Smart phones, smart boards, online classes, online assignments, laptops, tablets, etc. are just a few of the many technologies that have emerged in the learning environment within the last 20 years.

**Goodboy and Myers (2015) Typology of Misbehaviors**

Through a series of three studies, Goodboy and Myers (2015) set out to revisit Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology of instructor misbehaviors to determine how behaviors may have shifted to reflect technological advances; they also sought to provide a research-based measure for teacher misbehaviors, as one did not exist. In their first study, Goodboy and Myers (2015) found 16 additional misbehaviors from Kearney et al.'s original 28 misbehaviors; it's important to note that some of these misbehaviors were more irritations considered by students and not actual hinderances to student learning. The first study also found that the instructional environment, as well as the mentality of undergraduate students, has changed. That is, the younger and more recent generation of students prefers more individualized instruction.

Their second study worked to create a measure of teacher misbehaviors, with three new misbehavior types emerging: antagonism, lectures, and articulation. However, articulation was not found to impact student learning, so more attention was given to antagonism and lectures. In their third study, Goodboy and Myers (2015) confirmed and validated the measure developed in the second study. Overall, antagonism and lecture misbehaviors were found to demotivate students, which ultimately impacts student learning. While Goodboy and Myers (2015) found additional misbehaviors that mirror the technological and demographical changes in the college classroom, they also created a measure for instructor misbehaviors; utilizing that measure for instructor misbehaviors, they revisited Kearney et al.'s

(1991) typology of misbehaviors and introduced an updated typology of misbehaviors that consisted of antagonism and misbehaviors enacted during lectures.

### Antagonism

The first dimension of Goodboy and Myers's (2015) revised typology of instructor misbehaviors is *antagonism*. The dimension of antagonism as an instructor misbehavior is viewed synonymously with Kearney et al.'s (1991) dimension of offensiveness (Goodboy et al., 2018). Instructors who yell at students when asking for help or belittle students are enacting antagonistic behaviors (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). Other antagonistic behaviors include instructors arguing with students during class, telling students their opinions are wrong, and criticizing students' responses to instructor remarks (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). Antagonistic behaviors from instructors are significantly impactful to the student-teacher relationship. When an instructor misbehaves by antagonism, they are communicating to students "that they are not valued or respected by their instructor" (Borzea & Goodboy, 2016, p. 552). When a student perceives that they are not valued by their instructor, they are likely to decrease their interest in the course content and their participation in class, which will ultimately impede the possibility for a relationship to form with their teacher.

### Lectures

*Lectures* is the second dimension of instructor misbehaviors as outlined by Goodboy and Myers (2015). Misbehaviors that fall under the dimension of lectures are those that are enacted *during a lecture* on course content, not the act of delivering a lecture itself (Borzea & Goodboy, 2016). According to Goodboy and Myers (2015), examples of lecture misbehaviors include delivering the content in a dry and boring manner, delivering material so quickly that students cannot take adequate notes, or teaching in a confusing manner. Borzea and Goodboy (2016) found that the student's motivation to learn and the student's affect for the course are decreased when a teacher enacts misbehaviors during their lectures.

When a student disengages, they are diminishing the possibility for a relationship to form with their teacher.

Overall, the two typologies of instructor misbehaviors (Kearney et al. and Goodboy & Myers) have proven themselves useful for research on understanding the impact of instructor behaviors. Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology was groundbreaking for the discipline of instructional communication and laid a framework for future research. However, as technology requires updates, so does research. Goodboy and Myers (2015) revisited Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology and found an additional 16 perceived instructor misbehaviors, while also introducing an official measure for misbehaviors and an updated typology of misbehaviors. This newer typology reflects the evolving landscape of the learning environment and the evolving needs of students as well. Only so much can be said about instructor misbehaviors; however, they do lend themselves to be understood through the lens of interpersonal communication theories.

### Common Interpersonal Theories Used in Research on Instructor Misbehaviors

While instructional communication is a sub-discipline of the overall communication discipline, there is often much overlap with the larger interpersonal area. McCroskey et al. (2006) argued that research in instructional communication has been largely influenced by interpersonal communication theory and research. After all, the instructional environment is a "microcosm of the larger, interpersonal communication environment (Nussbaum & Scott, 1979, p. 578); the origins of instructional communication can be attributed to the umbrella study of interpersonal communication (Myers, 2017). Additionally, in their review of instructional research literature, Waldeck et al. (2001a) identified 11 categories of theories used in the instructional context, two of which were arousal valence theory (expectancy violations theory) and attribution theory. Through my own review of research on instructor misbehaviors, three interpersonal communication theories were most commonly used: expectancy violations theory, communication privacy management theory, and attribution theory.

**Expectancy Violations Theory**

Expectancy violations are behaviors that stray from expectations or norms of a behavior in a specific context. Expectancy violations theory was first formed to focus on how individuals react to violations of personal space (Burgoon, 1978; Burgoon & Hale, 1988). The theory was later updated to include how individuals react to all types of expectancy violations, whether verbal or nonverbal, and good or bad (Burgoon & Hale, 1988).

As a means of reducing uncertainty, individuals form expectations for how others should behave in different situations. These expectations can be divided into two categories: predictive expectancies and prescriptive expectancies (Burgoon et al., 1995). Predictive expectancies are defined as behavioral expectations that are set based on previous patterns of behaviors in a situation or relationship (Burgoon et al., 1995). An example of a predictive expectancy could be when receiving a request for an extension on an assignment from a student whom, based on their track record, you expect will still not submit the assignment on time. In this case, your prior experience with the student informs your expectations of their future behaviors. In contrast, Burgoon et al. (1995) defined prescriptive expectancies as the behavioral expectations that are set or influenced by what is generally considered appropriate in a special social or cultural context. An example of a prescriptive expectancy would be holding the door open for someone behind you because it is generally considered to be a polite gesture. Whereas predictive expectancies are based on specific situational or relational backgrounds, prescriptive expectancies are formed from broader sociocultural expectations.

It is often understood that expectancy violations are inherently negative. However, Burgoon and Hale (1988) argued that violations to expectations can also create a positive interpretation. The interpretation or outcome of the expectancy violation is dependent upon the comparison between the unexpected behavior that occurred and the behavior we expected. A positive violation occurs when the unexpected behavior is interpreted to be more desirable than the expected behaviors (Burgoon & Hale,

1988). For example, if a teacher provides an extension on an assignment to a student but the student

submits the assignment earlier than the original due date, this could create a positive violation. A

negative violation, which is what we often think of when discussing expectancy violations, occurs when

the unexpected behavior is not as desirable as the expected behavior (Burgoon & Hale, 1988).

Expectancy violations theory offers a framework for understanding how individuals manage uncertainty

by providing predictive or prescriptive expectations for interpersonal interactions (Burgoon et al., 1995).

If a teacher expects their student to hold true to their word of never submitting an assignment late

again, but the student submits the next two assignments late, this will create a negative violation for the

teacher.

### Application of Expectancy Violations Theory to Explain Misbehaviors

In the literature on instructor misbehaviors, expectancy violations theory is most popularly used

to explain instructor self-disclosures and instructor misbehaviors that are enacted online (Hazel et al.,

2014; MacArthur & Villagran, 2015; Miller et al., 2014; Sidelinger & Bolen, 2015). Self-disclosure is a

behavior within the approachable instructor style and is defined as the personal and professional

information, which cannot be obtained from other sources, that instructors share about themselves

(Myers et al., 2009). Self-disclosure is measured along three dimensions: amount, valence, and

relevance. Of the three dimensions, relevance to course content is found to be most significant;

however, in order to obtain a holistic view of the impact of instructor self-disclosure, all three

dimensions must be taken into consideration (Miller et al., 2014). Through the lens of EVT, self-disclosure

is associated closely with instructor nonverbal immediacy, which is the use of behaviors that decreases

the physical and psychological distance between instructor and student (Mehrabian, 1971; Witt &

Wheeless, 2001). According to the general model of instructional communication (GMIC), instructor

credibility has been found to mediate the relationship between instructor immediacy and student

learning and civility (McCroskey et al., 2004).  Miller et al. (2014) utilized EVT as a framework to

understand the relationship between instructor self-disclosure, nonverbal immediacy, and credibility as it impacts student incivility in the classroom. When an instructor provides negative disclosures about themselves, they are violating an expectation from students that the instructor should only disclose positively and should disclose information that is relevant to the course. Miller et al. (2014) found that instructor credibility completely mediated the effect of nonverbal immediacy on student incivility, and partially mediated the effect of negative disclosure; this study found that instructor credibility was most heavily influenced by nonverbal immediacy.

EVT has also been used in research as a framework for understanding instructor misbehaviors in online courses and social media platforms (MacArthur & Villagran, 2015). MacArthur and Villagran (2015) argued that instructor misbehaviors have largely been studied in the physical classroom and that misbehaviors can also occur in the digital medium.  They applied Kearney et al.'s (1991) typology of misbehaviors to EVT to understand digital instructor misbehaviors and the impact of digital expectancy violations, which MacArthur and Villagran (2015) defined as "instructor misbehaviors that occur digitally, via electronic messages" (p. 28). First, indolent expectancy violations referred to electronic messages from instructors that are disorganized, do not provide sufficient information, and deviate from the purpose of the message. Second, incompetent expectancy violations referred to instructor electronic messages that are unclear, contain bad grammar and spelling, and imply disinterest. Third, offensive expectancy violations referred to instructor electronic messages that are sarcastic, abusive, and generally negative (MacArthur & Villagran, 2015). In MacArthur and Villagran's (2015) study, EVT is used to understand how digital expectancy violations enacted by instructors may impact students' motivation to communicate with their instructors in and outside of the boundaries of the online class. MacArthur and Villagran (2015) found that students' motivations to communicate with instructors who enact digital expectancy violations differ based on the students' preexisting social, physical, and task attraction to the instructor. Students are tolerant of indolent digital expectancy violations when they desire a closer

relationship with their instructor, students are motivated to be more involved with their education when instructor enact incompetent digital expectancy violations, and students do not tolerate offensive digital expectancy violations (MacArthur & Villagran, 2015).

EVT was also used by Hazel et al. (2014) to explore how perceptions of prosocial instructor behaviors and student academic entitlement predict graduate student reports of teacher misbehaviors in online communication courses. Academic entitlement is a trait-like variable that encompasses the array of attitudes that students carry where they have expectations for high rewards academically in return for minimal effort, expectations for special accommodations from teachers, and impatience/irritation when their needs are not met by instructors (Greenberger et al., 2008). Teacher misbehaviors are viewed as a perceived violation of these norms and expectations carried by students. In the context of the online classroom, online social presence is performative and is conveyed by the messages sent and how those messages are interpreted; instructors convey social presence online by providing regular and specific feedback to student submissions, and students convey social presence online through self-disclosure in online forums, as well as personal exchanges in online forums (Kehrwald, 2008). Students' perceptions of their instructors' immediacy, interpersonal attraction, and communication satisfaction can be used to determine instructor social presence in the context of the online classroom. Instructor immediacy is defined as a communication variable measured by the level of psychological distance students observe between themselves and their instructor (Andersen et al., 1979; Freitas et al., 1998; Richmond et al., 1987). In the instructional context, interpersonal attraction is the degree to which students view their instructors as desirable on the dimensions of task, social, and physical (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Communication satisfaction is measured as the response to the accomplishment of one's goals and expectations in communication (Hecht, 1978).

Hazel et al. (2008) found that teacher misbehaviors can be perceived online, and that instructor communication satisfaction, immediacy, and task attraction were predictors of perceptions of indolence

and incompetence misbehaviors; communication satisfaction, task attraction, and social attraction were predictors of perceptions of offensive misbehaviors. Academic entitlement was not found to be a significant predictor of perceptions of any of the three misbehavior types (Hazel et al., 2014). This study articulates that students perceive cues online more than what teachers may think, that misbehaviors in the online classroom can have an impact on affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning, and provides evidence that student-teacher relationships are present in the online context.

Although expectancy violations theory has proven useful as a theoretical framework for understanding instructor misbehaviors, it is not the only interpersonal theory found to be applicable to the instructional context of instructor misbehaviors. Another well-known and widely used theory in both interpersonal and instructional communication is Communication Privacy Management theory, which I turn to next.

**Communication Privacy Management Theory**

Communication privacy management helps us understand how we maintain and withhold private information with others based on boundaries we set (Petronio, 1991, 2002, 2013). Communication privacy management theory was first introduced by Petronio (1991) as communication boundary management theory. Petronio (1991) argued that disclosure is more strategic than what was suggested by previous literature, and the strategic nature of disclosure was based on communicative boundaries set by the individual performing the disclosure. These metaphorical boundaries provide a sense of autonomy for the individual who is disclosing information; the boundaries set determine what information is considered public knowledge and what information is considered private knowledge (Petronio, 2009). The boundary management process takes into consideration five variables: need to tell, predicted outcomes, riskiness of disclosing information, privacy level of the information, and the degree of the discloser's emotional control (Petronio, 1991).

Communication boundary management theory ultimately transformed into communication privacy management theory to better understand how individuals choose to disclose information and who is deemed worthy of that information (Petronio, 2009). According to Petronio (2013), there are three elements (comprised of eight axioms) that undergird communication privacy management theory. The eight axioms fall under the three main elements of privacy ownership, privacy control, and privacy turbulence (Petronio, 2013).

The first element of CPM is privacy ownership (Petronio, 2013). Privacy ownership emphasizes the idea that individuals have the right to determine whether their private information is restricted or not. This element is comprised of the first two axioms of CPM, the first of which proposes that individuals are the "sole owners of their private information and they trust they have the right to protect their information or grant access" (p. 9). Axiom #2 of CPM states that when an individual chooses to share private information with others, those who are on the receiving end of the disclosure become authorized co-owners or boundary insiders of that information (Petronio, 2013). Petronio (2013) noted that when information is disclosed to co-owners, they have a responsibility to keep that information exclusive unless given permission to share by the original owner of that information.

The second element of CPM is privacy control, which is the "engine that regulates conditions of granting and denying access to private information" (Petronio, 2013, p. 9). Axioms 3-7 relate to this element of privacy control. Axiom #3 proposes that because individuals own the rights to their information, they should also be the ones to control their private information (Petronio, 2013). Axiom #4 further argues that privacy control is determined by the use of privacy rules that determine what aspects of information can be shared and how that information is framed when shared (Petronio, 2013). Privacy rules are determined between the owner and the co-owner(s) based on a number of factors such as situational needs or cultural norms. Axioms #5 and 6 argue that negotiation of privacy rules is coordinated between the owner and co-owner(s) and that successful negotiation leads to a shared

collective understanding of privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2013). As previously mentioned, with privacy

control being coined as the "engine" of CPM, it is important to understand that successful negotiations

of privacy rules determine the overall outcomes of disclosure. Axiom #7 therefore predicts that a

collective understanding of privacy rules and boundaries is regulated by an understanding of who can

become privy to the information and how much information boundary outsiders can become privy to

(Petronio, 2013).

The third principle of CPM is privacy turbulence, which occurs when boundary structures may

need to be renegotiated due to violations of boundary expectations (Petronio, 1991, 2013). To explain

privacy turbulence, axiom #8 argues that privacy regulation is unpredictable, and as a result, there is a

possibility for breakdowns of the boundary structure to occur (Petronio, 2013). Privacy turbulence occurs

when confidentiality had been breached, leading to an undesired restructure of the boundaries set in

place by the original owner of the information. Privacy turbulence is an important aspect of CPM

because it provides understanding as to why a person's willingness to share may change over time.

Overall, communication privacy management theory is an important aspect of interpersonal

communication as it provides a framework to explain when and why individuals choose to disclose

private information. It is a cycle that begins with privacy ownership, which leads to privacy control, and

when confidentiality is broken, creates privacy turbulence, causing the original owner to re-evaluate how

they share ownership of information in the future.

### *Application of Communication Privacy Management Theory to Explain Misbehaviors*

The use of communication privacy management theory as a framework to understand and

explain instructor misbehaviors is primarily used to understand the rules and depth of instructor self-

disclosures (Hosek & Thompson, 2009; Mazer et al., 2007; Schrodt, 2013). Hosek and Thompson (2009)

utilized CPM as a framework to examine how teachers develop privacy rules and coordinate boundaries

when self-disclosing information. The student-teacher relationship is one that requires relational

development just like all interpersonal relationships. Previous research notes that self-disclosure personifies the teacher in students' perspectives (Brookfield, 2006). CPM provides a framework for understanding the considerations surrounding an individual's decision to self-disclose; CPM also emphasizes the importance of the two-way process of communication, noting that the impact of the disclosure on the other should also be considered (Petronio, 1991, 2002, 2009, 2013).

Hosek and Thompson (2009) found that teachers consider the following criteria when making decisions surrounding disclosure: motivations, context, risk-benefit ratio, and past experience (not cited in CPM). Motivations for disclosure were content (course) and relationally driven (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). Contextual criteria for disclosure were driven by the social and physical context; in-class disclosures were more role/content related, while out-of-class disclosures were more loose/permeable with boundaries. The risk criteria that were considered by teachers were role, face, and stigma risks (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). The past experiences criteria were based on the experiences of other teachers in their disclosure to help inform whether a teacher should disclose similarly (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). In terms of boundaries, teachers considered themselves to be the sole owners of their information, even when they have shared with others, which CPM would argue creates co-ownership; once a teacher has disclosed, students are co-owners of that information and the teacher does not have as much ownership/control over whether the student discloses that information with others (Hosek & Thompson, 2009; Petronio, 1991, 2002, 2009, 2013). Hosek and Thompson (2009) also found that management of credibility is a significant criterion for a teacher's decision to disclose, which likely stems from the background that self-disclosure can be considered a misbehavior if it does not pertain to course content.

Mazer et al. (2007) also utilized CPM as a framework to understand the impact of instructor self-disclosure. Teachers have to be strategic with their disclosure in order to maintain credibility and create a class environment that students are comfortable in. Mazer et al. (2007) sought to examine the effects

of teacher self-disclosure via Facebook on anticipated student motivation, affective learning, and

classroom climate. Previous studies found that online instructor immediacy yields more student

motivation to communicate online (Waldeck et al., 2001b). Computer mediated communication provides

more opportunity for students to develop relationships with instructors, however, social media provides

a different experience than instructor emails or instructor websites as social media tends to be more

interactive and more personal (Mazer et al., 2007). The findings of Mazer et al.'s (2007) study suggest

that high teacher self-disclosure leads to higher levels of anticipated motivation and affective learning.

Through using CPM as a framework for analysis, one recommendation to emerge from Mazer et al.'s

(2007) study is that teachers should be consistent with their self-disclosure on Facebook and their

teaching style in the classroom.

Finally, Schrodt (2013) utilized (CPM) to examine the degree to which content relevance and

students' comfort with instructor disclosure moderated the relationship between instructor disclosure

and instructor credibility. The use of self-disclosure from instructor has two significant impacts: it

humanizes the instructor, and it enhances class climate and motivation (Fusani, 1994; Mazer et al.,

2007). Research shows that the most effective instructor disclosures are: 1) socially appropriate, 2)

relevant to course content, and 3) effective in encouraging participation (Hosek & Thompson, 2009;

Mazer et al., 2007). A key tenet of CPM is the idea of boundary coordination; in the instructional context,

boundary coordination involves coordinating the personal boundaries of the instructor with the

collective boundaries of the class, and navigating the impact of disclosure on students' perceptions of

instructor credibility (Petronio, 2002; Schrodt, 2013). Schrodt (2013) found that instructors who disclose

appropriately, who make efforts to help students understand the relevance of disclosure to course

content, and who disclose information that students are comfortable listening to are more likely to be

perceived as credible. Content relevance and student comfort with disclosure mitigate the potentially

damaging effects of inappropriate/negative disclosures, however, disclosure frequency had no

correlation to instructor credibility unless the appropriateness and student comfort are taken into

consideration as well (Schrodt, 2013). This furthers the argument that the dimensions of disclosure

should be measured in tandem with one another in order to gain a holistic understanding of the impact

of disclosure. When an instructor makes efforts to make course content relevant, there is a positive

impact on instructor credibility and on the relationship between student and teacher (Schrodt, 2013).

Ultimately, these studies illustrate how CPM can be utilized to understand how relationships in the

instructional context function differently than in the interpersonal/personal context.

**Attribution Theory**

Heider (1958) argued that people are "scientists" who study each other's behavior in order to

determine why they act in certain ways – in other words, we observe others' behavior in order to

develop attributions. Attributions are defined as "a perceptual process of assigning reasons or causes to

another's behavior" (Fisher & Adams, 1994, p. 411). Roloff and Miller (2006) argued that individuals are

more likely to make attributions about others when negative behavior is enacted, such as in conflict.

Specifically, there are three dimensions of attributions, which are locus of control, stability, and

controllability (Kelley, 1973). These three dimensions help in understanding how individuals make sense

of events and behaviors in their social world. Locus of control analyzes an individual's attributions from a

perspective of "Who is at fault?" Kelley (1973) argued that locus of control is a matter of forming

attributions based on either personal or situational factors, where the outcome/behavior is either due to

internal factors (a person's personality) or due to external factors (i.e., contextual or situational). Second,

the dimension of stability attributes behaviors as either ongoing or atypical (Kelley, 1973). When a

behavior is ongoing, it helps the attributor understand that this behavior is not abnormal. In contrast, if a

behavior is atypical, it may raise a red flag for the attributor. The third dimension, controllability,

attributes a behavior as either having the ability to be changed or having no control over the outcome

(Kelley, 1973). When a behavior can be changed, it is viewed as having control, while a behavior that is attributed as uncontrollable is viewed as having no ability to influence or change the situation.

Attributions are significant to interpersonal conflict because they help individuals determine how to approach conflict (McDermott, 2009). If an individual attributes their relational partner's negative behavior as internal, stable, and controllable, they are more likely to use a style that is uncooperative (Davey et al., 2001; Schweinle et al., 2002). With this in mind, it is important to understand the various dimensions that attributions are based on and to keep them in mind as it can affect how conflict is approached and managed.

### *Application of Attribution Theory to Explain Misbehaviors*

Because attribution theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals make sense of their actions as well as those of others, the use of attribution theory in research surrounding instructor misbehaviors is used to understand how students make sense of what instructors do and say (Kelsey et al., 2004; McPherson & Young, 2004). Kelsey et al. (2004) utilized attribution theory to understand the explanations students attribute to their teachers' misbehaviors. When attributing causes for behaviors, context is key in providing a frame for interpreting the intentionality, the consistency, and the saliency of that behavior (Kelsey et al., 2004). According to attribution theory, negative behaviors of others are assigned internal/dispositional attributions, while behaviors that are perceived as highly inconsistent are assigned external attributions (Kelley, 1973). Kelsey et al. (2004) emphasized the importance of context for understanding behaviors, as their results indicated that students do interpret their teachers' misbehaviors in ways that are consistent with attribution theory. Students more often assign internal attributions for teacher misbehaviors than external attributions, and teacher misbehaviors are attributed to internal/dispositional factors regardless of the level of immediacy from the teacher (Kelsey et al., 2004). Overall, the use of attribution theory in this study suggests that students are not very forgiving of their teachers' misbehaviors.

In a separate study, McPherson and Young (2004) utilized attribution theory as a framework to examine students' attributions about and explanation for teachers' expressions of anger in the classroom. When students witness or are the recipients of their teacher's anger, they are motivated to make sense of that behavior and attribute causes to that behavior. There are two types of expressions of anger: aggressive and assertive (Guerrero, 1994). Distributive aggressive anger is described as threatening and directed at the target of the anger; passive aggressive anger is threatening as well, but it is expressed indirectly (Guerrero, 1994). In contrast to these aggressive anger expressions, integrative assertive anger is expressed in a non-threatening manner by articulating thoughts and feelings without blaming the other individual (Guerrero, 1994). Students enter the classroom with expectations of how the teacher should behave in class, and attribution theory provides an understanding for when individuals do not meet others' expectations for their behaviors. Within attribution theory is the concept of fundamental attribution error, where individuals will overestimate internal causes or underestimate external causes (Nisbett et al., 1980). McPherson and Young (2004) found that students assign internal attributions to teachers who expressed distributive aggression and passive aggression more than to teachers who take an assertive approach. Additionally, students more often than not acknowledged that they did something to evoke anger from the teacher, but they still attributed the behavior internally to the teacher (McPherson & Young, 2004). The application of attribution theory to the instructional context, specifically regarding instructor misbehaviors provides insight into understanding how students perceive instructor behaviors.

Overall, in the current literature surrounding instructor misbehaviors, interpersonal theories are applied as a framework for understanding how instructors misbehave in the instructional context. EVT provides an understanding for the expectations that students carry regarding how their instructors should behave and what they should disclose. CPM illustrates the rules and boundaries through which instructors determine to who, what, and to what extent they disclose information about themselves.

Attribution theory serves to make sense of instructor behaviors and the reasoning behind why they may be misbehaving. As outlined in these various studies, instructors are often painted as the "bad guy" with many recommendations as to how they should avoid misbehaviors. However, I now move to make the case that these theories can be used to reframe misbehaviors as a means of improving the interpersonal climate of the classroom and the interpersonal nature of the student-teacher relationship.

## Positioning Interpersonal Theories in the Instructional Context

The field of instructional communication provides a context for understanding communication as it pertains to the classroom. The use of interpersonal concepts in the instructional context provides a framework for understanding the impact of behaviors (student and teacher) on learning outcomes. However, there is little attention on how these theories can reframe misbehaviors as an opportunity to *enhance* the interpersonal climate of the classroom. After all, interpersonal communication is "the relational, emotional, and affective component of communication related to learning" (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 116). Given the noteworthy application of interpersonal theories in the instructional context, it is worthwhile to explore how these theories can enrich the interpersonal climate of the classroom and the student-teacher relationship.

## Applying Expectancy Violations Theory to Reframe Instructor Misbehaviors in the Online Classroom

As previously noted, EVT has been used as a framework for understanding and explaining instructor misbehaviors. However, EVT can also be used to reframe instructor misbehaviors, specifically in the context of the online classroom. Just as students enter the physical classroom with expectations for instructors, they also carry expectations for instructor *behaviors* in the context of the online classroom (Hazel et al., 2014; MacArthur & Villagran, 2015). Nonverbal behaviors such as tone, chronemics, and feedback have immediacy effects in the online learning environment (Dixson et al., 2017). In the online classroom, instructors can set the tone through the use of emoticons and figurative language, and aesthetics of visual imagery, typographic design, color, and cohesion (Dixson et al., 2017).

Dixson et al. (2017) argued that chronemics as a nonverbal immediacy behavior in the online classroom are measured by response latency, time when messages are sent, length of messages, and frequency of messages. Feedback as a measure of nonverbal immediacy in the online classroom is measured by the timing that feedback is provided, the richness of the medium of feedback (text, video, audio, etc.), and the level of depth and effort of feedback (Dixson et al., 2017).

When considering the online instructional context, a lack of nonverbal immediacy as a misbehavior is considered an indolent expectancy violation. In the online classroom environment, students are most tolerant of indolent digital expectancy violations, which include messages from instructors that are late, disorganized, and stray from the purpose of the message (MacArthur & Villagran, 2015). While instructors should not capitalize on this tolerance, the tolerance is consistent with the common perception that online classes are typically easier and more manageable. Thus, while students still expect communication from instructors in the online context, it is likely that students do not carry high expectations from instructors in an online course. Using EVT to understand misbehaviors in the online classroom provides an opportunity to reframe lack of nonverbal immediacy as a potential expectation from students rather than being perceived as a misbehavior.

However, violations to expectations are not always a bad thing. On the flip side of the coin of lack of nonverbal immediacy, instructors who are more immediate in the online classroom can positively violate students' expectations. When an instructor is more communicative, such as an increased presence in discussion posts, consistent emails or announcements of upcoming assignments and modules, detailed feedback, or detailed assignment descriptions, this can positively violate students' expectations. In this case, this would not be considered an indolent expectancy violation, rather, it could build more credibility with students, which is not perceived as a misbehavior. By increasing the presence of nonverbal immediacy in the online classroom, instructors can create a better experience for their students in online classes.

**Applying Communication Privacy Management Theory to Reframe Nonrelevant Instructor Self-**

**Disclosure**

Research on instructor self-disclosure makes it clear that teachers disclose information that is

not relevant to course content (i.e. Borzea & Goodboy, 2016; Hosek & Thompson, 2009). The research on

instructor self-disclosure largely explores the impact of nonrelevant disclosures on student learning

outcomes, however, the application of CPM to nonrelevant self-disclosures from instructors can shift the

perspective of viewing this behavior as a misbehavior. CPM provides a framework for understanding the

rules in which individuals choose to disclose information about themselves, ranging from who they

choose to disclose to, what they choose to disclose, as well as the depth of what they choose to disclose

(Petronio, 1991, 2002, 2009, 2013). Instructor disclosures shed "light on an instructor's personality and

identity while enhancing the classroom climate" as well as student motivation to learn (Mazer et al.,

2007). Given that CPM provides insight into an individual's comfort level with others depending on what

and who they choose to disclose to, if an instructor discloses information that is not relevant to course

content, the instructor may be doing so as a means of building rapport with their students. It is

important to remember that the act of self-disclosing can serve multiple purposes, two of which are to

inform and to build relationships. It is commonly accepted that disclosures in the classroom should be

relevant to course content, but such a stance removes the interpersonal aspect from the student-teacher

relationship.

It is understandable that the application of CPM in the instructional context would be to

understand the impact that instructor disclosures have on students in relation to their learning

outcomes. However, keeping in mind that the student-teacher relationship is an interpersonal dyad, self-

disclosure from an instructor to students does not always have to serve the purpose of furthering course

content. When an instructor discloses private information to students, they may understand the risks of

disclosing nonrelevant information, and they may be doing so as a means of strengthening their

relationship with students. In doing so, the instructor runs the risk of being viewed as incompetent, but this may also build rapport and credibility with students. Instructor credibility is the overall perception that an individual has toward the instructor in terms of them being believable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy, and dynamic (McCroskey et al., 2006). Because research on instructor misbehaviors is rooted in the one-sided perspective of students, instructors are viewed as programmed machines whose sole purpose is to educate students, however, just like their students, instructors have lives outside of the classroom with feelings and emotions. Thus, instructor self-disclosures that are not relevant to course content are typically viewed as a misbehavior, but the application of CPM offers a lens through which these disclosures may serve as beneficial to strengthening the student-teacher relationship.

**Application of Attribution Theory to Reframe Instructors' Expressions of Anger**

As previously discussed, research on instructor misbehaviors through the lens of attribution theory largely focuses on explaining instructors' expressions of anger. The use of attribution theory to understand instructors' expressions of anger innately paints the instructor in a negative light. As illustrated by McPherson and Young (2004), students are aware that they may be the cause of their instructor's expression of anger, yet they still attribute the anger to be rooted internally; this is known as fundamental attribution error (Nisbett et al., 1980). Due to the relational power that instructors hold over students, students have an expectation for instructors to be calm and cool, which instructors do not always uphold.  Instructors, much like students, have lives outside of the classroom, but students often only see instructors in the instructional context. Maybe the instructor is having marital problems at home. Maybe the instructor has a sick family member. There is a large array of explanations that can be attributed to an instructor's expressions of anger and frustration that unfortunately can occur in the presence of students.

I have argued that instructors are similar to their students in that they have a life beyond the classroom, and this can be realized through instructor self-disclosures. With this understanding, students

may be able to shift their attributions of their instructors' expressions of anger as an external factor. Although it is easy to recommend that instructors should simply avoid showing their anger, this is not entirely possible. Thus, a deeper understanding of attribution theory and the various dimensions and factors at play can provide a broader array of possibilities of instructors' expressions of anger, allowing the misbehavior to be reframed as an opportunity of humanizing the instructor, which ultimately enhances the interpersonal climate of the classroom.

The current literature using interpersonal theories in the instructional context paints instructors in a negative light by focusing on their misbehaviors and providing explanations for their misbehaviors. However, as I have argued, instructor misbehaviors can be viewed through the lens of interpersonal theories as a means of enhancing the interpersonal relationship between students and instructors. Because they spend so much time together over the course of the semester or school year, it is very likely that students and instructors will form an interpersonal relationship to some extent with one another. The interpersonal relationship between students and instructors allows for learning to occur through mutual influence. By reframing misbehaviors as opportunities to enhance the interpersonal relationship between students and instructors, there is an increased opportunity for more valuable learning to occur in the classroom.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This current study utilizes interpersonal theory to reframe instructor misbehaviors, opening the opportunity for future research to consider the teacher's perspective further. Because the current available literature relies heavily on the one-sided perspective of the student, future research should take into consideration the perspective and identity of the teacher a well. When research considers both perspectives of the student and teacher, the two can be considered a dyad, and thus, the application of interpersonal theories becomes more practical. Interpersonal theories utilize the dyad as a unit of analysis, so the current use of interpersonal theories as a framework for understanding instructor

misbehaviors does not utilize these theories to their fullest potential. When considering the perspective

of the instructor, it is also important to consider the demographics of the instructor. What impact does

gender identity play in the interpretation of misbehaviors? What role does expression of the instructor's

sexuality play in how misbehaviors are perceived? Does race have an impact on the interpretation of

misbehaviors, and if so, what is that impact? These are just a few considerations that can be taken when

applying interpersonal theories to instructor misbehaviors. These questions provide a path for future

research on instructor misbehaviors and a more practical application of interpersonal theories to

interpret and potentially reframe the current interpretations of instructor misbehaviors.

**Conclusion**

Research on instructor misbehaviors has largely been grounded in the typologies of instructor

misbehaviors as outlined by Kearney et al. (1991) as well as Goodboy and Myers (2015). These two

studies in tandem with the application of interpersonal communication theories such as expectancy

violations theory, communication privacy management theory, and attribution theory have provided a

guide for how instructors should and should not behave and communicate with their students.

Unfortunately, the application of the interpersonal theories has mostly cast instructors in a negative

light, arguing that instructor misbehaviors, such as lack of nonverbal immediacy in the online classroom,

nonrelevant self-disclosures, and instructor expressions of anger, can only dampen the student-

instructor relationship. However, as I have argued and outlined, these interpersonal theories can also

reframe instructor misbehaviors as an opportunity to enhance the interpersonal climate of the

classroom. Instructors should still consider the impact of their interactions with students in and out of

the classroom, however, by reframing their misbehaviors through the same theories in which they are

villainized, they are afforded the opportunity to be humans with shortcomings just like their students. As

such, instructors can capitalize on this shift in perception as a means of enriching their interpersonal

relationships with students.

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