A COMPARISON OF TWO MODELS USED TO PREDICT STUDENT STRATEGY CHOICE FOR CLASSROOM CONFLICTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is inevitable; it cannot be avoided (Roloff, 1987a). Conflict is experienced both on a global level, through wars with other nations and violence on community streets, and on a personal level in daily encounters. Parents and children argue about the choices and decisions that they make. Disagreements arise between superiors and subordinates or colleagues at work over what method to use to solve a problem. A disagreement may erupt between a customer and an employee when discussing a service received. Conflict is especially pervasive in the classroom setting (Hocker, 1986). A student and teacher may enter into conflict over many classroom issues such as how a paper has been graded, whether an attendance policy is fair, or whether a teacher is presenting course material in an adequate manner. Conflicts are so pervasive that people might begin to wonder what good can come of them.

Although conflict is often perceived to be a negative occurrence in relationships, it can have positive outcomes. As Honeycutt (1993) explained about relationships, it is not a particular event that is good or bad in a relationship, but how one perceives the event, the significance that is attributed to it, and how the event is responded to that gives it meaning. This is also true of conflict in the classroom. It is not the conflict itself that is good or bad, but how a student perceives the conflict, assigns importance to the conflict, and approaches the conflict that defines it as positive or negative.

Statement of the Problem

Because there has been such importance placed on the value of an education, examining the process a student goes through to obtain that education is worth studying,
especially when some of the process includes conflict with teachers. A conflict could affect the grade in a course, and a grade is a permanent record of a student’s performance that eventually is passed along to employers and/or other educational institutions. When asked to describe the most negative experiences in their lives, one-third of people mentioned negative interpersonal relations or conflicts with teachers (Branson, 1972). This demonstrates that classroom conflicts have a lasting impact on students.

Students report having more personal involvement in their conflicts with teachers than teachers do (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974). This is not surprising. Imagine that a student approaches a teacher about a grade on a paper or test. The teacher calmly explains how the paper was graded and why the grade was reported as it was. At the end of the encounter, the teacher may leave feeling the issue was resolved calmly and reasonably. The student, however, could walk away fuming and feeling that the teacher is unreasonable and unfair. Knowing and understanding how students approach conflict is a vital area of research in that it can unveil how students view part of their own education process. This knowledge can aid instructors in planning course policies and preparing for interactions with students.

The problem examined in this research concerns how students approach conflict with instructors and what affects this approach. Why does one student approach a conflict in a reasonable and negotiating manner, while another student approaches it with threats and anger? Why do some students avoid conflict altogether? Are there primary strategies that can be chosen in a conflict situation that vary in their effectiveness and perceived competency for resolving conflict?
Extant literature suggests competing explanations of the variables that might affect what type of conflict strategy is selected. One body of literature suggests that communication predispositions that are related to personality traits are responsible for the conflict strategies a person chooses. In this literature, it is assumed that people have communication traits that are the same from situation to situation. Those working from this perspective assume that these communication traits influence how people react in conflict situations. The influential traits that have been identified in previous literature to influence conflict strategies include argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, communication anxiety, and communication competence (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1990; Lakey & Canary, 2002; Sorenson, Hawkins, & Sorenson, 1995).

A second body of literature suggests that it is not communication traits but the attributions people make in a conflict situation that influence conflict strategy choices (e.g., Baron, 1990; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c). This viewpoint posits that people examine a situation and determine who they believe is at fault, whether choices are internally or externally motivated, and whether or not actions were controllable before deciding how they will approach a conflict. In general, the attribution literature does not examine communication traits as variables, and the communication trait literature does not examine attributions as variables.

Although both the trait model and the attribution model have merit, the question should be raised as to which of these models make the stronger contribution to selecting conflict strategies. I will examine these two competing points of view and determine which of these approaches best explains a student’s choice of a conflict management strategy in a student-teacher interaction.
In addition to learning about the variables that contribute to conflict strategy choice, it is important to examine what students perceive to actually be conflicts. Interpersonal communication researchers have examined conflict between friends, romantic partners, and superiors and subordinates, but not between teachers and students. For example, Sillars (1980a, 1980b) examined attributional conflict between roommates. Although this type of conflict is important to study, it is different from conflict in the classroom because with roommates, only the relationship is at stake if a conflict cannot be resolved. When conflict exists between a student and teacher at the college level, there may be much more to lose: Students may feel their grades hinge on their ability to resolve a conflict with an instructor (especially if that conflict is over what grade should have been reported). Students’ motivation to learn could also be affected. Instructors would likely want students to be satisfied with the result of a conflict because dissatisfied students may lead to poor evaluations at the end of the semester. Thus, reaching a mutually satisfying conclusion may be a very high goal in classroom conflict for both student and teacher. As part of this study, I will try to determine what categories of conflicts are perceived by students.

**Rationale**

Conflict in a student-teacher relationship is expected because conflict is an inevitable part of any relationship (Forgas, 2001). Because people who have different values, ideas, and preferences must find ways to agree, co-exist, and coordinate their actions, conflict cannot be avoided (Roloff & Soule, 2002). Unresolved conflict leads to negativity within relationships. Previous research has demonstrated that a positive teacher-student relationship facilitates affective learning, which, in turn, enhances
cognitive learning (Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971). Thus, understanding what factors enhance positive conflict resolution could ultimately aid in greater learning in the classroom. Enhanced learning, higher satisfaction, and a greater understanding of conflict strategy choice can be gained by studying student-teacher conflict. Although much of the instructional communication literature to date has explored the role that communication plays in the college classroom (e.g., Anderson, 1978; Anderson, Norton, & Nussbaum, 1981; Hogelucht & Geist, 1997; McPherson, Kearney, & Plax, 2003; Scott & Nussbaum, 1981; Staton-Spicer & Marty-White, 1981), little of this research has addressed the role that communication about conflict plays in the college classroom.

Researching how students perceive student-teacher conflicts, though, is important because it will help teachers better understand how students approach conflict. Knowing this may help instructors guide students toward more positive and integrative approaches in resolving conflict. If the finding of this research is that communication traits affect students’ approaches to conflict (such as aggressiveness affecting the conflict strategy choice), then teachers may be able to identify students with the particular communication traits and be prepared with strategies that will (a) counter destructive conflict-resolving strategies the students might choose, or (b) encourage the students to use more productive strategies. However, if the attributional approach affects the strategy chosen most, then teachers will know that their focus needs to be on how to help students learn to take more responsibility for their role in classroom conflict. It is also possible that a combination of communication traits and attributions determine strategy choice. Understanding what affects strategy choice can also help instructors to respond better when a conflict is
perceived by students. It also will help guide future research and theory development in conflict strategy choice.

This research is not only important for instructors; it could help students as well. The findings of this study could be used in communication courses to help students understand more about student-teacher conflict, the conflict strategies they employ, and which ones are prosocial and more successful in conflict situations. It could also lead to greater understanding of conflict in future work relationships. Students who do not know or understand how to resolve conflicts may feel powerless to instigate change in a situation in which they are unhappy. History has shown that those who feel powerless often resort to drastic measures to achieve a sense of control. Buerkel-Rothfuss (1991) wrote:

In 1977, a basic course director at Michigan State University was dismayed to find her office vandalized and her locked filing cabinets forced open with a crowbar… In the mid-1980s a professor at a small Michigan college was shot to death by an irate student who had failed the professor’s course. A year later, an instructor in California was stabbed for refusing to accept a late paper from an irate student. (p. 2)

These accounts are not solitary. Many professors have reported being threatened during their careers. Professors reported experiencing verbal threats, physical threats, crank calls received at home, the robbing and vandalizing of offices, and threats to family and friends (Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1991). If students were aware of the productive strategies to resolve conflict, perhaps the feeling of powerlessness would be lessened and fewer threats would be made towards professors.
Although conflict has been studied within many relationships—friendships, romantic partnerships, marriages, families, and peer groups in the workplace—communication researchers have not examined how conflict unfolds between students and teachers in the classroom. Student-teacher relationships do not mirror all interpersonal relationships, but instead are more like the relationships between parents and children or between superiors and subordinates because of the power imbalance. A teacher holds more power than a student, much like a parent has more power than a child and a supervisor has more power than an employee.

However, student-teacher relationships also differ from parent-child and superior-subordinate relationships in that the classroom learning situation is unique. Students pay to come to the class, and teachers are paid to be there. The teacher is responsible for transmitting information, and students are held accountable for how well they learn and understand that information. The student-teacher relationship is also generally limited to the classroom context, and is often limited by time. Once a class ends, the relationship usually dissolves (except in unique and special cases). Frymier and Houser (2000) argued, however, that even with these differences between student-teacher and other interpersonal relationships, communication functions, such as relationship development and maintenance, are similar in student-teacher and other interpersonal relationships.

*Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relationships*

Student-teacher relationships are interpersonal (Devito, 1986; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992). In an article about the interpersonal nature of the student-teacher relationship, Frymier and Houser (2000) confirmed that:
teachers and students go through a process of meeting one another, exchanging information, and adjusting and developing expectations similar to what any two individuals would go through in developing a relationship. Both teachers and students have goals they wish to achieve. The achievement of those goals depends on the teacher and student’s ability to negotiate with one another and resolve conflict. These are communication intensive activities that go on in all relationships. (p. 208).

Wood (2000) defined interpersonal relationships as “voluntary commitments that are continuously in process and are marked by continuing, significant interdependence between particular individuals who are irreplaceable” (p. 5). It could be argued that, by this definition, the relationship between a student and teacher is not interpersonal. These relationships are often not voluntary. And students and teachers alike might even agree that these relationships are replaceable. In some situations, any teacher is acceptable for students as long as the teacher can present the material adequately enough for the students to learn. However, although the relationships may not always be of a voluntary or irreplaceable nature, these relationships share several similarities with other interpersonal relationships.

Student-teacher relationships are interdependent. Students need instructors to guide their learning and provide a blueprint of the material for a course. The instructor needs students to have someone to teach. Without students, instructors could not fulfill the basic function of their job: teaching. Without instructors, students would have a difficult time finding a focus or a way to measure their learning.
Teaching is a relational process that adheres to the same stages—from initial contact to dissolution—as most other interpersonal relationships (Devito, 1986). Graham, West, and Schaller (1992) stated that “teaching involves a process of relational development and requires effective interpersonal communication skills to achieve satisfying outcomes” (p. 11). The student-teacher relationship is a process that is ongoing. It has no clear beginning or end and can cycle through many stages along the process.

Conflict Between Students and Teachers

Although conflict has been examined in many other interpersonal relationships, there is only minimal communication research on interpersonal conflict in the classroom. There is an especially large gap in the literature on how students and/or teachers approach conflict and what affects students’ choice of conflict strategies. And because the student-teacher relationship is unique and highly interpersonal, examining conflict is important in order to fill this gap. Research in the field of education has addressed some aspects of conflict in the classroom (see Boulter, Miller, & Von Bergen, 1995); however, much of the research examines conflict between peers rather than between students and teachers.

In the field of communication, the small amount of research done on classroom conflict has focused on how conflict might be experienced in the classroom (Hocker, 1986), whether conflicts are student or teacher owned and initiated (Thomas, Karmos, & Altekruse, 1981), and how a teacher’s use of power is related to conflict styles (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974). Teacher-owned conflicts occur when an instructor has needs that aren’t being met, such as not having students obey the class rules. Student-owned conflicts occur when the student has needs that aren’t being met, such as not receiving a
desired grade. Thomas et al. indicated that it depends on who ‘owns’ the conflict as to who will initiate the conflict resolution. If conflict is teacher-owned, the teacher will initiate a resolution.

Students believe that communication skills reflect good teaching, and conflict management is one of the skills students perceive to be important (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Many researchers have suggested that incongruent goals are the primary foundation of conflict. Many student-teacher conflicts spawn from incongruent goals: a difference of opinions over what grade is deserved, policies, deadlines, requirements, or a teacher’s teaching method (Hocker, 1986; Thomas et al., 1981).

Conflict in the classroom holds some unique propositions that are not characteristic of other conflict episodes. In many interpersonal relationships, when conflict occurs, people have the choice of terminating the relationship if the conflict cannot be resolved. This may not be true in student-teacher relationships, so the outcome of the conflict is especially important. Students may also believe that the result of attempted resolution could have an effect on the grades assigned for the class, so the outcome, again, may seem especially important.

Roloff (1987a) noted that conflict between persons may not always be evident to both partners. This could easily be the case in the student-teacher relationship. For example, a student could have a complaint against a teacher or a class, and the teacher may never be aware the student is dissatisfied. Those grievances that do not go unnoticed are also a problem, as dealing with the conflicts that are voiced could take a great deal of an instructor’s time. When instructors think of class preparation time, they likely think of lesson planning, test preparation, and grading, not of conflict resolution time.
Although the approach to conflict in the classroom has been overlooked in communication literature, other aspects of conflict in the classroom have been noted. Compliance-gaining, compliance-resisting, argumentativeness, and verbal aggression have all been given attention in the instructional communication literature. Each of these subjects is relevant to conflict in that each is related to strategies useful during conflict. However, the research has not been extended to examine directly the strategies chosen during classroom-related conflicts.

**Purposes of the Study**

This study has multiple purposes. The first purpose is to determine the types of conflict students perceive to experience with their instructors. No such typology currently exists in the instructional communication literature. Although Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) identified teacher misbehaviors in the classroom (and these misbehaviors would likely lead to a sense of conflict between students and teachers), there is currently no research that identifies specifically what conflicts exist from the students’ perspective.

The second purpose of this study is to test competing theories about whether a trait model or an attributional model best explains which conflict strategy students choose. The personality trait model explains that it is personality that dictates what conflict strategies people will choose. The attribution model explains that it is how people determine cause and attribute blame in a conflict that will guide what conflict strategies are chosen. But which of these models contributes most to strategy choice is unknown.

A third purpose of this study is to determine if the conflict strategies chosen influence the selection of channel. Students who use different conflict strategies may also select different types of communication channels to send their messages. To
understand better how these purposes will be achieved, a review of the pertinent literature follows.

Review of Literature

A great deal of literature is relevant to each of these purposes. First, I define conflict and look at the history of conflict research. Second, I explain the theories used to examine interpersonal conflict and make an argument for why the trait and attribution models best explain how people respond to conflict. Third, I review literature about conflict strategy choice. Fourth, I review literature that suggests that channel selection could be influenced by strategy choice.

Conflict Research in Communication

In comparison to other scholarly research in the United States, conflict research is still relatively young. The serious study of conflict can be traced back to the 1950s (Coser, 1956). Although it grew exponentially in the 1970s, there have still only been small amounts of systematic research conducted in this area and few of the conflict theories that have been proposed have actually been tested (Borisoff & Victor, 1998). Additionally, examinations of conflict within the context of communication have been sparse. Nonetheless, conflict is pervasive and inevitable (Putnam, 1986; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Roloff, 1987a), although the volume of research conducted does not represent the rate at which conflict penetrates people’s lives. At times, conflict may be more frequent than peace and tranquility in relationships (Sprey, 1969).

Definitions

Defining conflict has not been an easy task (Fink, 1968). Although many scholars have attempted to define conflict, Weiss and Dehle (1994) indicated that “a precise, all-
purpose definition of conflict is still lacking” (p. 95). Lewin (1948) and Deutsch (1973) noted that conflict requires two participants in a social interaction to hold incompatible goals. Coser (1956) defined conflict as “a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals” (p. 8). Since Coser created this definition, most researchers’ definitions represent the idea that for conflict to exist, there must be a perception of incompatibility between parties or a problematic event must have occurred. However definitions differ in specificity and depth. One definition presents conflict simply as a difference of opinion (Cross, Names, & Beck, 1979), and another goes into such depth that it defines conflict as only the intermediate stage of a disruption (Keltner, 1987). A commonly used definition in communication research defines conflict as “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995, p. 21).

A general and more encompassing definition of conflict is used in this study. Because communication researchers have not examined conflict within the classroom context, there is not yet a strong understanding of what classroom conflict is. For this reason, a broad definition is used in this study to incorporate many suggestions of what conflict may be. This definition is created based on definitions developed from previous researchers (Cross, Names, & Beck, 1979; Deutsch, 1973; Hocker & Wilmot, 1995, 1995; Lewin, 1948). For the purpose of this study, conflict is defined as a perception, by at least one party, of opposition, dissatisfaction, a problematic event, difference of
opinion, or incompatibility between two interdependent parties that interfere with both parties achieving their goals.

The part of the definition that refers to a perception of an event is derived from Hocker and Wilmot’s (1995) definition. These scholars, among others, contended that it is the *perception* of ‘having opposition’ in attaining a goal that distinguishes conflicts from disagreements or misunderstandings (Bernard, 1965; Hocker & Wilmot, 1995). Thus, a conflict exists if a student perceives it to exist. This idea of perception has been used by many researchers as a definition of conflict. However, Hocker and Wilmot’s definition alone is not adequate as it is, because it does not consider that both parties do not need to have the perception of opposition for a conflict to exist (Roloff, 1987a). In a situation between a student and a teacher, the teacher may assign a grade of a “D” because the teacher believes this is the grade earned by the student. The teacher may not perceive any opposition or incompatibility. The student, however, may believe that the “D” was assigned because the teacher was biased against his or her work and thus may feel at conflict in this situation. Perception of conflict by only one party is adequate for conflict to occur.

Hocker and Wilmot’s (1995) definition, however, is not complete, because they indicated that a conflict is an expressed struggle. Not all conflicts are expressed. In the above example, if the student is very upset about earning a “D” and believes it is unfair, the student can choose to express his or her dissatisfaction, or the student can choose to avoid the situation. Just because the student avoids the situation, and does not express the dissatisfaction, does not mean that the conflict does not exist.
Conflicts can also differ in how they take form. Cahn (1990) proposed that conflict occurs at three levels. First, conflict can occur as specific disagreements such as arguments or debates over particular issues. Second, conflict can occur as problem-solving discussions, which can be seen in bargaining and negotiating. Third, conflict can be present in the form of unhappy/distressed relationships where patterns of interaction between partners indicate distress. Conflict on one of these levels does not necessarily indicate conflict on another level (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). Because conflict can occur in such different ways for different people, it is difficult to identify one definition that will describe conflict for everyone.

Communication and Conflict

Communication researchers have examined conflict within many types of interpersonal relationships. Deen (2000) suggested that communication is the central element in all interpersonal conflict because it is through verbal and nonverbal communication that people initiate, manage, and resolve conflict. Sometimes, conflict is even about the manner in which people communicate. It is possible for students to feel conflict over how an instructor presents class material. For example, if a teacher is presenting accurate facts about a subject, but is doing so using a monotone voice and little eye contact, a student may feel that the style of presentation makes it difficult to pay attention to or to understand the lecture. In this case, the conflict would be about the way in which the teacher communicates.

Conflict communication is at the root of social and personal change (Lulofs, 1994). “Conflicts frequently help people find the boundaries of their relationships with others” (p. 13). For change to be experienced, openness is needed. Communicating about
conflict includes two particular dimensions of communication: affect and engagement (Sillars & Weisberg, 1987). Affect refers to messages that convey either positive or negative emotions for the other. Engagement describes how likely one is to confront or to avoid conflict. Both affect and engagement influence communication.

In interpersonal conflict, the challenge is to manage a conflict so that the positive consequences outweigh the negative ones (Roloff & Soule, 2002). It is possible to stimulate growth and intimacy through conflict. If students could manage conflict to produce positive outcomes, they would likely feel more satisfied with their instructors. Managing conflicts in a negative way would likely lead to feelings of dissatisfaction, which could affect overall learning, motivation, and lead to lower evaluations of the instructor and course at the end of the semester.

Managing conflicts successfully is not an easy task to achieve, however, because even though conflict is very much a part of the human experience (Roloff, 1987a), and people will have to deal with it at one point or another, a major issue with conflict and how people perceive it and deal with it is their attitudes about it. In the United States, people tend to perceive conflict as a negative occurrence (Borisoff & Victor, 1998). Attitudes about conflict will inevitably affect how people communicate about it and how they approach conflict resolution. Children know only what they see occur around them as they grow up, and many of these examples show that conflict is negative and to be avoided. “Many regard conflict as a competition to be won at all cost; others find ways to continually avoid dealing with conflict” (Borisoff & Victor, 1998, p. 2).

People in our culture tend to associate conflict with bad events (war, violence, strikes), and it is often the failed attempts to resolve conflict that leave such a negative
view (Roloff, 1987a). When reflecting on conflict, people use words like problem, struggle, threat, difficulty, frustration, stress, anger, and rejection (Borisoff & Victor, 1998). Although some cultures thrive on conflict, people in the United States have a difficult time dealing with conflict partly because there is a belief that conflict is negative, and that any kind of discord among people conveys disharmony (Borisoff & Victor, 1998).

There are, of course, sub-cultures within any culture. Hofstede (1980) identified four variables for measuring values that are significant to any culture: masculine and feminine perspectives, avoidance of uncertainty, distribution of power, and individualism. Cultures and the sub-cultures within them may differ as to where they fall on the continua of each of these variables. The dimension of uncertainty avoidance refers to level of comfort one has with uncertainty. Uncertainty reduction theory posits that people attempt to reduce uncertainty through communication encounters (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). If a person is comfortable with uncertainty and not knowing what may occur in a situation, that person would be said to have low uncertainty avoidance. If the individual was extremely uncomfortable with not knowing what may occur in a situation, that individual would be said to have high uncertainty avoidance. By definition, cultures that are higher in uncertainty avoidance will likely avoid conflict more, as conflict increases uncertainty.

Hofstede (1980) noted that high uncertainty avoidance cultures practice consensus-seeking more than cultures with low uncertainty avoidance. Those low in uncertainty avoidance tend to seek out individual opinions more, which can lead to more conflict of ideas. Thus, some subcultures within the United States—those low in
uncertainty avoidance—may not perceive conflict to be negative, and might, in fact, thrive on conflict.

People need to understand that conflict is not abnormal and can improve situations if it is handled properly (Roloff, 1987a). “If one approaches conflict as a problem to be solved or an opportunity to persuade, more constructive choices are likely than if one views conflict as something to be feared” (Lulofs, 1994, p. 14). Although not all individuals do believe that conflict is solvable, holding the belief that conflict is solvable guides people to select conflict strategies that will lead to positive solutions. This change in attitude could possibly be attained through positive modeling of conflict from parents, or through conflict resolution training in schools and businesses.

Conflict can be negative and destructive, but it also can be productive (Lulofs, 1994). Destructive conflict takes on a life of its own. It escalates to the point that the original issue is no longer the focus of communication and parties involved argue about issues that were not the initial cause of disruption. This kind of conflict is indeed negative and often hurtful. Lulofs stated that productive conflict, on the other hand, is flexible, focused on one issue, and guided by the belief that all parties can achieve important goals. Productive conflict uses a balance of competitiveness and cooperation to resolve issues. Destructive conflict relies mainly on competitiveness for resolutions.

More communication may be helpful in resolving conflicts, but some researchers differ in how they believe people should communicate about conflict. There is a group of researchers who believe that being open in communication about conflict is very positive (e.g., Boulding, 1962; Coser, 1956; Deutsch, 1973; Infante, 1981, 1987a; Infante & Gorden, 1985; Simmel, 1955). These researchers promote the idea that open
communication about conflict can lead to adaptation, change, and revitalization. Avoiding conflict can lead to tensions building to an explosive conflict event.

Other researchers believe that being open about communication is acceptable, but that there may be circumstances in which openness is not always positive or desirable (Aldous, 1977; Bochner, 1981; Gilbert, 1976; Kursh, 1971; Parks, 1981; Rawlins, 1983). Parks (1981) argued that the advice (to be open in communication during conflict) is given by experts in human relations disciplines who are naturally biased by their own preference for open communication. These researchers feel that the need for privacy can sometimes outweigh the rewards of openness. Additionally, how conflict is talked about—not only in terms of openness or closedness, but in terms of the vocabulary that is used—may also affect the perception of conflict. Because there is such a negative perception about conflict, describing an episode as a conflict may lead to less acceptance and resolution than if the episode were described as a difference of opinion (Borisoff & Victor, 1998).

As can be seen from the above paragraphs, communication researchers have examined conflict and have developed an understanding of how conflict is perceived and is working in our lives. But for all that has been learned about conflict and how we communicate about it, one thing researchers have not focused on is how conflict occurs in the classroom setting. Even though scholars understand many aspects of conflict, there is still a lack of understanding about conflict in the classroom. In communication research, this area of study is virtually absent. Although some researchers have examined topics that may be closely linked to conflict—such as teacher misbehaviors (Kearney et al., 1991)—there is no research that directly specifies what conflicts are experienced
between students and teachers or that addresses how this conflict is resolved. However, knowing that conflict permeates all aspects of our lives, it can be expected that it would permeate the classroom culture as well. Thus, it is evident that research on conflict in the classroom needs to be conducted. This leads to the first research question for this study.

RQ1: What conflicts are experienced between students and teachers?
Answering this question should enhance the literature in conflict communication, and should help instructional communication researchers better understand another aspect of classroom culture.

Theories of Interpersonal Conflict

There are many communication-based theories that can be applied to address how conflict is managed in interpersonal relationships. These theories can be categorized into three major groups: rules, trait, and attributional approaches to conflict. At the cornerstone of this research are the trait and attributional approaches, but before reviewing and explaining these, I will first review the rules-approach theories and explain why these theories are not adequate to predict conflict strategies.

Rules Approach to Conflict

Rules theories are generally considered to have practical necessity, as they purport that people follow rules in order to achieve certain goals. For instance, most people understand that before conflict can be resolved, there is a rule that the conflict must first be expressed to the other party. Two types of rules are addressed in the following theories: constitutive and regulative. In the coordinated management of meaning theory (Pearce & Cronen, 1980), constitutive rules tell us what a conflict means. Thus, in a conflict situation these rules determine how people perceive conflict. In contrast,
regulative rules (in communication theory) tell us which behaviors are expected (or prohibited) in a given situation. Reciprocity theory and confrontation episodes theory both focus primarily on how regulative rules guide conflict interactions. This approach assumes that people act and react to conflict based on rules that govern the situation. The following theories of conflict are rules theories.

*Coordinated management of meaning.* In the coordinated management of meaning theory (CMM; Pearce, 1976; Pearce & Cronen, 1980), the context of the relationship between people, the culture, and the being of each person shapes how messages are interpreted in a given situation. Thus, backgrounds and unique life experiences influence how people perceive meaning in messages. The focus of this theory is on how people organize and coordinate their meanings and actions with each other. The theory also explains how the same event can be perceived differently by people.

This theory is important because it describes one way that conflict is created. If people share similar world views, then they should arrive at the same conclusions in conversations. A world view is developed through the circumstances a person experiences throughout life. Although no two people have the exact same world view, people raised in similar economic situations, in similar neighborhoods, or with similar families could have world views that are not extremely different from one another. However, when world views are extremely different and meanings differ between people, understanding is low, and the parties may arrive at different conclusions, which could lead to conflict. CMM explains that shared meanings come about through the creation of shared rules. Shared rules are developed over time through multiple interactions.
The reciprocity perspective. Reciprocity is a social norm that underlies many communication theories (Roloff & Campion, 1985). Reciprocity is motivated by the notion that people exchange like for like. Gouldner (1960) expressed this idea through the concept that people should help those who have helped them and should not hurt those people who have helped them. Roloff (1987b) wrote that “a recipient of a benefit is morally obligated to return a benefit in kind” (p. 12). The concept of reciprocity can also be seen in conflict episodes.

Threats are often followed by counterthreats (Deutsch & Krauss, 1960). Bargaining by one person is often mirrored by a partner (Putnam & Jones, 1982a, 1982b). In a study of family dinners, Vuchinich (1984, 1990) discovered that when listening to the family conversations, the next statement could be determined by reflecting on the last statement. Family members tended to match one another’s conversational behaviors.

Reciprocity theory provides that, in a conflict, reciprocity is expected between opponents. If one seeks to escalate the conflict, the other probably will seek to escalate the conflict as well. If one partner extends a branch of peace and compromise, the other will likely also seek to cooperate. People anticipate their partner’s response to actions and then mirror the conflict strategies that are expected from the partner (Scheff, 1967; Wilson, 1969).

Confrontation episodes theory. Confrontation episodes theory provides a lens for examining social conflict. Newell and Stutman (1988, 1991) believed that a confrontation episode is based on the concept that communication is co-created by two or more people. Thus, both people in the episode share responsibility for the creation and resolution of a confrontation. A social confrontation episode can occur only if the accused partner is
willing to acknowledge his or her partner’s initiating act as a confrontation. If the accused partner denies a rule was broken, the confrontation episode will end without resolution. According to this theory, social confrontation is a specific type of conflict that follows specific patterns that are different from other communication episodes.

Episodes of social confrontation involve conflict over rules that both partners are meant to follow. An episode begins when one partner informs the other that a rule has been violated. Before the episode can continue, the second party must agree that a rule has been violated. These rules are created by both partners, and must be rules that they understand to be important and have agreed to follow. If the accused partner does not agree to the social legitimacy of the rule, then the conflict will likely remain unresolved. Once both partners acknowledge the rule violation, they can address the behavior that violated the rule.

_Critique of rules approaches to conflict._ Rules theories are insufficient in explaining behavior and are immeasurable. Rules theories predict that people follow rules in order to achieve their intentions. However, rules theorists disagree about how much power rules exert over people’s actions. Although these theories are useful in understanding how some people react to conflict in some situations, they cannot predict behavior in all or even in most situations. Cushman (1977) discussed how rules are in a constant state of flux. Because people must define and renegotiate rules as interactions unfold, rules theories cannot predict specific behaviors. If rules are not able to predict specific behaviors, then this approach is not an appropriate or valid way of predicting conflict strategies among people. Another problem with rules theories is that, although
they explain how a conflict begins, they do not provide specific guidance for how conflict strategies are chosen by participants of the conflict.

Additionally, rules are immeasurable. There is no methodology that can measure the rules used that guide conflict. Rules differ from relationship to relationship, and it is difficult to put a quantitative value on rules so that they can be observed and measured. Due to these problems with rules theories, this approach will not be considered in this study.

*Communication Trait Approach to Conflict*

A second approach to conflict is to examine conflict in association with communication traits that are related to the strategies people use to resolve conflict. Several scholars have indicated a link between communication predispositions and conflict strategy choice (e.g., Bell & Blakeney, 1977; Boulding, 1962; Infante, 1987a; Jones & Melcher, 1982; Jones & White, 1985). Conflict researchers have found correlations between the conflict strategies used by people and several communication predispositions: communication competence, aggressiveness, argumentativeness, and communication apprehension. In many studies, these traits have been examined together to find if they affect conflict strategy choice.

Scholars have asked if individual differences really exist in personality constructs, and much of the research in communication assumes that they do (Daly & Bippus, 1998). People vary in the extent to which dispositions influence them (Britt & Shepperd, 1999), but that dispositions do influence people has been strongly supported through communication research (Daly, 2002). Thus, people are influenced by dispositions, but how affected they are differs from person to person.
The communication dispositions that have been examined in the conflict literature should not be confused with personality traits. The five dimensions of personality (often referred to as the “Big Five” in communication research) include (a) neuroticism, (b) extraversion, (c) intellect or openness to experience, (d) agreeableness, and (e) conscientiousness (McCraie & John, 1992). Although these are not the same as communication dispositions, many of the communication traits examined in conflict literature are represented within the five dimensions of personality. Communication apprehension would fall under the dimension of neuroticism, competence under conscientiousness, verbal aggression under agreeableness, and argumentativeness under extraversion.

There has been some debate among communication scholars about whether communication predispositions and behaviors are inherent in a person (traits) or if they change across situations. Infante (1987b) indicated that the trait position is more substantial:

Although people are not incessant regarding a class of behaviors from one situation to the next, there is a degree of continuity in behavior over a long period of time which clearly supports the meaningfulness of the concept of personality.

(p. 309)

Although Infante argued that an interactionist position that uses both state and trait approaches may be ideal, he also noted that the trait position alone holds the most weight. Thus, it makes sense to examine the communication traits of people when trying to determine how they will approach conflict. This study investigated argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, communication apprehension, and communication competence.
Argumentativeness. A person who is argumentative is willing to argue his or her point of view. An argumentative person is one who perceives conflict as a positive and intellectually stimulating occurrence (Infante, 1987a; Infante & Wigley, 1986). Argumentativeness reflects a predisposition to behave rather than an actual behavior. Argumentativeness is a communication trait that predisposes a person to advocate his or her position on issues in communication situations (Infante & Rancer, 1982). A person who is low in argumentativeness shies away from conflict and perceives it to be unsettling and anxiety inducing. A person who is low in argumentativeness is likely high in uncertainty avoidance. Arguing with another person would induce uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980), and thus someone low in argumentativeness would likely avoid conflict.

Communication researchers perceive argumentativeness to be a positive trait (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984). High argumentation is positively correlated with career satisfaction, career achievement, and superior-subordinate satisfaction (among other organizational outcomes; Infante & Gorden, 1985, 1989). People are more satisfied with others who are high in argumentativeness but low in aggression (Infante & Gorden, 1989).

People low in argumentativeness are not as willing to enter into conflict as people who are high in argumentativeness (Bower & Rubin, 2002; Infante, 1981). People high in argumentativeness are less likely to withdraw from conflict situations (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000). Infante determined that high argumentatives are more inflexible in their conflict techniques than low argumentatives. People who are high in argumentativeness are concerned with the negative effects of their communication
This finding suggests that highly argumentative people will have more concern for others’ goals in a conflict and would be more likely to select integrative strategies because of this concern.

Highly argumentative people are perceived as being highly competent at managing conflict situations (Bower & Rubin, 2002; Infante et al., 1984). In one study, students were given four different aggressive messages that they could use with a roommate (who was either accommodating or obstinate; Infante et al., 1984). Students who were highly argumentative indicated that aggressive messages were unacceptable in both situations. Those who were moderately argumentative chose aggressive messages only with the obstinate roommate. In another study, Bower and Rubin (2002) examined conflict strategies used by nurses in the workplace. A survey of nurses found that argumentativeness and competence were positively correlated.

Argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness have been identified as opposites on a continuum (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1997). Infante (1987a) explained that people low in argumentativeness tended to be high in verbal aggression because these people did not learn the skills needed to manage conflict successfully and they resorted to verbal attacks and aggressive tactics instead. Thus, I hypothesize that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to argumentativeness:

H1a: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor integrative strategies.

H1b: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor distributive strategies.
Verbal aggressiveness. Unlike argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness is perceived to be a negative trait (Infante, 1987a). Infante and Wigley (1986) defined verbal aggression as “a personality trait that predisposes persons to attack the self concepts of other people instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication” (p. 61). Those high in verbal aggressiveness tend to use more negative approaches to conflict and attack the self-concept of the other person involved.

Instructors low in verbal aggression have a more positive impact on their students (Myers, 2002). Verbally aggressive instructors are perceived by their students as less interpersonally attractive (Rocca & McCroskey, 1999), less competent (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997), less credible (Myers, 2001), and less caring (Teven, 2001). Perceived instructor argumentativeness is positively correlated with student state motivation (Myers & Knox, 2000a; Myers & Rocca, 2001), with student affect toward both course content and instructor evaluation and with student satisfaction (Myers & Knox, 2000b), whereas perceived instructor aggression is negatively correlated with these concepts. Infante and Gorden (1985, 1989) discovered that people who are perceived as having high argumentativeness and low verbal aggressiveness are perceived most favorably in evaluations and outcomes.

Verbal aggression and approaches to conflict also are strongly correlated. Bell and Blakeney (1977) determined that aggression was correlated with a forcing conflict mode. Wheeless and Reichel (1990) discovered a negative correlation between aggressiveness and nonconfrontational strategies. Martin, Anderson, and Sirimangkala (1999) also determined that, in an organization, subordinates who were aggressive used more confrontational conflict strategies. They also found that subordinates who were both
aggressive and competent used control strategies more than those who were submissive and noncompetent. Jones and Melcher (1982) asserted that as the need for aggression grows, so does the aversion to a smoothing mode for resolving conflict. Boster and Levine (1988) revealed that people high in verbal aggressiveness were not concerned with their messages, causing the receivers to experience negative emotions. This latter finding indicates that highly aggressive people have less concern for the others’ goals in a conflict, and are more likely to select distributive strategies than integrative ones.

Infante and Wigley (1986) suggested that people might choose to engage in aggressive behaviors rather than to argue a point if (a) they are frustrated and see the goal as being deliberately blocked, (b) they have learned aggressiveness as a model of how to behave, (c) the person they are attacking represents an unresolved pain or fear, and (d) they lack the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively. These are especially relevant in educational interactions. Bower and Rubin (2002) proposed that there is a continuum from nonaggression to aggression in people’s communication behavior. They suggested that at one end of the continuum is communication apprehension and at the other end is verbal aggression. In a study of nurses and their conflict behaviors at work, Bower and Rubin found that nurses who were on either extreme end of the continuum perceived themselves to be low in interaction with others. Also discovered was that those who were high in verbal aggression tended to select control-oriented conflict strategies.

Social influence theory (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1973; Tedeschi, 1983) also relates aggressiveness to how people react in conflict situations. This theory holds that most people avoid becoming involved in aggressive acts—distributive conflict resolution strategies—with others because of the social negativity associated with such
acts. Even though aggressive acts are not socially approved, they are occasionally used, and Tedeschi and his associates used social influence theory to explain why. In this theory, aggression and coercion are two separate characteristics. Aggression is explained in much the same way that Infante (1987a) defined it: a negative trait used to achieve one’s goals by attacking the self-concept of another. Coercion, however, is used to explain behavior that uses punishments or threats to gain compliance from an individual. Although aggression is perceived negatively, coercion is acceptable as long as it is justified by social norms and values (Tedeschi, 1983). For example, if a man approaches a door and cuts it down with an ax to reach a person inside, this would likely be perceived as an aggressive act. But if this person was a firefighter, the house was on fire, and someone inside was trapped, this act would be seen as a form of coercion, but would not be perceived as aggressive.

Whether or not an act will be perceived as aggressive or coercive depends on an observer’s opinion about whether or not the act is justifiable, and if the actor intends harm on the receiver (Tedeschi, Smith, & Brown, 1974). Aggression is a trait that is inherent in one’s personality, but coercion is a behavior that can be used by either an aggressive or a non-aggressive individual. Social influence theory asserts that people will use coercion when they believe it will help them achieve their goals, but will avoid it if they believe the actions will be perceived as aggressive by others. Thus I hypothesize that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to verbal aggressiveness:

H2a: Students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor integrative strategies.
H2b: Students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor avoidance strategies.

Communication apprehension. Communication apprehension (CA) is the “level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). CA is a general fear of speaking across many situations. Approximately 20% of Americans experience extreme communication apprehension to the extent that it interferes with their way of life, and another 20% experience at least moderate CA (McCroskey, 1977). Communication apprehension is a serious communication phobia.

Communication apprehension can have a severe effect on how students approach conflict with teachers. High CA students avoid verbal interactions with teachers more often than low CA students (McCroskey & Richmond, 1976). And because a student who is anxious about communicating with his or her teacher is more likely to avoid any communication interaction with a teacher, this should include conflict confrontations. Research also has shown that people who are high in CA have lower self-esteem and are less likely to self-disclose than those who are low in CA (Falcione et al., 1977; McCroskey & Richmond, 1976). Thus we can expect high CA students to use avoidant strategies in conflict, and low CA students to use non-avoidant strategies. Thus, I hypothesize that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to communication apprehension:

H3a: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor integrative strategies.
H3b: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor distributive strategies. Apprehension has also been linked to communication competence in the literature. Nurses who were highly apprehensive were also low in communication competence (Bower & Rubin, 2002). Speakers who perceived themselves to be low in competence experienced high apprehension (Ellis, 1995). Students low in CA have reported higher levels of communication competence (Rubin, Graham, & Mignerey, 1990). Additionally, students who were academically at-risk reported higher levels of CA and lower levels of self-perceived speaker confidence than did students who were not academically at-risk (Chesebro et al., 1992). Strain et al. (2001) discovered that anxiety sensitivity accounted for some variance in communication competence. Thus, students who suffered from anxiety sensitivity may have lower self-perceived communication competence. High-anxiety students were perceived as less competent (McCroskey, 1976) by others than were low-anxiety students. For these reasons, this study will also examine the effect of communication competence on conflict strategy use.

Communication competence. Spitzberg (1993) wrote that “competence plays a central role in the success and failure of all significant human relationships” (p. 38). Because communication is at the heart of relationships, whether or not people are competent in their communication directly affects the success or failure in relationships. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) defined relational competence as “the extent to which objectives functionally related to communication are fulfilled through cooperative interaction appropriate to the interpersonal context” (p. 100). Rubin and Martin (1994) defined relational competence as a judgment that one forms about one’s self and the other
person’s “ability to manage interpersonal relationships in communication settings” (p. 33). Competent communication is defined as the effective attainment of goals in a manner that is appropriate to the relational context and that includes flexibility on the part of the communicator (Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Martin & Rubin, 1994, 1995, 1998; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann & Kelly, 1981).

In a conflict situation, competence is specifically related to the ability to navigate and resolve a conflict encounter. This concept relies not only on communication competence, but also on interpersonal competence. Interpersonal competence is made up of a person’s interpersonal skills as well as their knowledge and motivation to communicate in particular situations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

A person’s interpersonal competence affects how he or she approaches conflict. Integrative strategies, which are perceived as more positive approaches to conflict, have been positively linked to competence (Dyck & Rule, 1978). Distributive and avoidant strategies, which are perceived as negative approaches to conflict, are negatively linked to competence. In fact, many researchers have indicated that competence in most conflict situations requires integrative rather than avoidant or distributive tactics (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989; Conrad, 1991; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b). Canary and Spitzberg (1989) noted that “the more appropriate and effective an interactant is, the more competent he or she is likely to be perceived” (p. 631). Because using appropriate communication is equated with trying to meet the goals of both interactants, integrative strategies should be viewed as competent. Bower and Rubin (2002) found support for this in that those who viewed themselves as competent used more integrative and distributive strategies rather than avoidant strategies.
In addition, Martin et al. (1999) asked subordinates in an organization to complete questionnaires about their socio-communicative orientations and the conflict strategies they use with their supervisors. Those lower in competence used nonconfrontational strategies more than those higher in competence. Competent communicators utilized collaboration strategies more than incompetent communicators. This makes sense because researchers have found that communication and apprehension and communication competence are negatively related (Rubin & Graham, 1988; Rubin et al., 1990) and those with high apprehension are expected to utilize nonconfrontational strategies. Thus in this study, I hypothesized that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to interpersonal communication competence:

H4a: Students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor avoidance strategies.

H4b: Students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor distributive strategies.

Research has clearly demonstrated that there are correlations between the above communication traits and conflict strategy choices. However, there have been discussions over the years about whether or not communication predispositions are stable across different contexts (e.g., Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983). Although some researchers feel these dispositions are stable, there is a competing theory to this idea. It is possible that the situation may dictate, or at least affect, the conflict strategy choice. How a student perceives the conflict to have developed, and to whom the student attributes blame in a situation could affect how the student chooses a strategy for managing the conflict. Thus,
traits alone may not predict conflict strategy choices. In the next section, I will discuss an attributional approach to conflict that could aid in determining strategy choices.

**Attributional Approach to Conflict**

A third approach to examining conflict involves using the attributions a person makes in a conflict situation to predict what kind of strategy will be selected to resolve the conflict. Central to attribution theory, developed by Fritz Heider (1958), is the idea that attributions are the process through which people interpret the cause of events and behaviors based on their perception of the cause. It can also be defined as “the process whereby people attribute characteristics, intentions, feelings, and traits to objects in their social world” (Kanouse & Hanson, 1972, p. 47). In the attributional model, a person first observes the behaviors of another and then attributes those behaviors to what seems to be a logical cause. For example, if a student comes late to a lecture, the professor will attempt to determine the cause of the student’s tardiness. It is psychologically necessary for people to try to determine the cause of others’ behaviors because it helps to reduce uncertainty. As Detweiler (1975) contended:

> If people did not continually infer cause and then make predictions about others’ behaviors, then one would not have any idea whether it was necessary to keep one’s fists up or keep one’s lips puckered to be ready for a kiss (or something in between). (p. 591)

*Factors influencing attributions.* Attribution theory is concerned with epistemology: how people come to know the cause of behavior. In 1967, Kelley extended attribution theory by indicating that people make systematic and logical attributions by categorizing the information against three dimensions: distinctiveness, consensus,
consistency. Distinctiveness refers to how much a feature is uniquely associated with a particular situation: Does this person behave this way in different situations? Consistency refers to the stability of that association over time and across circumstances: Does this person usually behave in this manner? Consensus refers to the extent to which others’ validate the observer’s perception: Do other people behave this way under the same circumstances? These dimensions, also known as the attributional cube, explain how people make sense of other people and events in their world (Baxter & Philpott, 1982). Kelley’s attributional cube was one way to examine the attribution that people make. However, the attributions have been assigned different names across research, and have been slightly changed and improved upon since their inception. The attributions used to guide the research in this study were influenced by the work of Weiner (1979) and Frieze (1976).

Frieze (1976) found that behaviors in achievement-related contexts (such as education) can be attributed to ability, effort, task difficulty, or luck. These factors were distinguished along three dimensions: locus of responsibility (internal or external); stability (stable or unstable); and controllability (controllable or uncontrollable). Weiner (1979) suggested that information along these three dimensions affect the kind of attribution made.

In assigning attributions for behavior, the observer must determine if the cause is internal or external. The locus of responsibility dimension of attribution is the perception of the location of the cause of an event (Weiner, 1979). A locus can either be internal or external. Heider (1958) suggested that people distinguish between dispositional causes (something internal to the person) and situational causes (something external to the
person) in their attributions. Whether a characteristic is internally or externally attributed depends on the distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus of the person’s behavior (Kelley, 1967). An internal attribution would mean that a student attributes a conflict or problem to him or herself. An external attribution could include both attributions a student makes to a situation or an attribution a student makes to an instructor. If a student receives a low grade and perceives the grade was given because he or she didn’t study for an exam, then the cause is constituted from an internal locus. If the student, however, perceives the teacher to have reported a low grade because the university has demanded that teachers curb grade inflation, then the locus would be external.

The stability dimension of attribution is the perception of the stability of the cause of an event (Weiner, 1979). The dimension is on a continuum from stable to unstable. The other person is perceived to be stable if the cause came from him or her and it is perceived that the cause is something that is usually occurring in the other. An attribution is unstable if the event is something that is not perceived to occur on a regular or frequent basis. Additionally, if the cause is consistent, it is perceived to be stable. A cause that is subject to change is perceived to be unstable. If a student believes a teacher made a test overly difficult, the student will likely attribute blame to the teacher if the student believes that the teacher always makes difficult tests. In this case, the behavior (making a difficult test) is stable. If the student believes that the teacher usually makes easy tests, but that this one time the test was more difficult than usual, then the student will attribute the blame less to the teacher, as the behavior is unstable.

The controllability dimension of attribution is the perception of whether the other could control the cause or whether it was something that was beyond the realm of control
(Weiner, 1979). Like locus and stability, this dimension of attribution exists on a continuum. If, for example, a teacher misses a class where a test was to be given, students might be unhappy that they are not able to take the exam for which they had studied and prepared. When attributing fault for the situation, the students would consider whether the teacher missing class was controllable or uncontrollable. If the teacher was in a car accident on the way to class, the students would likely perceive the event to be out of the teacher’s control, and thus not place as much blame on him or her. If the teacher had a dentist appointment during class time, and thus missed the class, the students would likely perceive the event to be entirely within the teacher’s control, as the appointment could have been made at another time (or at least on a day other than when a test was scheduled). In this case, the students would likely place more blame for the missed test on the teacher.

Research has shown that students tend to attribute successes to themselves and failures to others (Marsh, 1984). However, Hunter and Barker (1987) indicated that students will experience more satisfaction in a situation if they perceive events to be caused by an internal locus, unstable occurrence of events, and a feeling that they are in control of their actions. Hunter and Barker stated that “students will be better learners if they believe success depends on effort more than luck or ability” (p. 50). If students recognize that they play an active role in the education process, then they will likely make an effort to do better than if they feel the experience is out of their control.

*Attribution errors.* When people attempt to make attributions for another person’s behaviors, they often make errors. One of these attribution errors is known as the self-serving bias (Bernstein, Stephan, & Davis, 1979). People tend to attribute their own
failures to external causes (“I failed because the class was too hard”) and others’ failures to internal causes (“He failed because he was lazy and didn’t do the work”). People have a tendency to attribute their own successes to internal factors (I worked hard for that!) and others’ successes to external factors (“He just got lucky”; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Zimbardo, 1972). Similarly, people perceive ingroup members as having internally caused successes and externally caused failures, whereas outgroup members have externally caused successes and internally caused failures (Deschamps, 1983).

Another attribution error is the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). It occurs when a person has a tendency to overestimate the personal internal contribution and underestimate the external situational factors. Research has shown that people do have a tendency to attribute the cause of events to personal qualities rather than to situational causes (Quattrone, 1982). Sillars (1980a) found an illustration for this error. He researched how roommates dealt with conflict and determined that both parties blamed the other as the cause of the conflict (internally attributing blame to other) and saw themselves only as responding to it (external factors).

Why do people tend to underestimate the situational factors that influence others? Jones and Nisbett (1971) asserted that it was because people are in touch with their own internal cues, and know what internal and external factors are playing a part in their own actions, but are not as aware of the situational factors that affect others; thus, the observer may see a person rather than their situations. For example, if a student is uneasy and nervous prior to giving a speech, he or she is likely to attribute the cause of his or her nervousness to the situation. But if the student encounters a nervous speaker, he or she is likely to attribute that speaker’s nervousness to a personality trait. Jones (1979) indicated
that people commit the fundamental attribution error because it gives the illusion of control, which they find comforting. People find it scary to think that things just happen to them and are not a result of their actions. In order to preserve self-esteem, people often defensively attribute negative consequences to external forces and attribute positive consequences to their own doing (Bradley, 1978; Zuckerman, 1979). The fundamental attribution error occurs on an interpersonal level: a person makes an error in perceiving the cause of another person’s behavior. These errors occur in general attributions made across situations, but especially in attributions of conflict episodes.

**Attributional Theory of Conflict**

The attributional theory of conflict (Horai, 1977; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b) uses the basics of attribution theory to explain how people make attributions in conflict episodes to determine what strategy they will use to resolve the conflict. Horai suggested that people can’t get through a day without questioning who or what caused events that affected them. It is the difference in the explanations for *why* things happened that causes attributional conflict (Orvis, Kelley, & Butler, 1976). Dealing with conflict is an inevitable part of relationships (Forgas, 2001) and when faced with conflict, people attempt to explain the causes that brought it into their paths. Attributions can include more than reasons for cause; they can also include judgments of responsibilities (Vangelisti, 2001).

In a conflict, both parties try to make sense of the incompatibilities between them. Both will construct causal explanations for how they arrived at the conflict. When these parties attribute different causes to the incompatibilities, the conflict becomes an attributional conflict (Horai, 1977). Causal attributions can be influenced by many things:
self-image, public image, role relationship, and the control one desires to maintain (Horai, 1977). Vangelisti (2001) explained that, interpersonally,

one means of accessing the influence of individuals’ emotional experiences on their relationships is to examine people’s attributions, that is, their explanations for how and why their emotions are evoked through hurtful communication…the way people think about and explain their hurtful experiences affects the way in which they interact with others. (p. 42)

If a student believes that a teacher has intentionally done something to cause conflict, the student is more likely to feel negatively towards the instructor, and may respond in a negative and destructive way. Sillars (1980b) explained that attributions can affect interpersonal communication strategies in two ways. First, how one attributes specific behaviors influences the way in which he or she reacts to other people. Second, making attributions creates expectations for how one believes another will act in future situations.

Orvis et al. (1976) reported that attributional conflict often centers on several behaviors, including passivity, insensitivity or unyielding actions, irresponsible or annoying behavior, emotional or aggressive actions, avoidance of particular activities, situational ineptness or social rejection, habitual engagement in activities disliked by the other partner, and overly caring or demanding behavior. It is possible that one might witness any of these behaviors in the classroom, many on the part of either student or teacher. For example, considering irresponsible or annoying behavior, it is possible that either students or teachers could frequently come late to class. This would likely be considered both irresponsible and annoying and could lead to an attributional conflict between the student and teacher.
Sillars (1998) argued that conflicts are almost always seen from different perspectives. Thus, we can expect that if a student earns a poor grade, the student may perceive the root of the problem differently than the teacher will. The student may think that he or she received a low score because the test was unfair, because the teacher graded unfairly, or because the teacher didn’t present the material clearly enough. If the student isn’t blaming the teacher, the student may blame external circumstances such as having too much work to do to be able to study well. Likewise, the teacher will likely blame the student. The teacher may think the student was too lazy, didn’t study hard enough, or just didn’t understand the material. The teacher is unlikely to think that he or she is too difficult a grader or that an unfair test was created. Sillars asserted that “perceptions of conflict are not merely opposed, but they often depict entirely different conflicts from the point of view of either party” (p. 89). In this example, the student may view the conflict as the teacher not being fair or effective. The teacher may view the conflict as the student not working hard enough. Sillars concluded, then, that these conflicts are “often one-sided affairs, in which the parties neither participate in the same issues nor observe the same sequence of events” (p. 89).

In the course of his research, Sillars (1980a) created three basic propositions that are at the heart of the attributional theory of conflict:

1. People choose conflict strategies based on attributions about the partner’s intent to cooperate, the locus of responsibility for conflict, and the stability of conflict. (p.182)

2. Biases in the attribution process tend to discourage integrative modes of conflict resolution. (p.183)
3. The choice of conflict strategies affects the likelihood of conflict resolution and the degree of satisfaction in the interpersonal relationship. (p. 185)

Orvis et al. (1976) speculated that because attributions are inherently subjective and unclear, attributional conflicts will generally be irresolvable. Isenhart and Spangle (2000) disagreed. They noted that:

- to deescalate conflict, disputants need to expose misperceptions created by inaccurate attributions. They need to uncover the “I just assumed” judgments that create barriers to resolution of problems. And to reduce polarization, they need to reduce blaming, see how each party has contributed to escalation of the problem, and accept responsibility for resolution. (p. 4)

Isenhart and Spangle believed that attributional conflicts can be resolved.

Attributions are highly salient in conflict (Sillars, 1981). The attributions made in any situation are formed into accounts. “Accounts of interpersonal and intimate conflict are profoundly selective” (Sillars et al., 2001, p. 193). The discrepancies that arise between actors when making attributions has been reported to evolve from (a) the differences in the information available to parties involved in the conflict (Eisen, 1979), (b) the motivations of the actor (Bradley, 1978), and (c) the underestimation of the influence of one’s own behavior (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970). People often disagree about whether to attribute behaviors to internal or external causes in the situation. And once a decision has been made, it can still change. Attributions are not static. They can change throughout the course of a conflict (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1997). The focus of this study is whether it is these attributions or the personality traits one has that affects the strategy chosen to deal with a conflict.
A body of research focusing on the attributional theory of conflict has been amassed in the last three decades. The focus of this literature is on conflicts between married couples, friends, and families rather than conflicts in the classroom (e.g., Burrell & Cahn, 1994; Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979; Messman & Canary, 1998; Sillars, 1998). The results from this research, however, are useful in determining what can be expected from conflict in the classroom. Specifically, it is useful to examine the literature dealing with the three dimensions (intent to cooperate, locus of responsibility, stability) of attributions that Sillars (1980a) indicated were part of conflict strategy selection based on the attributional theory of conflict and also the dimension of controllability, which was part of the original attribution theory (Weiner, 1979).

**Intent to cooperate.** Sillars (1980a) based his proposition—that people select conflict strategies based on attributions of their partner’s intent to cooperate in the conflict—on the work of Schelling (1960), Scheff (1967), and Thomas and Pondy (1977). This proposition asserts that the perception of cooperation by a partner, or lack of it, is essential to choosing a conflict strategy because “the intentions of the partner restrict the goals that are personally attainable” (Sillars, 1980a, p. 182). If a student expects a teacher to resist proposals of resolution, there would be little incentive to use integrative strategies. Because of this factor, people are expected to use integrative strategies mostly when they expect the partners to be cooperative. In his study of college roommates, Sillars (1980a, 1980b) determined that integrative strategies were associated with a greater likelihood of conflict resolution. Thus, if a student expects a teacher to cooperate, and foresees a likelihood of resolution, integrative strategies would be favored over the
other two. Thus I hypothesized that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the attributional dimension of intent to cooperate:

H5a: Students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor distributive strategies.

H5b: Students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor avoidance strategies.

*Locus of responsibility.* Persons may attribute responsibility for a conflict to the self or the other. Several previous research studies have addressed how the locus of responsibility affects conflict strategy choice. Sillars (1980a, 1980b) conducted multiple research studies examining the conflict and attributions of responsibility among college roommates. In the first study, roommates used self-reports to indicate conflict strategies used. In the second study, researchers directly observed roommates having a videotaped discussion about conflict issues and discussion strategies were coded from videotapes. Sillars was surprised that roommates attributed responsibility for conflicts almost equally between themselves and their roommates. This finding was not consistent with previous attributional conflict research where people commonly report others as responsible for conflicts. He attributed this to the reported high satisfaction rates with roommates.

Sillars (1980a) indicated that when a partner is attributed responsibility for a conflict, a person will likely feel negatively towards the situation as he or she may feel wronged. Thus, integrative strategies are less likely when a person attributes responsibility to a partner. Sillars and Parry (1982) indicated that as stress levels in
conflict situations increase, the blame towards the other also increases. This leads to a
decline in integrative conflict strategies. Additionally, less satisfied couples tend to make
more attributions of responsibility to their partners, and distributive tactics are adopted
more by less satisfied couples (Gottman, 1979; Koren, Carlton, & Shaw, 1980; Pike &
Sillars, 1985; Sillars, 1980b).

Locus of responsibility is one of the few areas that has been examined in the
classroom. Kearney, Plax, and Burroughs (1991) found that students perceived
themselves as being responsible in the classroom (specifically for resistance decisions)
when the teacher was immediate. Immediacy is the extent to which selected
communicative behaviors enhance physical or psychological closeness in interpersonal
communication (Mehrabian, 1967). If the teacher was non-immediate, the student would
place the responsibility for the resistance on the teacher. It has also been found that
students tend to attribute the cause of teacher misbehaviors to the teacher rather than to
the student or external factors (Kelsey et al., 2004). It would make sense that students
also attribute the blame for conflicts to teachers, especially if they’ve had negative
experiences with the teachers.

Although people use attribution to determine what strategies are best to use, they
are often biased in the attributions that they make. People tend to see themselves as
blameless and only as reactors to conflict rather than as initiators. Folger, Poole, and
Stutman (1997) claimed that this bias affects our conflict strategy selection.

When actors attribute conflict responsibility to their partners, they perceive no
threat to escalate the conflict. Hence they turn to distributive and passive-indirect
strategies. Conversely, those who attribute responsibility for the conflict to
themselves are likely to desire sensible resolution through integrative strategies.

(Folger et al., 1997, p. 54)

Additionally, a common theme across attributional literature is that observers tend to overestimate dispositional causes of a person’s behavior and underestimate situational causes (Heider, 1958; Ross 1977; Sillars, 1980b). This leads to a person attributing responsibility of conflict to a partner more often than to him or herself.

In his study of college roommates, Sillars (1980a, 1980b) determined that attributions of responsibility to the partner were associated with avoidance and distributive strategies while attributions of responsibility to the self were associated with integrative strategies. The responsibility for conflicts was attributed more to the partner, on the average, than to self. Thus, I hypothesize that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the attributional dimension of responsibility:

\[ H_{6a}: \text{Students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies.} \]

\[ H_{6b}: \text{Students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor avoidance strategies.} \]

**Stability of conflict.** When determining stability, a person in a conflict must decide if the cause of a conflict is one that usually would occur from the person responsible (a stable cause), or if the conflict is something that is not perceived to occur on a regular basis (an unstable cause). For example, a student might question a grade on a test as unfair. If the teacher assigns low grades frequently to many students, the cause would be perceived as stable. If, however, this low grade is unique, and the teacher usually assigns high grades, then the cause would be perceived as unstable.
When it comes to their own behaviors, observers tend to attribute the causes to unstable and situational factors and underestimate personal dispositions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Orvis et al., 1976; Rosenberg & Wolfsfeld, 1977; Thomas & Pondy, 1977). This was seen in Sillars’ (1981) study where more students attributed the responsibility of a conflict to their roommates than to themselves. Orvis et al. (1976) indicated that these attribution errors are not malicious; a person may genuinely believe that the cause of his or her behavior is something that is not frequently occurring, and something that is understandable, and that the cause justifies the behavior.

Sillars (1980a, 1980b) determined that stable attributions for conflicts are associated with avoidance strategies and unstable attributions are associated with integrative strategies. This was true whether the responsibility was found to be in one’s self or the partner. Avoidance strategies would be chosen in stable situations because it would seem that there was little chance that anything would change and thus there would be few rewards for even attempting a conflict resolution. Additionally, Sillars also found that when an individual attributed a conflict to a partner, the conflict was also perceived to be more stable. Thus, I hypothesized that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the attributional dimension of stability:

H7a: Students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than students who favor integrative strategies.

H7b: Students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies.

Controllability. When examining a conflict, people also try to determine whether or not the cause of the conflict was controllable. Controllability of conflict has often been
related to how satisfied partners are in the relationship. Couples who are distressed have lower satisfaction in their relationships than do non-distressed couples (Fincham & O’Leary, 1983). Distressed couples tend to attribute negative behaviors of a spouse to more stable and controllable factors. Non-distressed and satisfied couples attributed negative behaviors to unstable and uncontrollable factors (Fincham & O’Leary, 1983). Thus the higher the satisfaction, the more conflict is attributed to uncontrollable factors. Jacobson et al. (1985) found a tendency to attribute positive behaviors internally (to controllable factors) in non-distressed couples, and a tendency to attribute negative behaviors externally (to uncontrollable factors) in distressed couples.

Both Dyck and Rule (1978) and Sillars (1980b) noted that several studies have found that people retaliated more when they perceived a stimuli to purposefully harm them (a controllable act) than they did when the stimuli was perceived to have hurt them by accident or unintentionally. If we attribute a conflict to an actor’s controllable and purposeful behaviors, we are more likely to respond using a distributive style than if we attribute a conflict to uncontrollable circumstances. It could be expected that students who feel the cause of a conflict was controllable by the instructor might feel less compulsion to select integrative strategies to resolve the conflict. If the conflict was not controllable, more understanding might be given, and integrative strategies would likely be chosen. Thus, I hypothesized that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the attributional dimension of controllability:

H8a: Students who favor distributive strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control and under another person’s control more than students who favor avoidance strategies.
H8b: Students who favor distributive strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control and under another person’s control more than students who favor integrative strategies.

Both the attributional approach to conflict and the trait approach to conflict provide reasonable models for explaining how conflict strategies are chosen by students when in conflict with teachers. However, which model is most successful at predicting conflict strategies is yet unknown. This leads to the second research question for this study:

RQ2: Does the trait model, the attributional model, or a mixture of both best predict which conflict strategies students use?

Conflict Strategies

When people find themselves facing a conflict, they must decide how, or if, they will resolve it. There is more than one approach that can be chosen. Researchers have used two schemas, the three- and five-dimensional models, to represent people’s approaches to conflict strategies. The three-dimension model, the model preferred in communication research, explains that people use three primary strategies to resolve conflict: integrative, distributive, and avoidance (Sillars, 1980a, 1980b). Integrative strategies, that involve active and open communication between two parties, promote information exchange and the expression of neutral or positive affect towards a partner, and focus on collaboration and problem-solving (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Ross & DeWine, 1988; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b; Walton & McKersie, 1965). Distributive strategies involve active and open communication between two parties, but with negative evaluations of parties being exchanged. Distributive strategies promote
individual goals over mutual goals, are often win-lose strategies (where one partner wins at the other partner’s expense) and are used to seek compliance from the partner, even at the cost of face-detracting strategies (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Ross & DeWine, 1988; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b). Avoidance strategies are those that avoid explicit acknowledgment of conflict. People using these strategies suppress, ignore, and avoid conflict, shift the focus of communication, or address conflict in an indirect and ambiguous manner (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Ross & DeWine, 1988; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b). The use of avoidance strategies is often perceived negatively by others (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989).

Some scholars have used the *five-dimension model* in their research (Filley 1975; Mourton 1964; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Thomas & Pondy, 1977). This five-level model is also known as the “dual concern model” because of the approach that people choose a strategy based on their concern for both the goal and other people (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2001; Isenhart & Spangle, 2000). The dual concern model uses the concepts of integrative, distributive, and avoidance strategies, but it adds to these two others: accommodation and compromise. Rahim (1983) created a self-report instrument based on the five-level model to measure conflict styles in the workplace, but the instrument has also been used successfully in more informal contexts (Hammock et al., 1990; Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989). Though the five strategy model has been touted in some research, many communication scholars have shown consistently that conflict approaches can be organized into the three general strategies of integrative, distributive and avoidance (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Cupach & Canary, 2000; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Ross & DeWine, 1988; Sillars, 1981; Sillars et al., 1982).
Channel Selection

Previous literature has indicated that personality traits and attributions affect the conflict strategies chosen. The chosen strategy might then influence the channel of communication selected to resolve the conflict. A good deal of attention has been devoted recently to channel selection in communication encounters (e.g., O’Sullivan, 2000; Scott & Rockwell, 1997; Shearlean, 2001; Sitkin, Sutcliffe, & Barrios-Choplin, 1992) with specific attention being given to the channel selection in instructional settings (D’Souza, 1992; Fusani, 1994; Kelly, Duran, & Zolten, 2001; Waldeck, Kearney, & Plax, 2001). However, communication researchers have not yet examined the channels selected to resolve conflict.

Several decades ago, researchers argued that mediated channels provided less social presence (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976), filtered out essential cues (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Sproul & Kiesler, 1986), and were less “rich” than face-to-face (FTF) communication (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987). However, even though computer-mediated communication (CMC) may lack social presence, it can still encourage the exchange of personal information and be used to meet particular goals or needs (Williams, 1985). More recent research has indicated that people can use leaner mediated channels, such as e-mail, effectively for social interactions (e.g., Parks & Floyd, 1996; Rice & Love, 1987; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1992). Some researchers have even suggested that certain communication channels might better meet particular gratification needs than other channels (Westmyer, DiCioccio, & Rubin, 1998). Thus, the goal or need of the communication encounter may dictate what channel is selected. For example, Kelly, Keaton, and Finch (2004) found that students who are reticent prefer
communicating with instructors via e-mail rather than talking with them face-to-face or on the telephone. The communication goals of a reticent student may be different than for a non-reticent one.

Channel expansion theory (Carlson & Zmud, 1999) posits that richness is dependent on the subjective experiences of individual users. People with more experience—and more positive experiences—with particular channels will find those channels to be richer than those who lack experience—or have negative experiences—with the same channels. People also select channels by their own subjective evaluations of the medium’s performance (Dobos, 1992). If a person perceives e-mail to be an effective means of transmitting information, then that person is more likely to select e-mail than someone who perceives FTF as being the only effective communication channel. Hovick, Meyers, and Timmerman (2003) also found that the more one e-mailed, the richer the media was perceived to be.

Westmeyer et al. (1998) determined that FTF communication was perceived as more effective and appropriate for meeting interpersonal needs than were mediated channels. However, Walther and his colleagues have argued that although FTF channels are more effective than CMC in achieving goals when time constraints exist, when time is not an issue, CMC are as effective as FTF communication (Walther, 1992, 1994; Walther, Anderson, & Park, 1994). CMC simply takes longer to achieve the same goals. Thus, if students perceive a conflict as needing to be resolved quickly, FTF could be preferred.

Research has indicated that personal relationships are maintained by both FTF communication and mediated channels (Wellman & Gulia, 1999) and that mediated
communication can serve maintenance functions within interpersonal relationships (Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999). Tidwell and Walther (2002) determined that, in first encounters, CMC users devoted a greater proportion of their conversations to revealing information about themselves, and asking questions than did FTF communicators. CMC users also asked more personal questions than did FTF communicators. Walther, Loh, and Granka (2005) also indicated that the affinity experienced in a relationship does not differ due to communication channel differences.

Although Walther and his colleagues have argued that CMC can be as effective as FTF communication, communicators do not always perceive the channels to be equal. The telephone—a mediated, but oral channel—is often perceived to be a functional alternative to FTF communication (Westmyer et al., 1998). The Internet is not perceived to be a functional alternative to FTF communication when interpersonal communication is the goal (Flaherty, Pearce, & Rubin, 1998). In long-distance relationships, there is a positive relationship between oral channels (FTF and phone), and a positive relationship between written channels (written notes, e-mails, internet chatting), but a negative relationship between oral and written channels (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). This indicates that individuals who prefer oral channels shy away from written channels and vice-versa. Thus, it could be expected that people tend to use similar channels across time within the same relationship.

Recent literature has also shown that people choose channels based on the impression they are trying to manage (O’Sullivan, 2000). Students often try to manage a positive impression with instructors, and thus this research could be useful in examining a relationship between channels and conflict management strategies. O’Sullivan (2000)
suggested that people can use communication technologies as one method of controlling how others perceive them because the choice of a channel also communicates a message. Mediated channels could allow people to control factors that might threaten positive impressions. For example, if a student is confronting a teacher about a grade that the student feels is unfair, in a FTF encounter, the student may feel unable to control his or her emotion and physical reactions; the teacher would be able to see if a student is upset or embarrassed. An e-mail, however, would allow the student to hide these emotions and only present the information that the student wants to reveal to the instructor. As noted by Brown and Rogers (1991), the channel selection provides communicators with a way of selecting what will and what will not be revealed about themselves.

O’Sullivan (2000) found that when a person’s preferred impression was expected to be threatened, people preferred mediated channels over FTF communication. Thus, if a student believes that his or her impression will be damaged in a conflict encounter, the student may choose a mediated channel over a FTF one. The change in channel between FTF and mediated channels could also be affected by what conflict strategy choice a student would choose. Thus, channel could be influenced by the conflict strategy choices. This leads to the third research question of the study:

RQ3: Does conflict strategy influence channel selection?

Model

The above discussion suggests that choice of a conflict strategy might be explained by a communication traits model or an attribution model. These two models are depicted in Figure 1. One purpose of this dissertation is to determine which model best predicts strategy choice.
Figure 1. Competing models of conflict strategy choice.
On the left side of the figure is the communication traits model. The independent variables of argumentativeness, aggressiveness, communication apprehension, and interpersonal communication competence are all continuous variables. These variables are personality traits of students that might affect the dependent variable, conflict strategy. On the right side of the figure is the attribution model with the continuous independent variables of student attributions of intent, responsibility, stability, and controllability. These variables are also depicted as influencing the dependent variable of conflict strategy. The model also implied that the conflict strategy selected influences the channel of communication adopted.

Hypotheses one through four were tested by examining the relationship between the communication trait model and the conflict strategies. Hypotheses five through eight were tested by examining the relationship between the attribution model and conflict strategies. Research question one was addressed by doing a qualitative examination of the data from Study I. Research question two was addressed by examining whether the personality trait model or the attribution model has stronger influence on the conflict strategies chosen. Research question three was answered by examining whether channel selection affects the strategies chosen.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

After reviewing the literature above, I proposed several research questions and hypotheses. A summary of these is provided below.

RQ1: What conflicts are experienced between students and teachers?

RQ2: Does the trait model, the attributional model, or a mixture of both best predict which conflict strategies students use?
RQ3: Does conflict strategy influence channel selection?

H1a: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor integrative strategies.

H1b: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor distributive strategies.

H2a: Students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor integrative strategies.

H2b: Students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor avoidance strategies.

H3a: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor integrative strategies.

H3b: Students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor distributive strategies.

H4a: Students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor avoidance strategies.

H4b: Students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor distributive strategies.

H5a: Students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor distributive strategies.

H5b: Students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor avoidance strategies.
H6a: Students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies.

H6b: Students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor avoidance strategies.

H7a: Students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than students who favor integrative strategies.

H7b: Students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies.

H8a: Students who favor distributive strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control and under another person’s control more than students who favor avoidance strategies.

H8b: Students who favor distributive strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control and under another person’s control more than students who favor integrative strategies.

To determine answers to the research questions and to test the hypotheses, two studies were conducted. Study I was qualitative in nature and provided categories of conflict to answer RQ1. Study II was quantitative in nature and tested the model and hypotheses presented in this chapter. The method, results, and discussion of these studies are described in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

The first purpose of this research was to determine what conflicts students have with their classroom instructors. This issue was investigated in Study I. Participants in Study I were asked to provide examples of conflicts they had experienced with instructors. These examples were then used in Study II to test the model proposed in Chapter 1. The second purpose of the research was to compare two models (communication traits versus attributions) to see which best predicts conflict strategy choice among participants. This question was addressed in Study II. The communication trait model examines communication competence, communication apprehension, aggressiveness, and argumentativeness as potential antecedents of strategy choice. The attribution model examines attributions of intent to cooperate, responsibility, stability, and control as influences of strategy choice. Channel was examined in relation to conflict strategy.

Design

Interpersonal communication researchers have collected data about participants’ communication patterns through several methods, including having participants make personal ratings about their own traits and behaviors. One advantage of this method is the ability to capture participants’ own interpretations of their behaviors and interactions. Daly (1978) argued that self-reported behaviors are consistent with actual behavioral measures. Rubin (1985) also posited that people have a more accurate perception of their own behaviors than do others. Researchers use self-report survey responses to describe communication characteristics of a population and to assess relationships between
communication and other behavior. Conflict researchers have used self-report instruments in studying interpersonal conflict (e.g., Alberts, 1990; Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; Cloven & Roloff, 1991; Papa & Natalie, 1989; Witteman, 1992; Zillman, 1990). Instructional researchers have also used self-report instruments in examining student and teacher behaviors in the classrooms (e.g., Chesebro, 2003; Ellis, 2004; Johnson & Roelke, 1999; Myers, Martin, & Mottet, 2002; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). In this study, self-report instruments will be used because it is assumed that students will know best what their typical behaviors are and can report them better than any outside observer.

For this research, a two-part study was needed. The data in the first part of the study identified what conflicts students report having with teachers. These data were used to create realistic conflict scenarios from which students selected the conflict resolution strategy that was closest to the one they would actually use in each situation. In the first study, I used an open-ended survey design in which the participants were asked to recall and report about a conflict between themselves and an instructor. In the second study, I used a questionnaire in which the participants read case studies and then reported how they would likely respond in each situation. The questionnaires also included measures of communication competence, apprehension, aggressiveness, argumentativeness, and attributions for each conflict situation. The data collected in Study II were analyzed by using discriminant analysis. The relevant variables were entered in separate discriminant analyses to determine whether the communication trait or the attributional model best predicts conflict strategy style.
Study I

Participants

The data for Study I were collected in two parts. For the first part, the participants were 364 students from a basic communication course at a large Midwestern university. Approximately 29% were freshman, 42% were sophomores, 16% were juniors, and 5% were seniors. Several students did not report their class status. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 50 with a mean age of 20.4. Forty percent of the participants were male and 60% were female. This course fulfilled a general education requirement across the university and thus students represented a diversity of major fields.

The data for the second part of Study I were also collected from students in a basic communication course at a large Midwestern university. The participants were 346 students comprised of approximately 43% freshman, 37% sophomores, 11% juniors, 6% seniors, and 1% returning adult students. Eight students did not report their class status. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 49 with the mean age being 20.2. Forty-six percent of the participants were male and 54% were female.

Procedure

In order to identify the types of conflicts experienced between students and teachers, a questionnaire was distributed during Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 semesters as part of the department’s mass testing research. Participants were asked to write about a conflict they had experienced with an instructor. This method mirrored one used by Canary and Cupach (1988) where participants were asked to report a conflict they had experienced in a relationship. A simple open-ended questionnaire asked students to report about a conflict they had experienced with an instructor. The instructions read:
In the space provided, please indicate any conflicts or grievances you have experienced with your college instructors in the past 12 months. This can be any sort of irritation or disagreement, regardless of significance or severity. Briefly indicate the nature of the conflict. You should not use instructors’ names.

Of the 364 students, 156 students wrote about a conflict they had experienced with an instructor. Eighty-one students indicated that they had experienced no conflicts with instructors, and 127 left the questionnaire blank. A total of 243 units of conflict were generated across the study.

This first part of the data collection was viable for determining general categories of conflict. However, after a review of the responses, it was evident that there was a need for more specific instruction in order to determine how students responded in the situations. Thus, the instructions differed slightly from the first data collection to the second and were as follows:

In the space provided, please write about a conflict you have experienced with a college instructor. This can be any sort of irritation, disagreement, or grievance, regardless of the significance or severity. **Briefly write about the conflict, explaining what the conflict was about, how it began, and how you dealt with it.** You should not use instructors’ names.

Of the 346 students who received this questionnaire, 264 students responded with a narrative of a conflict episode experienced with an instructor. Overall, these narratives were much more detailed than those from the first data collection. Sixty-one students wrote that they had experienced no conflict, and 21 left the questionnaire blank. This procedure was approved by the Kent State University Human Subjects Review Board and
all participants were given a consent form prior to completing the research (see Appendix A).

Part I Coding

To analyze the data from the first part of Study I, I completed several stages by following the example set forth by Kearney et al. (1991) for coding qualitative data from students about classroom teachers. First, one coder read all of the responses and separated them into discrete conflict units. If a student generated more than one unit of conflict, the units were separated. A unit was defined as each individual conflict. For example, one student wrote:

Many of my teachers have been foreign and it can be SOOOOOoo oo hard to understand them and to learn from them. Also, for one of my business classes, my instructor didn’t copy the last part of all the sentences of an exam, so we didn’t know what the questions on the test were supposed to say. The study guide he passed out didn’t help us review for it either.

In this example, there were three units of conflict. The first unit was that the student indicated that foreign teachers are difficult to understand and prevent learning. The second was that an instructor did not copy a test correctly, making it difficult to take the test. The third unit was that the student felt the study guide was inadequate. To identify all of the units in the responses, the first coder read each page of responses generated by students who participated in the first data collection. Two additional coders read through the data and unitized a sample of 10% of the responses. The Cohen’s Kappa for unitizing reliability for the sample was .86 between coder two and coder three, .92 between coders one and two, and .92 between coders one and three. The coefficient alpha for the three
coders was .96. Cohen’s Kappa was used to determine unitizing reliability because this statistic has been defended as the measure of choice for researchers that are coding behavior (Dewey, 1983).

In the second stage of analysis, the primary coder read the units and coded them into categories that contained similar words, phrases, and themes. Initially, 20 categories of classroom conflict emerged. Units were coded into only one category. This stage was undertaken in order to identify the number of and titles for categories. Again, two additional coders were provided with a sample of 10% of the units and asked to categorize them. The Cohen’s Kappa for inter-coder reliability for this sample was .87 between coders two and three, .93 between coders one and two, and .93 between coders one and three. The coefficient alpha for the three coders was .97.

In the third stage, all of the units were re-read and checked for consistency to be certain that the units were sorted into the appropriate categories. This stage was completed by all three coders. The Cohen’s Kappa for inter-coder reliability for this stage was .89 between coders one and two, .89 between coders one and three, and .96 between coders two and three. The coefficient alpha for the three coders was .98. The Cohen’s Kappas and coefficient alphas provided a satisfactory indication that inter-coder reliability was acceptable and the results of the coding were reliable. After this stage, the causes for discrepancy in inter-coder reliability were examined and two of the categories were collapsed into other existing categories. The remaining 18 categories were renamed to appropriately reflect the units of conflict assigned to each category.
Part II Coding

The second set of data collected in Study I was used to create the *Student-Teacher Conflict Index*, a measure intended to examine classroom conflicts. This index (employed in Study II) presented participants with hypothetical conflict scenarios to which they could select answers as to how they would respond if they were students in the situations. Once the conflicts in Study I were coded, the ten categories of conflicts that encompassed the most units reported were used to create the scenarios. Ten scenarios were provided to Study II participants because this gave them a chance to indicate how they would respond to conflict in more than one situation. The scenarios were created to represent the types of conflicts represented in each of the top ten conflict categories. I used specific examples of conflict provided by the 346 Study I participants to create the scenarios.

By using the narratives provided by students, I was able to create realistic conflict scenarios for Study II participants to read. Additionally, I used the responses reported by participants in the second data set in Study I to create realistic multiple choice answers from which the participants in Study II could select their strategy. The multiple choice responses in each scenario represented the three conflict strategy types: integrative, distributive, and avoidance. Pavitt and Kemp (1999) also provided participants with conflict scenarios to determine what type of conflict strategy they would select in the given situation. The scenarios used in this study represented the categories of testing, grading, attendance, course structure, discussing irrelevant content in class, unrealistic expectations, incompetent teaching skills, non-native English speakers, teacher personality, and favoritism.
Three coders read through the completed index to check for reliability and validity. First, coders read the scenarios to determine if they reflected the category of conflict intended. All coders agreed that all categories represented the intended conflict categories. Thus, the categories were determined to have face validity. Second, the coders read the multiple choice responses and indicated what conflict strategy was represented in each response. The coders reviewed each response and coded them as either integrative, distributive, or avoidance. The Cohen’s Kappa for inter-coder reliability for this phase was 1.0 between coders one and two, .95 between coders one and three, and .95 between coders two and three. The coefficient alpha for the three coders was .99. Only the coding for one response was disagreed upon between the three coders, and that response was changed so it more clearly represented the conflict strategy intended.

Study II

Participants

The participants were 171 students from a basic communication course at a large Midwestern university. Approximately 40% were freshman, 40% were sophomores, 12% were juniors, and 8% were seniors. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 40 with a mean age of 20.1. Thirty-three percent of the participants were female and 67% were male. This course fulfilled a general education requirement across the university and thus students represented a diversity of major fields. Students participated in the research in order to fulfill a class requirement, although the choice to participate in this specific study was voluntary.
**Procedure**

For Study II, participants were solicited for one hour increments, during which time they completed the required self-report measures. As students arrived, they were given a letter that briefly explained the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). Then, students were read instructions before beginning the research. The instructions were read to each group in the same manner from a script (see Appendix C). The students then completed the self-report measures. The order of the conflict scenarios and personality trait questionnaires were varied in four ways for participants, so that any effect order might have on responses could be controlled.

The four varieties of the order of measures were distributed as follows. In group 1, 43 participants completed the communication disposition scales first, and then completed the *Student-Teacher Conflict Index*. For this group, the scenarios were ordered with the topics of conflict as follow: grades, course structure, attendance, irrelevant content, unrealistic expectations, incompetence, testing, non-native English speakers, teacher personality, and favoritism. In group 2, 42 participants completed the *Student-Teacher Conflict Index* first, with the scenarios placed in the same order as group 1, and then completed the communication disposition scales. In group 3, 43 participants completed the communication disposition scales first, and then completed the *Student-Teacher Conflict Index*. For this group, the scenarios were ordered with the topics of conflict as follow: non-native English speakers, favoritism, teacher personality, testing, incompetence, grades, attendance, unrealistic expectations, irrelevant content, course structure. In group 4, 43 participants completed the *Student-Teacher Conflict Index*, with the scenarios placed in the same order as group 3, and then completed the communication
disposition scales. For all four groups, the communication disposition scales were administered in the following order: Argumentativeness Scale, Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, and Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale.

To complete the Student-Teacher Conflict Index, students responded to five steps for each scenario. First, students read a scenario that presented a conflict between a student and teacher. Second, students were instructed to select the response, from three possible behaviors, that most closely matched the action (or lack of action) they would take. Each response represented one of the three conflict strategies (integrative, distributive, and avoidant). Third, participants reported what channel (e.g., face-to-face conversation, e-mail, telephone) they would use to respond to the conflict. These channels were presented as multiple choice options. Fourth, participants indicated, through a self-report questionnaire, their attributions of the teacher’s intent to cooperate, responsibility, stability, and controllability for each situation. Fifth, at the end of each scenario, participants indicated how much conflict they perceived to be present in the scenario. These steps were completed ten times, once for each scenario.

So that students could have a more complete understanding of the purpose and results of the study, students were debriefed at the end of the semester with a brief explanation of the study. This debriefing was posted on a public research board in the department where the data was collected.
Instruments

*Student-Teacher Conflict Index*

The *Student Teacher Conflict Index* was created from the data in Study I. It is a measure that presents ten hypothetical conflict scenarios to students and then presents multiple choice options for how the student would react in the given situation. The specific details for the scenarios and responses were drawn from the examples provided by students in Study I. These scenarios constituted the means of determining which strategies students would use to respond to conflict (see Appendix D).

*Conflict Strategies*

After reading each of the scenarios, students were asked to select from multiple choice responses which strategy most closely represented the one that they would use in the situation. These answers were created using the student responses to the conflict questionnaires from the second data set in Study I. By using this technique, the responses reflected realistic conflict situations. There were three responses for each scenario, with one representing each strategy category (see Appendix D). These responses represented the strategy categories as set forth by Sillars (1980a; see Appendix E). A participant’s predominant strategy was determined by selecting the one that was used most often across the scenarios. If the predominant strategy was mixed, the participant was considered to be using multiple strategies, and the data were not used in the study.

The method of providing conflict scenarios and multiple choice responses has been used in other conflict research (Pavitt & Kemp, 1999). Although measures such as the *Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict* (Rahim, 1983), and the *Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument* (Putnam & Wilson, 1982) exist to
measure conflict styles, these measures are meant to be used to indicate strategy selection for only one conflict, rather than a set of conflicts, as were presented to the participants of this study. Each of these measures contains too many items to try to have participants complete them after reading each scenario; it would likely create fatigue for participants. Some studies have allowed participants to write open-ended responses to indicate how a participant would respond to a conflict (e.g., Sternberg & Soriano, 1984; Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989). Although respondents may be able to best create their own plan of action which could then be coded into one of the conflict strategy types, there is the possibility that they could supply too brief a response for a coder to know which category the response belongs in. For this reason, multiple choice responses were provided.

*Argumentativeness*

Argumentativeness was measured by the *Argumentativeness Scale* (Infante, 1988; Infante & Rancer, 1982; see Appendix F). This scale has been used frequently to measure the trait of argumentativeness in communication research (Infante, 1981; Infante Chandler, & Rudd, 1989; Infante & Gorden, 1987; Rancer, Kosberg, & Baukus, 1992). This scale includes 20-items measuring argumentativeness, such as “I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get into an argument.” The items are split into two major categories: the tendency to approach arguments (ARGap) and the tendency to avoid arguments (ARGav). Thus, overall argumentativeness is measured by subtracting ARGav from ARGap (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Participants self-report their argumentativeness by responding to these items on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (*always true*) to 5 (*never true*). People are considered high in argumentativeness if
they fall one standard deviation above the mean or higher. Low argumentatives fall one
standard deviation below the mean or lower. In this study, however, argumentativeness
will be measured as a continuous variable and not split into categories of low, medium,
and high.

The argumentativeness scale has the advantage of demonstrated reliability and
validity (Graham, 1994). Infante and Rancer (1982) reported reliability as high as .91 for
the ARGap items and .86 for the ARGav items. The scale was used in conflict strategy
behavior research previously by Canary, Cunningham, and Cody (1988). These
researchers reported alphas of .83 (ARGap) and .79 (ARGav).

Aggressiveness

The independent variable of aggressiveness was measured using the *Verbal
Aggressiveness Scale* (Infante & Wigley, 1986; Appendix G). This scale has been used
frequently to measure the trait of aggressiveness in communication research. This scale
includes 20 items measuring verbal aggressiveness, such as “When I try to influence
people, I make a great effort not to offend them,” and “If individuals I am trying to
influence really deserve it, I attack their character.” Responses to these items are recorded
on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never true*) to 5 (*almost always
true*). The scores from the scale are summed and high scores demonstrate high levels of
verbal aggressiveness.

The *Verbal Aggressiveness Scale* has demonstrated reliability and validity (Rubin,
1994). Infante and Wigley (1986) found a reliability coefficient of .81 for this scale.
Other research has published reliability as high as .87 (Wrench, 2002).
Communication Apprehension

To measure students’ communication anxiety, I used the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PCRA-24; McCroskey, 1982; Appendix H). The PCRA-24 is a 24-item scale that measures an individual’s apprehension across four contexts: public, small group, meeting, and dyadic or interpersonal encounters. Each of these contexts could be relevant for teacher-student interactions as students may be expected to give speeches in classes (the public context), and could work with teachers in small groups, meetings, and through dyadic encounters. Because this measure indicates an individual’s apprehension across contexts, it can be used as a general measure of apprehension. The scale uses a five-point Likert response that ranges from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Items include statements such as “I have no fear of speaking up in conversations,” and “My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.” The scale is summed across the four contexts to achieve a general apprehension score. As with the argumentativeness scale, participants with scores that fall one standard deviation above or below the mean are considered high and low in anxiety (McCroskey & Richmond, 1976).

This scale is similar to the Communication Anxiety Inventory—Trait Form (Booth-Butterfield, & Gould, 1986), but has the benefit of slightly higher reliability coefficients. The reliability of the scale ranges from .90 to .95 (McCroskey et al., 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1976). The scale has also been found to be valid across several research studies (Beatty, 1994; Rubin et al., 1990).
Interpersonal Communication Competence

This variable was measured using the Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS; Rubin & Martin, 1994; see Appendix I). This 30-item scale includes items that measure 10 aspects of interpersonal communication competence: empathy, social relaxation, self disclosure, assertiveness, interaction management, altercentrism, expressiveness, supportiveness, immediacy, and environmental control. There is a shorter, 10-item version of this scale that was used for this study. This 10-item scale provides an overall interpersonal communication competence score.

The five-point frequency scale ranges from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) for items such as, “I allow friends to see who I really am,” “My conversations are characterized by smooth shifts from one topic to the next,” and “I accomplish my communication goals.” The ICCS is reliable (Martin & Anderson, 1995, Martin & Rubin, 1998) and valid (Rubin & Martin, 1994). Internal reliability of the overall scale was .86 (Rubin & Martin, 1994). Concurrent validity was found when the scale was positively related to both cognitive flexibility and communication flexibility (Rubin & Martin, 1994).

Attributions of Conflict

The four dimensions of attributions of conflict were measured using the Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDSII; McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992; see Appendix J). The original Causal Dimension Scale was created a few years earlier (Russell, 1982). Although it was found to be reliable, the dimension of controllability achieved a reliability coefficient of only .52 (Russell, McAuley, & Tarico, 1987). The CDSII altered the controllability dimension to measure both internal and external controllability and
achieved a much higher reliability of .79 for personal control and .82 for external control. In addition to controllability, the scale measures the dimensions of stability and locus of responsibility. Controllability, stability, and locus of responsibility are each measured through three items. An additional three items were added to this scale to measure the intent to cooperate, which Sillars (1980a) indicated was part of the attributions people make in order to choose a conflict strategy. Participants responded to all 12 items on 9-point rating scales. The CDSII scale has been found to be both valid and reliable. When used across four studies, McAuley et al. found the reliability of the scale to range from .60 to .92.

The total scores for each dimension are obtained by summing the items that measure that dimension. High scores in locus of responsibility indicate that the participant believes the cause to be in themselves. Low scores in this area indicate the cause to belong to the other person in the conflict. High scores in the dimension of external control indicate others have control in the situation while low scores indicate others do not have control. The opposite is true of the personal control dimension, high scores indicate greater personal control, and low scores indicate low personal control. High scores in the dimension of stability indicate a belief that the conflict is stable and unchangeable whereas low scores indicate instability and change. High scores in intent to cooperate indicate that the participant believes the other person is trying to cooperate to resolve the conflict. Low scores indicate the other is not trying to cooperate.

Channel Selection

After reading each scenario, participants indicated how they would respond to the conflict. Participants also were asked, “What channel of communication would you use to
do this?” Participants could select from six multiple choice items: (a) talk to the instructor face-to-face, (b) have a conversation with the instructor on the phone, (c) leave a voice mail message for the instructor, (d) write a note to the instructor, (e) write and e-mail message to the instructor, or (f) I would do nothing in this situation. The categorical responses were considered when examining strategy choice.

Perceived Conflict

Each conflict scenario was presented to the students on a separate page. At the top of the page was the scenario itself, followed by the strategy response selection, followed by the channel selection, and then followed by the Revised Causal Dimension Scale. At the bottom of each page was an item that measured the perceived conflict present in the scenario. The item read, “How much conflict would this situation represent for you?” The participants responded on a 9-point semantic differential scale with 1 being a very low level of conflict and 9 being a very high level of conflict.

Power Analysis

The power of a test is the ability of the test of statistical significance to detect differences in means when differences exist (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). In other words, it is the likelihood that one will reject the null hypothesis. Murphy and Myors (2004) reported that there is a general consensus among researchers that power should be at least .50. A power of .80 is more desirable as this power level means that the success of the study is four times as likely as failure. To have adequate power for a discriminant analysis, it is recommended to have at least 20 participants for each independent variable in the analysis (Hair et al., 1998). Since there are eight independent variables in this study, I
needed to obtain at least 160 participants to have adequate power. This number was achieved.

To test the hypotheses, univariate ANOVAs were employed. The independent variable was strategy type (integrative, distributive, avoidance). With a sample size of 164 (see below), power to detect a moderate effect size ($f = .25$) at the 5% level was .82 and power to detect a large effect size ($f = .40$) at the 5% level was .99 (Cohen, 1988).
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

In this study, I examined the conflict strategies students reported using when faced with conflict with teachers. I proposed three research questions and eight hypotheses that address whether the communication predispositions of students or the attributions they make in conflict situations best predict which conflict strategies they select and how the traits and attributions differ across the strategy categories. Two studies were conducted. The first identified categories of student-teacher conflicts reported by students. The second study examined student responses to conflicts to determine if a trait model or an attribution model better predicts strategy choice. The relationship between preferred conflict strategy and channel selection was also investigated in Study II. In this chapter, the results of the two studies are reported. The chapter is divided by study and according to research questions and hypotheses. I begin with RQ1, which was answered by the data collected in Study I. In the results for Study II, I answer RQ2, RQ3, and present the results for the testing of all of the hypotheses.

Study I

In Study I, I wanted to learn what categories of student-teacher conflict students report occurring in their education processes. In order to determine these categories, I used an open-ended survey design in which the participants were asked to recall and report about a conflict between themselves and their instructors. The questionnaire was distributed during the Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 semesters as part of the department’s mass testing research. In addition to determining the categories of conflict, narratives were also gathered that could be used to create hypothetical, but realistic scenarios of
student-teacher conflicts. This collection of scenarios was used to create the Student-Teacher Conflict Index. The data for Study I was coded as described in Chapter 2 and the results of Study I are detailed below.

RQ1 asked what conflicts are experienced between students and teachers. Study I was conducted in two parts. Part I involved a collection of data from students who indicated what conflicts they had experienced with instructors. The responses in Part I were analyzed to develop a preliminary typology of classroom conflict categories. Part II solicited the same information, but students provided more detail about the conflicts experienced. The responses from Part II were used to create the Student-Teacher Conflict Index. From both parts of Study I, out of 710 students, 420 indicated at least one conflict with an instructor. However, only the responses in Part I were analyzed and categorized. From the data collected in Part I, the participants generated 243 units of conflict. From these units, 18 general categories of conflict emerged from the data. The conflict categories can be grouped into teacher behaviors and class/work conflicts. Students reported conflicts related to testing, grading, attendance, textbooks, the structure of courses, debates about content of the course, and having to teach themselves. Each of these categories is related to the class/work that students do or how they participate in a course. These conflicts accounted for approximately 32.1% of the conflicts reported.

Students also reported conflicts related to how the teacher teaches, including inadequately covering course material, discussing irrelevant content during class, being incompetent in teaching, having a poor delivery style, holding unrealistic expectations for the students, not being able to speak English well, having an undesirable personality, being disrespectful to students, not being helpful, and showing favoritism towards some
students. These teacher-related conflicts accounted for approximately 67.9% of the conflicts reported.

Table 1 presents the categories with sample conflicts obtained with this procedure. This table also presents the rankings of these categories, the frequency of occurrence in the data, and the percentages against the total number of units analyzed in the study.

Study II

The purpose of Study II was to determine whether the trait model, the attributional model, or some combination of both best predicted what conflict strategies students selected. Participants read 10 hypothetical conflict scenarios and indicated which of the three provided responses was most similar to the manner in which they would respond to the situation. The three responses corresponded to integrative, distributive, and avoidant strategies.

Reliability

Prior to conducting the data analyses, the reliability of the measures was assessed.

Trait Measures

The Argumentativeness Scale (Infante, 1988; Infante & Rancer, 1982) had a coefficient alpha of .87 for the dimension that measures the tendency to approach argumentative situations (ARGap) and .86 for the dimension that measures the tendency to avoid argumentative situations (ARGav). When the ARGav items were reverse coded, and all items were combined, the coefficient alpha was .90. The Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986) coefficient alpha for reliability was .85. The overall
### Table 1

**Student Perceived Conflict Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflicts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class/work-related conflicts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESTING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests are poorly constructed, makes questions too difficult, doesn’t provide adequate study guide, doesn’t allow enough time for test, or asks trick questions.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t round up grades with a .5 to next highest grade, grades are lower than deserved, or too subjective in grading.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTENDANCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penalizes students for arriving late, leaving early, or missing class; doesn’t allow students to make-up work when absent, requires attendance when it should be optional.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE STRUCTURE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course isn’t what is listed in the catalog, class is harder than it needs to be, and not enough time spent on certain subjects in the semester.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENTS TEACH THEMSELVES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must learn class material on their own or students must teach themselves by reading the book.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXTBOOK CHOICE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks are boring, poorly written, or expensive.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE MATERIAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate over information that is taught, about if it is right/wrong, or if students agree with concepts.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-related conflicts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher has a dialect that is difficult to understand or teacher doesn’t speak English well enough to understand or answer students’ questions.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOMPETENT TEACHING SKILLS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gives incorrect explanations of course material, teacher cannot explain material so another person can understand it, teacher is unprepared for class, and teacher is unorganized.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER PERSONALITY</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher is threatening, arrogant, impersonal, moody, controlling, boring, unmotivated, rude, unkind, not empathetic, condescending, and mean.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigns too much work and expects students to know material before it is covered in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHOWS FAVORITISM</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t treat all students fairly, gives some students special treatment, is biased against males/females, doesn’t assign grades equally.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSES IRRELEVANT CONTENT IN CLASS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on religion, politics, pop culture, or personal topics that are unrelated to the course during class time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER DELIVERY STYLE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotone lectures, too many non-fluencies, relies too much on PowerPoint, and lack of eye contact or involvement with class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT HELPFUL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t answer questions, won’t meet students outside of class, doesn’t respond to e-mails, and not available during office hours.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISRESPECTFUL TOWARDS STUDENTS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher treats students like children, calls students names, or embarrasses students in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INADEQUATELY COVERS COURSE MATERIAL</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t spend enough time teaching material students need to know, covers too little in the class time, and doesn’t explain material in textbook.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOESN’T LISTEN TO STUDENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t listen to student questions or concerns.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
coefficient alpha for the PRCA-24 (McCroskey, 1982) was .95. The coefficient alpha for the Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (Rubin & Martin, 1994) was .81.

Attributional Measures

The alphas for the Revised Causal Dimension Scale were computed individually for each scenario as well as across scenarios. The coefficient alphas ranged from .84 to .95 across the five attributional dimensions. These results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Coefficient Alphas for Dimensions of the Revised Causal Dimension Scale by Scenario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>External Control</th>
<th>Personal Control</th>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Intent to Cooperate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Grades</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Course structure</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Attendance</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Irrelevant content</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Unrealistic expectations</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Incompetence</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Testing</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Non-native English speakers</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Teacher personality</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Favoritism</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall reliability</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceived Conflict

After reading each scenario, participants were asked what level of conflict was represented in the scenario on a scale of 1 (very low level) to 9 (very high level). An analysis of the data indicated that of the 10 scenarios, 8 were rated with mean scores above the midpoint (5) on this scale. These results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Perceived Level of Conflict Represented in Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Grades</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Course structure</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Attendance</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Irrelevant content</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Unrealistic expectations</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Incompetence</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Testing</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Non-native English speakers</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Teacher personality</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Favoritism</td>
<td>7.02</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the same two scenarios that fell below the midpoint on the level of conflict scale also fell on a different factor from the others when the levels of conflict for the 10 scenarios were factor analyzed. Because scenarios 2 and 4 fell below the midpoint on the scale, and factored differently than the other scenarios in a factor analysis, these two scenarios were eliminated from the remaining analysis. Thus the data analyses were based on eight scenarios.

*Primary Strategy*

One purpose of Study 2 was to determine whether communication dispositions or attributions best predict which conflict strategy students use (RQ2). To investigate this issue, discriminant analyses were conducted. Each participant’s primary conflict strategy was identified by summing the number of times they selected avoidance, integrative, and distributive strategies across the eight scenarios. A participant’s primary strategy type was the one that he or she selected most frequently. If there was a tie, and a participant selected, for example, distributive strategies four times and avoidance strategies four times, then that participant was eliminated from further analyses. Seven students were eliminated from the analysis using this procedure. One-hundred-one students were categorized as having an integrative strategy, 27 as distributive, and 36 as avoidant.

*Data Analysis*

*Research Question 2*

RQ2 asked whether the trait approach, the attributional approach, or a combination of both best predicted the conflict strategies students favor. To answer this question, I conducted three separate discriminant analyses using the standard method, where all variables were entered simultaneously, comparing the trait model, the
attributional model, and then both together to determine which model best predicts conflict strategy choices. Discriminant analysis is a statistical procedure that allows a researcher to examine the differences between two or more groups of objects with respect to several continuous independent variables simultaneously (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Klecka, 1980). This procedure allowed me to determine whether meaningful differences exist among the three conflict strategy groups and to identify the discriminating power of each independent variable involved in the study. The analysis identifies those variables that contribute most to the differences between groups and assigns weights to those variables (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). In this analysis, the dependent variable, conflict strategy, contained three categories: integrative, distributive, and avoidance. The independent variables were personality traits of argumentation, verbal aggressiveness, communication apprehension, and interpersonal communication competence as well as the attributional dimensions of stability, controllability, locus of responsibility, and intent to cooperate.

As with any statistic, there are several assumptions that must be met before the results can be considered reliable (Brace, Kemp, & Snelgar, 2003; Eskildsen, 2002; Goldstein & Dillon, 1978; Hand, 1982; Klecka, 1980). The first set of assumptions deals with group membership and number of variables. The data set must contain two or more mutually exclusive groups. Within each mutually exclusive groups, there needs to be at least two cases. This assumption was accomplished in this study because participants using equal numbers of strategies were eliminated. There can be any number of discriminating variables (independent variables), provided that this number is less than the total number of cases minus two. (Thus, if there are 10 cases, there could be no more
than 8 discriminating variables.) This assumption was also accomplished, with 164 cases and 9 discriminating variables. The discriminating variables need to be measurable on an interval scale (metric), and dependent variables should be nonmetric, which was the case in this study.

The second set of assumptions has to do with the measurement results and sampling requirements. Discriminating variables cannot be a linear combination of other discriminating variables. The population covariance matrices for each group must be approximately equal. (If they are not equal, there are special formulas that must be used.) And finally, each group should be drawn from a population that has a normal multivariate distribution on the discriminating variables (Brace et al., 2003; Eskildsen, 2002; Goldstein & Dillon, 1978; Hand, 1982; Klecka, 1980). If the rate of prediction of classification is not acceptable, this might be due to the violation of some of these assumptions, especially those regarding outliers and homogeneity of variance (Brace et al., 2003). These assumptions were also met in this study.

The first discriminant analysis performed was with conflict strategy as the dependent variable and the communication predispositions of argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, communication apprehension, and interpersonal communication competence as the predictor variables. As noted earlier, the communication predisposition model was tested using only the participant’s primary conflict strategy choice which was determined by selecting the strategy chosen most often by the student. Because some participants were eliminated due to a mixed-strategy as a predominant strategy, only 95.6% of the cases were included in the analysis (N = 164).
Box’s test of equality of covariance matrices showed that the groups did not differ in their covariance matrices and thus met this assumption of discriminant analysis ($p = .068$). Univariate ANOVAs conducted as part of the discriminant analysis revealed that the mean verbal aggressiveness scores differed significantly across categories, $F(2, 161) = 6.98, p < .001$, the mean communication apprehension scores differed significantly across categories, $F(2, 161) = 5.65, p < .004$, and the mean interpersonal communication competence scores differed across categories, $F(2, 161) = 7.79, p < .001$. The effect of argumentativeness approached significance, but did not differ significantly across categories, $F(2, 161) = 2.64, p = .074$. The means and standard deviations for each predisposition for each strategy type are presented in Table 4.

Two discriminant functions were calculated. Both function one ($\chi^2 = 34.92, df = 8, p < .001$) and function two achieved significance ($\chi^2 = 14.36, df = 3, p < .01$). The values of these functions were significantly different for participants selecting different conflict strategies. The correlations between predictor variables and the discriminant function suggested that verbal aggression and interpersonal communication competence were the best predictors of the distributive strategy selection. Competence, apprehension, and argumentativeness best discriminate for the avoidance strategy selection. Overall, the discriminant function successfully predicted outcome for 53.0% of the cases, with accurate predictions made for 47.2% of avoidance strategies, 66.7% of distributive strategies, and 51.5% of integrative strategies. The results of this discriminant analysis are presented in Table 5.
### Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for Communication Predispositions by Conflict Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Strategy</th>
<th>Communication Predisposition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>11.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>50.44</td>
<td>10.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>14.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal Competence</td>
<td>36.61</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive</td>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>13.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>58.19</td>
<td>7.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>20.67</td>
<td>14.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal Competence</td>
<td>36.96</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>12.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>50.64</td>
<td>10.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>16.09</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal Competence</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The possible range of scores for each communication predisposition was: Argumentativeness (–40–40), Verbal Aggressiveness (20–100), Apprehension, (–44–68), Competence (10–50). A higher mean indicates greater argumentativeness, aggressiveness, and competence. A lower mean indicates greater apprehension.
Table 5

**Communication Predispositions Discriminant Analysis Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Function 1</th>
<th>Function 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUMMARY STATISTICS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonical Correlation</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilk’s Lambda</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>34.92</td>
<td>14.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of Freedom</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VARIABLE CORRELATIONS (r) WITH THE FUNCTION:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>.79*</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Comm.</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td>.78*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apprehension</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.77*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.45*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GROUP CENTROIDS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Group</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>-.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Group</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Group</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of Cases Correctly Classified</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Group</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Group</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Group</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * indicates largest absolute correlation between each variable and any discriminant function.*

To investigate the attributional model of conflict strategy choice, a second discriminant analysis was performed. As in the prior analysis, conflict strategy (integrative, distributive, and avoidance) was the dependent variable. The predictor variables were the five attributional dimensions: responsibility, stability, personal control,
external control, and intent to cooperate. For this analysis, the attributional model was tested by averaging the participants’ attributions across scenarios. The resulting scores are assumed to reflect each participant’s propensity toward certain kinds of attributions in classroom conflict situations. The scores for each attributional dimension were added together for the 8 scenarios and divided by eight to attain a mean score. As in the first discriminant analysis, I considered only the participant’s primary conflict strategy choice which was determined by selecting the strategy chosen most often by the student. As in the previous discriminant analysis, some participants were eliminated due to a mixed-strategy as a predominant strategy. Another case was eliminated because it was missing discriminating variables. Thus, 95.3% of the cases were included in this analysis ($N = 163$).

Box’s test of equality of covariance matrices showed that the groups did differ in their covariance matrices and thus violated this assumption of discriminant analysis ($p = .029$). However, discriminant analysis is robust even when the homogeneity of variances assumption is not met, provided the data do not contain important outliers (Klecka, 1980). Thus, the results of this analysis are still considered.

Univariate ANOVAs conducted as part of the discriminant analysis revealed that there were significant differences between participants who selected different conflict strategies across three of the five dimensions of attributions. There were significant differences in the personal control dimension scores between the different conflict strategies, $F(2, 160) = 5.55, p < .01$. There were also significant differences in the responsibility dimension scores between the different conflict strategies, $F(2, 160) = 4.57, p < .02$. Finally, there were significant differences in the stability dimension scores
between the different conflict strategies, $F(2, 160) = 3.41, p < .04$. The differences in the intent to cooperate dimension approached significance, $F(2, 160) = 2.15, p = .12$. But the differences in the external control dimension scores were not significant, $F(2, 160) = .13, p = .88$. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 6.

In this discriminant analysis, two discriminant functions were produced. Function one achieved significance ($\chi^2 = 19.84, df = 10, p = .031$) for participants selecting different conflict strategies. Function two did not achieve significance ($\chi^2 = 5.04, df = 4, p = .283$). The correlations between predictor variables and the discriminant function suggested that the dimensions of personal control, responsibility, and stability were the best predictors of conflict strategy selection in the significant function. Overall, the discriminant function successfully predicted outcome for 43.6% of the cases, with accurate predictions made for 50.0% of avoidance strategies, 48.1% of distributive strategies, and 40.0% of integrative strategies. The results of this discriminant analysis are presented in Table 7. Thus, to answer RQ2, which asked whether the trait approach or the attributional approach best predicted which conflict strategy students use, the results of the discriminant analyses indicated that the communication predisposition model predicted more conflict strategies correctly (53.0%) than did the attributional model (43.6%).

In order to determine if a mixed model would be the best predictor, one final discriminant analysis was conducted using conflict strategies as the dependent variables and all of the communication predispositions and all of the attributional dimensions as the predictor variables. Like the previous analyses, some participants were
Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations for Attributions by Conflict Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Strategy</th>
<th>Attributional Dimension</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>14.58</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>15.88</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>17.05</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>13.97</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>18.44</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>15.18</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>15.66</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>14.05</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>16.82</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>15.19</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* On each of the five dimensions, scores could range from 3 to 27. A higher mean indicates greater responsibility attributed to self, greater stability of conflict, greater personal control, greater external control, and greater intent to cooperate.
Table 7

Attribution Dimensions Discriminant Analysis Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Function 1</th>
<th>Function 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUMMARY STATISTICS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonical Correlation</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilk’s Lambda</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>19.84</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of Freedom</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VARIABLE CORRELATIONS (r) WITH THE FUNCTION:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>.79*</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>.76*</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td>-.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GROUP CENTROIDS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Group</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Group</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Group</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of Cases Correctly Classified</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Group</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Group</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Group</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * indicates largest absolute correlation between each variable and any discriminant function.

eliminated dues to mixed-strategies as a predominant strategy or missing discriminating variables. Of all the cases, 95.3% were included in the analysis ($N = 163$).

Box’s test of equality of covariance matrices showed that the groups did not differ in their covariance matrices and thus met this assumption of discriminant analysis ($p =
Univariate ANOVAs revealed that there were significant differences between participants who selected different conflict strategies across six of the nine variables. There were significant differences across conflict strategies for the variables of interpersonal communication competence, \( F(2, 160) = 7.52, p < .001 \), verbal aggressiveness, \( F(2, 160) = 7.01, p < .001 \), communication apprehension \( F(2, 160) = 5.67, p < .01 \), personal control, \( F(2, 160) = 5.55, p < .005 \), responsibility, \( F(2, 160) = 4.57, p < .02 \), and stability, \( F(2, 160) = 3.412, p < .04 \). The differences in intent to cooperate, \( F(2, 160) = 2.15, p < .02 \), argumentativeness \( F(2, 160) = 2.63, p = .75 \), and external control, \( F(2, 160) = .126, p = .88 \), were not significantly different between the participants selecting different conflict strategy types. The means and standard deviations for each predisposition for each strategy type are presented in Table 8.

From this analysis, two discriminant functions were calculated. Both function one \( (\chi^2 = 50.26, df = 18, p = .000) \) and function two achieved significance. \( (\chi^2 = 17.81, df = 8, p = .023) \). The values of these functions were significantly different for participants selecting different conflict strategies. The correlations between predictor variables and the discriminant function suggested that, in the first function, verbal aggression, attributions of personal control, attributions of responsibility, and attributions of stability were the best predictors of conflict strategy selection. In the second function, interpersonal communication competence, communication apprehension, attributions of intent to cooperate, argumentativeness, and attributions of external control were the best predictors of conflict strategy selection. Overall, the discriminant function successfully predicted outcome for 54.6% of the cases, with accurate predictions being made for 44.4% of avoidance strategies, 70.4% of distributive strategies, and 54.0% of integrative
Table 8

*Means and Standard Deviations for Predispositions and Attributions by Conflict Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Strategy</th>
<th>Attributional Dimension</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>11.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>50.44</td>
<td>10.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>14.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>36.61</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>14.58</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>15.88</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>17.05</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>13.97</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive</td>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>13.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>58.19</td>
<td>7.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>20.67</td>
<td>14.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>36.96</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>18.44</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>15.18</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>12.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>50.64</td>
<td>7.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>16.09</td>
<td>16.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>15.66</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>14.05</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>16.82</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>15.19</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

strategies. This combined model predicts the largest percentage of cases overall. The results of this discriminant analysis are presented in Table 9.
Table 9

**Summary of Discriminant Analysis with both Predispositions and Attributions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Function 1</th>
<th>Function 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUMMARY STATISTICS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonical Correlation</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilk’s Lambda</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>50.26</td>
<td>17.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of Freedom</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VARIABLE CORRELATIONS (r) WITH THE FUNCTION:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>.62*</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communication Competence</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apprehension</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.64*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.46*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.35*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GROUP CENTROIDS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Group</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Group</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Group</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Cases Correctly Classified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Group</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Group</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Group</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * indicates largest absolute correlation between each variable and any discriminant function.
Tests of Hypotheses

To test H1 through H8, univariate ANOVAs and Scheffe post-hoc analyses were employed. The first hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to argumentativeness, in that (H1a) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor integrative strategies, and (H1b) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor distributive strategies. As noted previously, a univariate ANOVA indicated that mean argumentativeness scores did not differ significantly across the three strategies, $F(2, 161) = 2.64, p = .074$, although these results approached significance. The mean argumentativeness score of students who favored avoidance strategies ($M = 1.92$) was lower than for students who favored integrative ($M = 5.38$) or distributive strategies ($M = 9.07$), but the differences were not significant. Thus, there was a failure to support H1. The results for this and all ANOVAs related to the hypotheses are presented in Table 10.

The second hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to verbal aggressiveness, in that (H2a) students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor integrative strategies, and (H2b) students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor avoidance strategies. As noted earlier, a univariate ANOVA determined that mean verbal aggressiveness scores differed significantly across the three strategies, $F(2, 161) = 6.98, p < .001$. A Scheffe post-hoc analysis determined that the mean verbal aggressiveness score of students who favored distributive strategies was significantly higher ($M = 58.19$) than
Table 10

*Univariate ANOVA Results for All Hypotheses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Aggression</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apprehension</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Competence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Control</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Control</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to Cooperate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for students favoring integrative ($M = 50.44, p < .002$) or avoidance strategies ($M = 50.64, p < .01$). Thus H2a and H2b were supported.

The third hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to communication apprehension, in that (H3a) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor integrative strategies, and (H3b) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor distributive strategies. As previously noted, a univariate ANOVA indicated that mean apprehension scores differed significantly across the three strategies, $F(2, 161) = 5.65, p$
A Scheffe post-hoc analysis indicated that greater apprehension was experienced by students favoring avoidance strategies ($M = 7.72$) than by those favoring integrative ($M = 16.10, p < .03$) or distributive strategies ($M = 20.67, p < .008$). A lower mean indicates greater apprehension and thus both H3a and H3b were supported.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to interpersonal communication competence, in that (H4a) students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor avoidance strategies, and (H4b) students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor distributive strategies. A univariate ANOVA indicated that mean competence scores differed significantly across the three strategies, $F(2, 161) = 7.79, p < .001$. A Scheffe post-hoc analysis revealed that the mean competence score of students who favored integrative strategies ($M = 39.60$) was significantly higher than for students who favored avoidance ($M = 36.61, p < .003$) or distributive ($M = 36.96, p < .03$) strategies. Thus both H4a and H4b were supported.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to the attributional dimension of intent to cooperate, in that (H5a) students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor distributive strategies, and (H5b) students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor avoidance strategies. As previously indicated, a univariate ANOVA indicated that mean scores on intent to cooperate did not differ significantly across the favored strategy categories, $F(2, 160) = 2.15, p = .12$, \< .004.
although these results approached significance. The mean intent to cooperate score of students who favored integrative strategies ($M = 15.19$) was higher than for those who favored distributive ($M = 15.18$) and avoidance strategies (13.97), but not significantly so. Thus, H5 was not supported.

The sixth hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to the attributional dimension of responsibility, in that (H6a) students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies, and (H6b) students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor avoidance strategies. As indicated earlier, a univariate ANOVA indicated that mean scores on responsibility differed significantly across favored strategy categories, $F(2, 160) = 4.57, p < .01$. A Scheffe post-hoc analysis indicated that the mean responsibility score of students who favored integrative strategies ($M = 15.66$) was significantly lower than scores of students who favored distributive strategies ($M = 17.89$, $p < .02$), but did not differ significantly with the score of students who favored avoidance strategies ($M = 15.43$, $p < .950$). A higher score of responsibility indicates that responsibility is attributed to the self rather than the other. Therefore, students who favored integrative strategies attributed responsibility to their instructors or the situation more than did those preferring distributive strategies and H6a and H6b were not supported.

The seventh hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to the attributional dimension of stability, in that (H7a) students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than
students who favor integrative strategies, and (H7b) students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies. As noted earlier, a univariate ANOVA indicated that mean scores on stability differed significantly across the favored strategy categories, $F(2, 160) = 3.41, p < .04$. A Scheffe post-hoc analysis indicated that the mean score of stability for students who favored avoidance strategies ($M = 14.58$) was not significantly higher than for students who favored integrative ($M = 14.05, p = .60$) or distributive strategies ($M = 15.56, p = .36$). Thus students who favored avoidance strategies did not attribute conflicts to stable factors more than students who favored integrative or distributive strategies; H7a and H7b were not supported. Although not predicted, perceptions of stability were significantly higher for those favoring distributive strategies than for those who favored integrative strategies, ($p < .04$).

The eighth hypothesis predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy are related to the attributional dimension of controllability, in that (H8a) students who favor distributive strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control and under another person’s control more than students who favor avoidance strategies, and (H8b) students who favor distributive strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control and under another person’s control more than students who favor integrative strategies. In the Revised Causal Dimension Scale, there are two sets of items that represent the dimension of control: external control and personal control items. The dimension was split during the creation of the Revised Causal Dimension Scale in order to increase reliability of an overall control dimension (McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992). Univariate ANOVAs were computed for both external and personal control.
The first ANOVA indicated that mean scores on external control did not differ significantly across the favored strategy categories, $F(2, 160) = .13, p = .88$. The second ANOVA indicated that mean scores of personal control did significantly differ across the favored strategy categories, $F(2, 160) = 5.55, p < .005$. A Scheffe post-hoc analysis indicated that the mean personal control score of students who favored distributive strategies was higher ($M = 18.44$), than for students who favored avoidance ($M = 15.88, p < .006$) or integrative strategies ($M = 16.67, p < .03$). A higher score of personal control indicates the perception that the student has more control than a lower score of personal control. Thus H8a and H8b were not supported.

**Research Question 3**

RQ3 asked whether conflict strategy influenced channel selection. The results indicated that face-to-face (FTF) communication was the primary channel selected for both integrative and distributive strategies. Participants chose FTF 89.4% of the time for integrative strategies and 80.3% of the time for distributive strategies. Those students who selected avoidant strategies primarily indicated that they would not communicate via any channel in the situation. The data suggest that students choosing distributive strategies may be somewhat more inclined to select mediated channels (18.1%) than students choosing integrative strategies (10.11%). Communicating via phone, voice mail, or through written notes made up just over 1% of the responses. These results are presented in Table 11.
Table 11

*Channel Selection and Conflict Strategy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FTF</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Voice Mail</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrative (633)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>89.42%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>9.95%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distributive (351)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>80.34%</td>
<td>1.42%</td>
<td>1.42%</td>
<td>15.10%</td>
<td>0.85%</td>
<td>0.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidant (383)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>98.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Count</strong></td>
<td>851</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>62.25%</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>8.65%</td>
<td>0.22%</td>
<td>28.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The results from Study 1 indicated that students perceive classroom conflicts to exist, with conflicts about course work and conflicts related to teacher behaviors being the two primary categories. Specific categories of these conflicts were explained in this chapter. The results from Study II indicated several findings. In answer to RQ2, the trait model predicts conflict strategy choice better than the attributional model, but a mixture of traits and attributions was the best predictor of students’ conflict strategy choice. Students favoring distributive, integrative, and avoidance strategies were found to differ significantly in traits such as verbal aggressiveness, communication apprehension, and
interpersonal communication competence. A tendency to make attributions of responsibility, stability, and personal control also differed across the three strategy groups. In answer to RQ3, strategy choice does appear to be related to channel selection. Students selected mediated channels at a greater rate when selecting distributive strategies than when selecting integrative strategies. In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications of these results.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

Learning how communication traits and attributional dimensions affect conflict strategy selection in the classroom is important to understanding interpersonal conflict. One purpose of this investigation was to determine what types of conflict are experienced by students and teachers. A second purpose of the study was to determine whether communication traits, attributional dimensions, or a combination of these best predict the conflict strategies selected by students in student-teacher conflicts. In this chapter, I discuss the results of the present investigation. A discussion of the research questions and hypotheses from Study I and Study II are discussed in sequence. Following this discussion is a presentation of the limitations of the present study. Last, a discussion of future research possibilities in the area of conflict and classroom conflict are offered.

Study I

RQ1 asked what conflicts are experienced between students and teachers. Of the 710 students who responded, 420 of them indicated that they had experienced some sort of conflict. With nearly 60% of the students experiencing conflict, it is evident that from the students’ perspective, there are conflicts occurring between students and teachers. The results of questionnaires supported the existence of eighteen categories of conflicts. These conflicts were grouped into two sub-categories: conflicts related to teacher behaviors, and conflicts related to class/work. In the category of conflicts related to teacher behaviors, some conflicts reported included conflicts about teachers’ personality qualities, teachers holding unrealistic expectations for students, and teachers not speaking
English in a competent manner. In the category of conflicts related to class work, the conflicts included testing methods, attendance policies, and problems with the textbooks.

The most frequently cited conflicts were about (a) testing and (b) non-native English speakers (a tie), followed by (c) incompetent teaching skills, and (d) unappealing teacher personality qualities. From the list of conflicts that was generated, a majority of the conflicts were about teacher behaviors. Thus, students recalled conflicts they believed were about something the teacher had done more than they recalled conflicts about actual class work. This finding might indicate that personality clashes between students and teachers could lead to more conflict than policies or coursework about which the students are unhappy.

Many of the conflicts reported by students were similar to the teacher misbehaviors indicated by Kearney et al. (1991). For example, in this study, students reported having conflicts with teachers because of their unappealing personalities. One student wrote:

My teacher thinks he’s so much better than we are. He always talks down to us and gets a nasty look on his face if we give a wrong answer. It doesn’t promote a learning environment. I dread going to that class because of him.

In the Kearney et al. study, “negative personality” was one category of misbehaviors found by researchers. Other categories were also similar. In this study, students reported conflicts about teachers who played favorites. In the Kearney et al. study, “shows favoritism or prejudice” was a category of teacher misbehaviors. With these similarities in categories, a question is raised about whether students perceive themselves to be in conflict with teachers if a teacher participates in these misbehaviors? Although not all of
the misbehaviors reported by Kearney et al. were reported in conjunction with the conflicts reported here, many were. Thus, students may perceive having to deal with teacher misbehaviors as a conflict; or, if a teacher misbehavior is perceived to interfere with the students’ learning, the behavior—or events caused by the behavior—may be perceived as conflict.

The conflicts reported in this study were primarily student-owned conflicts (C. Thomas, Karmos, & Altekruse, 1981). Student-owned conflicts occur when a student’s needs aren’t being met (such as when a student doesn’t receive a desired grade). Because students were surveyed to provide conflicts, the conflicts generated in this study were primarily student-owned. If teachers were asked to report classroom conflicts, the conflicts would likely be teacher-owned. Using students to respond to the given scenarios was acceptable in this study because Candice Thomas et al. reported that who will initiate a resolution depends on who ‘owns’ a conflict. When the conflicts are student-owned, students are more likely to initiate the resolution. Thus, since these conflicts were primarily student-owned, and the students’ needs were not being met, students likely would initiate conflict resolution. This could be one reason that so many students indicated an integrative approach to the conflict. Future research could examine whether different strategies are used when initiating a conflict than when responding to someone else’s initiation.

More conflicts were reported in the second data collection of Study I than in the first. One explanation of this phenomenon is that the first data collection occurred prior to the midpoint of the fall semester. At this point, many students had just begun taking classes, and since a large part of the sample were freshman, many were taking classes at
the university for the first time. They may not have had enough time to experience many conflicts with the instructors. The second round of data collection occurred about the midpoint of the spring semester. At this point, most of the students had finished at least one semester of coursework (the fall semester) at the university, and thus may have had more time to experience conflict with instructors. Also, many of the conflicts reported were about grades or testing, which might not have occurred until the end of the fall semester. Another explanation could be that the instructions were changed between the first and second collection periods. The instructions on the second questionnaire were more specific, and may have helped students to recall conflicts better.

Another interesting finding from Study I was that most students attributed responsibility for the conflict to the teacher. For example, one student wrote:

My spring semester of my freshman year, I had an art instructor who was very difficult to follow. She could hardly speak English and was always very unorganized. I did what I could in the class to understand what we were learning, but ultimately, I ended up with a “D” in the class because she didn’t teach very well. I had to Freshman forgive it.

In this narrative, the student explained that he or she earned a “D” because the teacher didn’t teach well enough rather than because the student couldn’t understand well enough. Most of the narratives followed this manner of explaining how a conflict was a teacher’s fault. This finding supports the results reported by Kelsey et al. (2004) that students tend to attribute teacher misbehaviors to the teacher rather than to the student or external factors. This finding also supports the theme across attributional literature that
observers tend to overestimate the responsibility of partners and underestimate their own responsibility (Heider, 1958; Ross, 1977, Sillars, 1980b).

Additionally, when students reported conflicts they realized were out of their teachers’ control, students wrote the narratives to indicate the conflict was also out of their own control. This was most common when indicating conflicts about grades. One student wrote:

The conflict between us was that I had to miss class due to a family emergency. The professor hesitated to excuse me because the circumstance did not fit into a ‘typical family emergency’ and I couldn’t provide documentation for it. My instructor would not allow me to make up a quiz that I missed that day. I understand why there’s a policy for documenting absences, but it wasn’t my fault that I couldn’t get one so I don’t think I should have been penalized.

In this situation, the student recognized that the teacher was following a rule and may not have faulted him or her, but also the student didn’t feel that the situation was within his or her own control either. This supports the theme across attributional literature that actors tend to have a self-serving bias and believe that when they cause their own conflicts, it is due to external causes rather than internal causes (Bernstein et al., 1979; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Zimbardo, 1972).

In Chapter 1, I discussed the definition of conflict, including the notion that conflict is difficult to define. Some of the responses to the conflict questionnaires indicated that students, also, are not always certain what a conflict is. This supports the idea that conflict is not easily defined, and that there is not one definition of conflict that is used by many (Fink, 1968; Weiss & Delhe, 1994). Students wrote that they had not
experienced a conflict with an instructor, but then proceeded to write about a situation. For example one student indicated:

I have not had a conflict with an instructor. However, I have been in a classroom where the instructor used explicit language that made me uncomfortable. Instructors are in a position to set positive examples for students, not create bad examples that become lasting memories. I didn’t say anything though because I didn’t want my grade to be lowered, so there was never a conflict.

Some students might have perceived such a circumstance to be a conflict. The student’s behavior in response to the circumstance could have been considered to be avoidance. However, because the student didn’t perceive a conflict, one didn’t exist. A few students indicated instances similar to this one, instances such as receiving a poor grade, but wrote that because an event was their own fault, it was not a conflict. One student wrote, “I have never had any kind of conflict with a college instructor. I have sometimes been mad about my grade, but it had nothing to do with the instructor, it was my own fault.”

From these responses, a theme emerges: If students perceive themselves to be at blame, a conflict does not exist. Or, if nothing was done in the situation, it was not a conflict. This is one reason that I believe the definition of conflict must include the concept that conflicts must be perceived as such by the person involved. According to the definition of conflict used in this study, a student must perceive some sort of conflict for a conflict to exist. Thus, it is not truly a conflict if there is no perception of a conflict. People perceive similar incidents in very different ways, depending on their life experiences, and it should be noted that the same incident (being dissatisfied with a
grade, for instance) can be a conflict for one student and not for another; it is the perception of a conflict existing that makes a conflict a reality.

To assess perceptions of conflict in the present research, participants in Study II were asked to rate the extent to which each scenario involved conflict. A low number on the scale represented a very low level of conflict and a high number on the scale represented a very high level of conflict. For every scenario given, at least one student ranked the situation as being low in conflict, and at least one student ranked the situation as being high in conflict. Thus, not all of the scenarios were perceived as conflicts by all of the students. However, for eight of the ten scenarios, the mean of the scale was above the midpoint, which indicated that most students perceived at least a moderate level of conflict. The fact that perception is part of what defines conflict helps to explain how two of the scenarios, although generated from student narratives, fell below that midpoint and were perceived to have only a low-level of conflict represented in the situation.

There are no previous studies that have examined the types of conflicts in classrooms, so there are no studies with which to compare these results. For that reason, Study I contributed a new set of categories of student-teacher conflicts to the discipline of communication. These categories currently serve as a starting point for examining student-teacher conflict in more depth and should be examined in greater detail in future research.

Study II

RQ2 asked whether the communication trait approach, the attributional approach, or a combination of the two best predicts student conflict strategy preference. Results from the discriminant analyses indicated that the communication trait model alone
predicted conflict strategies better than the attributional model alone. Specifically, within the trait model, the level of verbal aggressiveness best predicted those students who would favor distributive strategies, and a combination of competence, apprehension, and argumentativeness best predicted those who would favor avoidant strategies. For the attributional discriminant analyses, attributions of personal control, responsibility, and stability best predicted those students favoring distributive strategies. A common theme emerged here: Both models best predict those students who select distributive strategies rather than integrative or avoidance strategies.

From these results, instructors can expect that the communication traits of students contribute more to the conflict strategy selection than do the attributions a student makes in the conflict episode. This could be because attributions are often made after a conflict occurs, and thus are not as great in contributing to the resolution of the conflict. If these results are accurate, helping students to take more responsibility for their contribution to conflict situations will not alter strategy choice as much as actually altering the traits in individual students, which would be quite difficult to do. However, if an instructor can identify students with traits such as verbal aggressiveness, which will lead to less productive conflict strategies, the instructor may be able to anticipate the path of a conflict resolution attempt, and possibly initiate the resolution to help guide the conflict in productive ways. Additionally, students could be taught how to communicate assertively rather than aggressively in order to aid students in learning how to communicate in conflict situations more competently and effectively.

In the third discriminant analyses conducted, the results indicated that a combination of traits and attributions actually made the best prediction for strategy type.
A function that combined verbal aggressiveness, personal control, attributions of responsibility and stability create a function that accounts for approximately 67% of the variance in the discriminant function. Students high in aggression who perceive greater personal control in managing the conflict, attribute responsibility for the conflict to themselves (rather than to the instructor), and perceive the conflict to be more stable tended to favor distributive strategies. Additionally, a second function indicated that interpersonal communication competence, communication apprehension, argumentativeness, attributions of intent to cooperate, and attributions of external control best predicted those who favored avoidance strategies. Thus, the functions predict for distributive and avoidance strategies, but not integrative ones.

This means that knowing students’ communication predispositions or attribution tendencies will help teachers to predict those students who will tend to use distributive and avoidance strategies. Teachers may not be as concerned about students who favor avoidant strategies, as these students may not engage in conflict resolution. Distributive strategies, though, could lead to serious problems. Thus, teachers can be watchful of those students high in aggression who tend towards attributing control and responsibility to themselves, and who perceive conflicts as stable. Teachers could devote more attention to warding off or managing conflict with these students. For instance, students who favor distributive strategies tend to make attributions that indicate they perceive conflicts to be stable. One thing teachers could do early on is to help students understand how the teachers could make a variety of decisions or come to different conclusions depending on the circumstances. This might help students to realize that the same decisions are not made in all situations, and thus the students might not perceive conflicts to be as stable.
H1 predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to argumentativeness, in that (H1a) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor integrative strategies, and (H1b) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly lower in argumentativeness than students who favor distributive strategies. This hypothesis was not supported. The strategies were not significantly different across the trait of argumentativeness, although the direction of the results were the same as the direction predicted. In the discriminant analysis, argumentativeness contributed slightly to a preference for distributive strategies (Function 1). Argumentativeness played a slightly more important role in distinguishing those preferring avoidance strategies from those favoring other strategies (Function 2). Students higher in argumentativeness were less likely to prefer avoidance strategies, as predicted. The evidence that persons low in argumentativeness tend to prefer avoidance strategy was mixed. With a larger sample size, the difference in argumentativeness between avoidance and distributive might be significant.

Previous studies have indicated that strategy selection does differ by level of argumentativeness, so the question raised in this study is why was argumentativeness not a factor in these students’ strategy selections? One explanation could be that the trait of argumentativeness was positively correlated with age, $r = .18, p < .01$. The older the participants, the more argumentative they were. Maybe no difference was detected in the category of argumentativeness because the mean age of the students in this study was 20.1, and the majority of the students were in their late teens or early twenties. The majority of the participants had similar levels of argumentativeness.
Another possible explanation is that classroom conflict is different from other types of conflict and thus the participants may react differently to it than to conflict in other types of situations or contexts. Bower and Rubin (2002) discovered the argumentativeness of nurses dealing with conflict in the workplace did correlate with the type of conflict strategy selected. In that study, nurses who were high in argumentativeness tended towards control strategies (distributive strategies) and solution-oriented strategies (integrative strategies). These results indicate that in the workplace, people who are highly argumentative do confront conflict in some manner. In other work settings, employees who were rated as “highly satisfactory” by their superiors were also rated high in argumentativeness (Infante & Gorden, 1989). Highly argumentative people are perceived to be leaders and to influence decision-making in groups (Schultz, 1982). Thus, researchers have found argumentativeness as being related to work-place behaviors and impressions. This study did not replicate those findings. In the classroom, other factors besides argumentativeness may be more relevant in determining how students deal with conflict. More research needs to be done to either confirm or dismiss these results.

H2 predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to verbal aggressiveness, in that (H2a) students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor integrative strategies, and (H2b) students who favor distributive strategies should be significantly higher in verbal aggressiveness than students who favor avoidance strategies. The results for this hypothesis were significant, and the prediction was supported. Students who favored distributive strategies had higher verbal aggressiveness scores than did students
who favored either integrative or avoidance strategies. This finding is consistent with those from several other studies (e.g., Bell & Blakeney, 1977; Jones & Melcher, 1982; Martin et al., 1999; Wheeless & Reichel, 1990). Verbal aggressiveness also provided the greatest contribution to both the communication trait discriminant model and the mixed trait and attribution discriminant model, specifically in relation to discriminating those who selected distributive strategies from those choosing other strategies.

People who are verbally aggressive are more likely to attack another person’s point of view, and thus more likely to use distributive strategies in conflict. Social rules dictate that students should behave respectfully towards instructors. Thus, students who are high in verbal aggression and who favor distributive strategies are likely not to follow this social rule. People who have higher levels of verbal aggressiveness might ignore this rule because people high in verbal aggressiveness tend to seek out “I win, you lose” strategies (Bell & Blakeney, 1977), and winning is important at all costs. Verbal aggressiveness tends to be negatively correlated with communication competence (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984), which was also true in this study ($r = -.13, p = .04$). People lower in competence would likely have lower regard for social communication rules, and thus would be more likely to approach a teacher with distributive strategies, which would likely be perceived as disrespectful.

H3 predicted differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to communication apprehension, in that (H3a) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor integrative strategies, and (H3b) students who favor avoidance strategies should be significantly higher in communication apprehension than students who favor distributive
strategies. The results of this study supported this hypothesis. This hypothesis was proposed based on literature that indicated that students high in communication apprehension avoid verbal interactions with teachers more than low apprehensive students (McCroskey & Richmond, 1976). Students who are highly apprehensive may want to avoid any communication encounter that could be perceived as negative or uncomfortable. As most people perceive conflict to be negative (Borisoff & Victor, 1998), students in this study appear to be no different. These findings also support that the Student-Teacher Conflict Index has construct validity.

McCroskey and Richmond (1976) indicated that highly apprehensive students avoided not just any interaction with teachers, but specifically verbal interaction. The results of this study indicated that channel may differ slightly for low and high apprehensives. Those high in communication apprehension selected mediated channels approximately 22% of the time, whereas those low in apprehension only selected mediated channels approximately 13% of the time. Thus, when the option of using mediated channels exists, those with higher apprehension may select the mediated channels rather than avoid the conflict entirely. Mediated channels may become a sort of functional alternative to FTF communication for high apprehensives. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found this occurred; for those who avoided FTF interaction, the Internet was a functional alternative channel for fulfilling interpersonal needs. This finding also supports the work of Kelly et al. (2004). These researchers determined that highly apprehensive students preferred e-mail to FTF communication when communicating with teachers.
H4 predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to interpersonal communication competence, in that (H4a) students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor avoidance strategies, and (H4b) students who favor integrative strategies should be significantly higher in interpersonal competence than students who favor distributive strategies. The results of this study supported this hypothesis. These findings support those of previous research that indicates that those who select integrative strategies are higher in competence and who select distributive and avoidant strategies are lower in competence (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989; Dyck & Rule, 1978). Using appropriate communication would be equated with trying to meet the goals of both participants, and this would occur by utilizing integrative strategies. Finding that students favoring integrative strategies are higher in competence than those favoring the other strategies also supports the notion indicated by several researchers that competence in most conflict situations requires integrative rather than avoidant or distributive tactics (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989; Conrad, 1991; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b).

H5 predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the attributional dimension of intent to cooperate, in that (H5a) students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor distributive strategies, and (H5b) students who favor integrative strategies should perceive an instructor’s intent to cooperate significantly higher than students who favor avoidance strategies. This hypothesis was not supported in the ANOVA. The mean scores for students in this dimension did follow the direction of the hypothesis, but the results were not significant. However, in the mixed
discriminant analyses, as intent to cooperate increases, students were less likely to favor avoidance strategies. Thus, the evidence was mixed that a perception of a greater intent to cooperate decreases use of avoidance strategy.

Sillars (1980a) suggested that intent to cooperate was an important dimension, but subsequent research has not tapped this dimension. Intent to cooperate may not predict strategy choice as clearly as Sillars proposed it would. Another possible explanation for these mixed results is that because these situations were hypothetical, students may have had a difficult time determining whether the hypothetical instructor truly did intend to cooperate in the scenario. Future research should be conducted examining this dimension in an authentic conflict situation to determine if it does differ across the strategy categories.

H6 predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the attributional dimension of responsibility, in that (H6a) students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies, and (H6b) students who favor integrative strategies should attribute responsibility to themselves significantly more than students who favor avoidance strategies. The results of this study did not support this hypothesis. Students who favored integrative strategies attributed responsibility to their instructors to a greater extent than those favoring distributive strategies. The post-hoc analysis demonstrated that distributive strategies were used significantly more by students when they perceive themselves to be at fault. Previous research indicated that attribution of responsibility to one’s partner is associated with the use of distributive strategies (Sillars, 1980a, 1980b). Thus, these results do not fall in line with previous research. However, this previous
research examined conflict between peers (friends, roommates, or romantic partners), and this study examined conflict between students and teachers. Maybe the imbalance in power affects how conflicts are attributed.

Another explanation is that conflict is often perceived negatively, and thus for students who perceive themselves to be responsible for a conflict, they may believe that they are responsible for a negative occurrence. If a student is capable of creating a ‘negative’ conflict, the student may also be capable of managing it in a manner that is also perceived as negative: using distributive strategies. A third explanation for this finding is that students report selecting integrative strategies, even if they perceive the instructor to be at fault, because they are concerned that using distributive strategies with a teacher could result in negative evaluations, including lower grades. If a student perceives an instructor to have caused a conflict, there may not be a trust that the instructor would be fair in grading, and thus, students might be hesitant to use strategies that would be perceived negatively. This possibility should be researched further.

H7 predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the attributional dimension of stability, in that (H7a) students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than students who favor integrative strategies, and (H7b) students who favor avoidance strategies should attribute conflict to stable factors significantly more than students who favor distributive strategies. Results failed to support H7a and H7b. However, there was a significant difference between the attributions of stability for those who favored distributive and integrative strategies. Students who perceived the conflict as more stable selected distributive strategies and students who perceived the conflict as lower in stability
selected integrative strategies. These findings are consistent with Sillars’ attributional
conflict research (1980a, 1980b). Sillars also discovered that when people perceived a
conflict to be less stable, they selected integrative strategies.

There was not, however, a significant difference for those favoring avoidance
strategies across the dimension of stability, as was expected. Maybe in a classroom
setting, a student disregards how stable the cause of the conflict is. For example, a student
might perceive that the cause of the conflict is stable, and that teachers would frequently
behave in this manner. However, because the student might feel that grades are
dependent on the resolution of the conflict, the student still might choose to approach the
conflict, even though in most relationships, it would be expected that people avoid
conflicts where the causes are perceived to be stable because change is not expected. This
possibility needs to be researched further.

H8 predicted that differences in preferred conflict strategy should be related to the
attributional dimension of controllability, in that (H8a) students who favor distributive
strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control and under another
person’s control more than students who favor avoidance strategies, and (H8b) students
who favor distributive strategies should perceive a conflict to be out of their own control
and under another person’s control more than students who favor integrative strategies.
The results of this study did not support this hypothesis. External control did not differ
across strategy categories, but personal control did. However, although personal control
differed significantly across categories, it did not differ in the direction predicted.
Findings indicated that students disregarded teacher control (external control) of the
conflict. Across the conflict strategies selected, the perception of teacher control did not
significantly differ. However, students’ self-perceived control did matter in that the selected strategies did differ according to how much control the students’ perceived themselves to have in the situation.

Students who favored distributive strategies had a higher rating of personal control, which indicates that they believe the conflict is within their own control and out of another person’s control. Thus, when the conflict is perceived to be something over which students believe they have some control, distributive strategies are the most likely to occur. When students perceived the conflict to be under their control, they selected distributive strategies significantly more often than when they perceived the conflict to be out of their own control. This finding is inconsistent with previous research which indicated that when people believed an act was out of their own control, they were more likely to resort to distributive strategies (Dyck & Rule, 1978, Sillars, 1980b). However, it is consistent with the findings in this study of attributions of responsibility. If students believe that they control or are responsible for the cause of the conflict, they tend to select distributive strategies, possibly because a student who feels comfortable instigating conflict would also be more comfortable using a strategy that is perceived as negative.

Controllability was included as a dimension of attribution in this study because it was one of the original attributional dimensions studied by Frieze (1976) and Weiner (1979). However, it was not one of the dimensions included by Sillars (1980a, 1980b, 1980c) in the attributional theory of conflict. The dimensions of control and responsibility may have similar effects in conflict episodes, and thus Sillars may not have included the dimension of control for this reason.
RQ3 asked whether conflict strategy choice influenced channel selection. Students indicated that they would favor face-to-face (FTF) communication over all mediated channels. Face-to-face was the channel selected the majority of the time. One interesting finding for this question was that students who selected distributive strategies used mediated channels somewhat more than students who selected integrative strategies. Although, there is no previous research on conflict strategies and channel selection that could explain why this is, a practical explanation makes sense. When using distributive strategies—“I win, you lose”—students might be more nervous about communicating face-to-face. Writing an e-mail or leaving a voice mail message might seem easier because the sender would not have to manage immediate feedback. This allows the student to plan and send the message, regardless of how rude or disrespectful it might be, without having consequences of immediate negative feedback, if there is any.

O’Sullivan (2000) indicated that when a person’s preferred impression was expected to be threatened, people preferred mediated channels over FTF ones. When using distributive strategies, students could expect their preferred impression to be threatened, as using these strategies is perceived by some as negative (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989). On the other hand, integrative strategies are perceived as “win-win” strategies (Canary & Cupach, 1988), and thus, might be perceived as having fewer negative consequences. Therefore, communicating face-to-face would not hold as many negative consequences. Additionally, integrative techniques involve seeking information from both parties, and communicating face-to-face could yield the quickest resolution for both student and teacher.
Implications and Contributions

In this investigation, several of the hypotheses were supported. Conflict strategy preferences were significantly influenced by the traits of verbal aggressiveness, communication apprehension, and interpersonal communication competence. Strategies also depended on the dimensions of responsibility, stability, and control, although not always in the way expected. A model combining verbal aggressiveness, attributions of personal control, responsibility and stability is the strongest predictor of a preference for distributive strategies.

Some of the results, however, were unexpected. Students primarily selected integrative strategies more than any other strategy. Strategy selection was not strongly related to the trait of argumentativeness or the dimension of intent to cooperate. One implication of these findings is that, although some aspects of conflict behave in a predictable fashion, some aspects of conflict in the classroom work differently than conflict in settings previously examined. As indicated in Chapter 1, the student-teacher relationship is special and unique and unlike other interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the conflict models that have been assumed to be valid across other interpersonal relationships may simply not work for student-teacher relationships.

Implications for Methodology

One result of this study was the creation of a new measure to examine classroom conflict: the Student-Teacher Conflict Index. This index presents possible classroom conflicts to students for consideration and evaluation. Although the index is not yet in perfect form, it does have potential for continued use in instructional communication. The results of the study indicated that students do perceive at least eight of ten of the
scenarios to be above-average in the amount of conflict portrayed. Those conflicts that were perceived to contain a below-average level of conflict can be revised to include more aspects of conflict, or they can be eliminated from use in future applications of the index. The representations of integrative, distributive, and avoidance strategies in the index may need revisions as the majority of students selected the integrative strategy choice. These choices can be modified, more choices can be offered, or a different method of measuring conflict response can be experimented with in order to determine how the index can best be used in future research.

A second methodological issue pertains to the items employed to measure the attributional dimension of intent to cooperate, which were created for this study. Previous researchers have not attempted to measure this dimension of attribution even though Sillars (1980a) recommended that it should be considered in attributional conflict. The results of these items were reliable, but the study provided only weak evidence that this dimension influences conflict strategy selection. This could be due to the fact that this dimension is not, in fact, relevant to strategy selection. However, another possibility is that the scale, although reliable, was not valid in measuring the dimension as expected. More research is needed to determine whether these items are valid and should be used in future research.

**Contributions to Conflict Communication Theory and Research**

This research contributes to current theory about conflict communication in several ways. First, to the author’s knowledge, this is the first study to identify categories of classroom conflict. Conflict has been examined in all sorts of relationships, but not in the student-teacher relationship. Although the categories generated in this study should be
examined further, this beginning lays a road map for others to follow. These categories provide a context to which conflict theory may be applied. For example, the attributional theory of conflict (Sillars, 1980a) has been examined within romantic relationships, but now, with the specific list of conflicts, the attributional theory of conflict can be used as a lens to examine the relationship between conflict strategies and attributions made in classroom conflict as well. Previous research has used reciprocity theory to demonstrate that like begets like (Gouldner, 1960). This theory could be tested using the conflicts generated in this study to determine whether students and teachers use similar conflict strategies when managing conflict.

Second, although not large, there is a difference between how the trait model and attribution model predict conflict strategies. The results of this study indicate that the trait model is a stronger model for predicting conflict strategy preference. Furthermore, the variable of verbal aggressiveness seems to be the best single predictor of determining when a student will select a distributive strategy. Though the trait model is stronger than the attributional model, neither alone is as good a predictor of strategy choice as is a combined model. Previous conflict literature has examined these models and variables separately (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1990; Lakey & Canary, 2002; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c), but the results of this study indicate that more research is needed that examines both communication traits and attributions together. To ignore the contribution that either communication traits or attributions make would be erroneous.

A third contribution made to conflict communication research is the examination of the selected variables within classroom conflict. No previous research has studied the traits and attributions examined here within the context of classroom conflict, so the
results produced in this study are new to the literature. Because no previous research has examined conflict in this manner, there is little to compare these results against. Thus, the findings provided in this study can now be tested and either confirmed or dismissed.

A fourth contribution was the creation of a new measure, the *Student-Teacher Conflict Index*, which can be refined and used for future study of classroom conflict. By using specific student responses in categories that emerged from the data, I was able to create an index where most of the scenarios were perceived as holding conflict for the students. These scenarios were created from qualitative data to contribute to the realism of the conflicts.

In order to test conflict theory further, more research needs to be conducted in the area of classroom conflict to either support and verify these findings, or to dismiss them. Future directions of this research are proposed, but first, the limitations of the current study are discussed.

**Limitations**

This research has several limitations that should be taken into account in drawing conclusions from the findings. One limitation pertains to the measure of conflict strategy preference. Of the three responses provided after each conflict scenario, each conflict strategy type (integrative, distributive, and avoidance) was represented by only one choice. As each student chose one conflict strategy for each scenario, there were 10 conflict strategies reported per student. However, a primary strategy type for each student was needed to conduct the analyses. These strategies were determined by the strategy that students chose predominantly across scenarios. For the most part, students did have a predominant strategy. (Only 7 of 171 students did not.) Even though a primary strategy
was defined for each student, the student did not always select that strategy. A student
with a primary strategy of integrative, for example, may also have selective distributive
and avoidant strategies in some scenarios, but only the primary strategy was considered
for analysis. In fact, most of the students had some mixture of strategies in their overall
selection. This could explain some of the unexpected results found in the study.

Additionally, preferred conflict strategy was treated as a categorical variable in
this study. Some researchers have measured conflict strategy use on a continuum (Filley,
1975, Rahim, 1983, Utley et al., 1989). For example, participants might be asked to read
or reflect on a conflict and then indicate the likelihood of using some number of conflict
strategies on rating scales anchored by not at all likely and very likely. By measuring
conflict strategies on a continuum, a canonical correlation could have been conducted
between the traits and strategies and/or between the attributions and strategies. This test
would have produced richer data. Additionally, the communication traits and attributional
dimensions, also measured on a continuum, could be correlated with the strategies or
employed as predictor variables in multiple regression analyses. With conflict strategy
use being measured as a nominal variable, only simple measures of association or
differences could be used.

A second limitation to this study is that the methodology relied on self-report
data. Although there have been proponents of having people self-report their own
behaviors, there are also some limitations to this methodology. One of these is that
occasionally, participants respond in the way that they believe will be the most socially
desirable. This effect is known as the social desirability bias (Babbie, 2001). Burleson et
al. (1988) found that there was an item-desirability bias that affected strategy selection
procedures in compliance-gaining research. In their studies, when participants were asked to indicate which compliance-gaining strategies they would be willing to employ in given situations, the researchers determined that the participants selected strategies they believed were socially desirable. Waltman and Burleson (1997) made similar claims that an item desirability bias was found in responses to a checklist of prosocial and antisocial behavior alteration techniques employed by teachers. These researchers reported that teachers indicate a use of prosocial techniques more than they actually would use them, because using prosocial techniques is the most socially desirable response. This effect also may have contaminated this research, as students indicated across all scenarios that they would select integrative conflict strategies more than distributive or avoidant ones. One way to alleviate this bias would be to allow respondents to construct their own response to the situation, rather than providing them with options. By doing this, the respondent would not be able to select a response based only on social desirability, but instead might be more likely to respond with a strategy that would actually be used regardless of how socially desirable the strategy seemed.

However, although item-desirability has been discussed in the literature, not all researchers believe it affects self-report measures. Kearney and Plax (1997) argued against the claims made by Waltman and Burleson (1997) claiming that just because teachers indicated that they used prosocial techniques more than antisocial ones, this did not make the responses biased. Kearney and Plax supported their claim by indicating that it was not only teachers that indicated they used prosocial techniques; students reported that their teachers used more prosocial techniques and teachers reported that other teachers used them more too. Thus, Kearney and Plax asserted that self reports are not so
different from classroom observations or others’ reports. In this research, students may have indicated that they would select integrative strategies more often because they actually would. In a situation where students believe their grades may be in jeopardy if they behave in a manner that may be perceived as inappropriate, they may actually communicate using integrative strategies, which would likely be perceived as positive and effective.

A third limitation to the study is that the students were presented with hypothetical situations. Although the situations were molded from real student-teacher conflicts, they were still hypothetical for the students completing the surveys. Knowing whether the responses students selected are actual responses the students would employ if faced with a real conflict situation is difficult. In the past, some researchers have found that situations created in laboratory settings do not elicit the same responses that people would use in real-life settings (Burleson, 1984; Burleson, Wilson, Waltman, Goering, Ely, & Whaley, 1988). It is also difficult to know whether these hypothetical situations would be considered conflicts by all students completing the measure. Although the mean scores of the eight selected scenarios were above the midpoint on a scale asking if the scenario represented conflict, some students were responding to situations that they may not have perceived to be conflicts. One way to counter this issue would be to compute scores only for those scenarios where a student identified the scenario as a conflict. However, that technique also raises methodological issues as some students might have perceived nine of the scenarios as having high levels of conflict, and others might perceive only two scenarios as having high levels of conflict. The current method allowed for the same number of conflicts to be considered for each student.
A fourth limitation is that, in this sample, males outnumbered females in this study by almost two to one. Because the participants volunteered for the study, controlling for gender would have been a difficult task. Additionally, because the course the volunteers were enrolled in was composed of more women than men, it was surprising that so many men volunteered for this study. Students volunteered for the study in order to earn research points for a class. The study occurred at the end of the semester, and thus the students who participated were students who had not yet earned their points. It appears, from the participation that more males than females had not earned the points at the time of the study, and thus the sex of participants was weighted heavily on the male end. This inequality in gender is important because males have been reported as higher in verbal aggression and argumentativeness than females (Nicotera & Rancer, 1994). The gender imbalance may have affected the results, as the discriminant analyses did not control for gender. In this study, there were significant differences between the argumentativeness scores for males ($M = 7.16$) and females ($M = 1.55$), $F(1, 169) = 7.71$, $p = .006$, and between the verbal aggression scores between males ($M = 53.50$) and females ($M = 48.52$), $F(1, 169) = 9.66$, $p = .002$. This finding has also been present in past research (e.g., Infante et al., 1986, 1989; Infante & Gorden, 1985). With there being more males than females participating in the study, and a significant difference in these scores, this could account, at least partially, for why verbal aggressiveness was such a major contributor in the discriminant models.

Directions for Future Research

The research presented in this investigation focused on a student-centered approach to conflict. Future research could examine conflict from a teacher-centered
approach. This study has only provided categories of conflict as perceived by students. There is still a large gap where conflict as perceived by teachers needs to be addressed. One way that this could occur would be to replicate Study I, asking for teachers to report conflicts they experience in the classroom. The teachers’ responses could be categorized and compared to students’ perceptions and those conflicts that do overlap between students and teachers could be examined further. Just as the students generated conflicts centered on the faults of teachers, teachers might generate conflicts that center around the faults of students. For instance, teachers might mention conflicts about student discipline problems, students’ lack of effort, students not following directions, lying, plagiarizing, or cheating. Because people tend to have attributional biases and perceive others’ to be at fault more than themselves (Sillars, 1980a, 1980b), they may also tend to notice or recall conflicts where others are at fault. I would expect that teachers would report more teacher-owned conflicts (those that center around a teacher’s needs not being met; C. Thomas, Karmos, & Altekruse, 1981). Learning how teachers perceive conflict will contribute a more comprehensive view of classroom conflict. As Kearney et al. (1992) suggested, when students perceive conflicts to exist, undesirable student responses such as “negative teacher evaluations, poor attendance, classroom disruptions, and lower achievement” (p. 323) may occur. These behaviors can cause problems for teachers. Thus, understanding conflict and finding positive ways to manage it is important both for the student and the teacher.

Additionally, the link between classroom conflict (from a student’s perspective) and teacher misbehaviors could be examined. This study sought to generate conflicts from a students’ perspective just as Kearney et al. (1991) generated a list of teacher
misbehaviors as reported from a students’ perspectives. Some conflict types identified in the current study centered around issues very similar to concepts generated in the teacher misbehavior study. A better understanding of what constitutes both the misbehaviors and conflicts may help to clarify the definition of classroom conflict.

Hocker (1986) discussed how students and teachers may use different and incompatible conflict strategy types. Hocker only suggested that this could be the case, but research thus far has failed to examine this phenomenon. Based on this suggestion and the results found in this study, another area for future research would be to investigate questions such as the following: When students and teachers approach conflicts with different strategies, what happens? Is there a combination of strategies that is most effective for conflict to be resolved in an efficient and satisfactory manner? All conflict resolution strategies can be effective at some point in time (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975), but when partners use different strategies—such as one person using an integrative strategy and the other using a distributive one—more conflict can be added to an already tenuous situation.

Future research also could examine whether and how classroom conflicts differ by physical locations or school type. Kramer and Pier (1999) compared students’ perceptions of teaching effectiveness in small and large classes and found that the instructors’ positive and negative behaviors had a stronger effect on the students’ perceptions of effectiveness than did differences in class size. However, researchers might discover that other differences such as college or university size, or the regional location of the school could affect the types or ways in which conflict is experienced. Students from small colleges experience different conflicts than do students from large
universities, for example. One would expect that students at a small college would have a greater level of interaction with instructors, and thus the amount of conflict, or the types of conflict experienced on a small campus could be different than those experienced on a much larger campus. Specific types of conflicts might occur across majors as well. For example, do students report conflicts about incompetent teaching more in science and math classes where the material might be perceived as less subjective and more difficult to understand to begin with? Or do students report conflicts about grading in humanities courses more, where grading may be perceived as being subjective? Determining and examining these patterns could help students and teachers to know what conflicts to expect and be prepared for in the classroom. Cloven and Roloff (1995) found that when participants anticipated communicating about a conflict, they had a greater variety of thoughts and a greater proportion of descriptive thoughts about the foreseen communication than did people who did not anticipate communicating about conflicts. Additionally, more than 80% of people rehearse arguments before a confrontation with a partner (Stutman & Newell, 1990). Thus, understanding the types of conflicts students and teachers might experience could aid them in preparing to deal with the conflicts.

Previous research has indicated a relationship between instructor traits and student outcomes. For example, high argumentativeness and low aggression have been associated with positive affective learning and student satisfaction (Myers, 2002). There might also be a connection between conflict resolution and student outcomes. The way in which a conflict is resolved could also have implications for, not only the student-teacher relationship, but for student learning outcomes. Are students more likely to perceive greater learning if a teacher uses one strategy over another? Additionally, other traits
such as immediacy have also been linked to student satisfaction and learning (Arbaugh, 2001). These traits could be examined in relation to conflict strategy. Are students more likely to use integrative approaches if the teacher is immediate? Plax, Kearney, and Downs (1986) posited that teachers’ satisfaction with their work is tied to their ability to influence and manage students. The satisfaction of teachers may also be linked to conflict management. Thus, this relationship could be examined in future research.

Conflict strategy choice in classrooms may also differ across cultures. Where cultural rules differ, so might decisions about which strategies to use in conflict episodes. Previous research suggests that communication about conflict takes different forms in different cultures (Avtgis & Rancer, 2004; Bailey, 2000; Kyritzis & Guo, 2001; Siira, Rogan, & Hall, 2004). Instructional researchers could investigate whether these cultural differences carry over into the classroom. Although teachers expect that students from all cultures will respect and be guided by the rules of the culture where the classroom is, Morris (2005) asserted that people who are living in a culture that is not their native one often revert back to habits of their original culture when they feel anxious or threatened, as could occur in a conflict situation. Thus, people from different cultures may behave differently in conflicts.

A future study taking an intercultural approach might ask whether the types of classroom conflict or the strategies employed differ across cultures that are, for example, high versus low in uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede (1984) wrote that “uncertainty about the future is a basic fact of human life with which we try to cope” (p. 110). Hofstede’s dimension of uncertainty avoidance refers to a person’s lack of tolerance for uncertainty. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures are high on achievement
motivation, more open to change, more risk taking, less hierarchical and more accepting and encouraging of dissenting views among cultural members (Hofstede, 1980). The United States is a relatively low uncertainty avoidance culture, whereas France, Portugal, and Belgium are high uncertainty avoidance cultures. In a high uncertainty avoidance culture, learning is very structured and teachers are often perceived as having all the answers, whereas in a low uncertainty avoidance culture, the learning is more open-ended and teachers are not expected to know everything (Hofstede, 2001). These differences as well as the differences in how low and high uncertainty cultures approach conflict could be examined within the context of classroom conflict. First, researchers could learn what conflicts exist in the classrooms in these cultures. Are they the same ones discovered in this investigation? Another area to research is whether attributions or communication traits predicted strategy choices in these cultures. Additionally, do people with different heritages approach conflict in different ways? For example, Greek families are sometimes perceived to be loud and argumentative; do they avoid conflict less than, say, people from an Asian heritage who are often perceived as being quiet and polite? This cultural impact could be present for both students and teachers. Do, for instance, students avoid conflicts more with teachers who are from cultures that are perceived as being less argumentative and aggressive?

To further the results of this study, researchers should continue to examine the categories of classroom conflict generated in Study I to confirm the validity and exhaustiveness of the categories. In Study II, the ten conflict scenarios represented a sampling of the most common conflicts reported in Study I, and students were asked to indicate how much conflict these ten scenarios represented. This provided a validity
check for the presence of conflict in these scenarios. However, more of the conflicts generated from Study I could be checked for validity. One way to do this would be to generate a list of the conflicts presented in Table 1 and ask students to indicate if they perceive the examples to be conflicts. Students could also report if they have ever experienced such conflicts with their instructors and if so, how often. Students could rank the conflicts and indicate which they perceive to be more severe than others. By doing this, the categories of conflict in this study could be checked for validity, altered where necessary, and improved upon. A Q-sort (Stephenson, 1953) also could be conducted to determine if there are underlying categories (either similar or different to the ones proposed in this study) within the conflicts. Such research might also contribute to a more refined definition of conflict. A definition of conflict based on previous research was used in this study, but as Weiss and Dehle (1994) noted, “a precise, all-purpose definition of conflict is still lacking” (p. 95). Communication researchers can continue to work on developing a “precise” definition. Are conflicts only those events for which the students are not responsible? Are issues only conflicts if the students perceive them to interfere with a desired grade?

One assumption of the current research was that students have a predominant conflict management strategy. Thus, conflict strategy was treated as a categorical variable. As noted earlier, future research might examine classroom conflict treating conflict strategy use as a continuous variable. This could demonstrate whether research measuring conflict in such a way would conform to the results of this study, or yield different results. Additionally, examining classroom conflict through ethnographic methods could allow researchers to observe and examine conflict that people are not
willing to self-report. Because the area of classroom conflict still has not been investigated greatly, an ethnographic study of classroom conflict could bring out patterns of which researchers are currently unaware.

Examining channel selection in conflict communication is another future area of research. Previous research has indicated that some mediated channels serve as functional alternatives to FTF channels (e.g., Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Flaherty et al., 1998; Westmyer et al., 1998). Students in this study primarily selected FTF channels. Thus this may be an indication that mediated channels are not perceived to be functional alternatives in classroom settings. This possibility should be examined. Furthermore, channel selection during conflict could be examined in settings outside the classroom. Most previous research investigating the functional alternatives to channels (Flaherty et al., 1998; Westmyer et al., 1998), and the uses and gratifications of particular channel choices (Dobos, 1992; O’Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995) do not examine the implications of these results in conflict communication.

Classroom conflict is important to examine, but conflict occurs in a variety of settings. Most research to date has examined either traits (Canary & Spitzberg, 1990; Lakey & Canary, 2002; Sorenson, Hawkins, & Sorenson, 1995) or attributions (Baron, 1990; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c) as predictors of conflict strategy use. Future research should examine and compare the communication trait model and the attributional model across different relational contexts. This research could investigate the relative influence of traits and attributions on strategy choice in friendships, romantic relationships, and organizational settings. Researchers might find that different components of the model(s) predict conflict strategy use in different contexts or that the findings of the current study
apply across contexts. Additionally, results from this study indicated that conflict may not be handled the same way in the classroom as in other contexts. Due to many factors, such as fear of poor grades, students may respond to conflict in a classroom situation differently than people would outside the classroom. More research needs to be conducted in this area to determine if there is support for this claim.

Conclusion

Conflict is inevitable. But it is not inevitable that conflict must be a negative occurrence. Increasing our understanding about how we respond to and manage conflict may increase our perception about episodes of conflict themselves. In this study, I have created a list of categories of the types of conflicts that are experienced between students and teachers, including conflicts related to class work and teacher behaviors. This list can be examined further, expanded upon, and improved in future instructional communication research. I have also compared two models for predicting conflict strategies and determined that a mixture of these models best predicts what strategy a student is likely to select in a conflict situation. Conflict will continue to occur in the classroom between students and teachers, but hopefully our understanding of conflict will increase in a way that will aid students and teachers at more effectively resolving their conflicts.
APPENDIXES
Appendix A
Mass Testing Consent Form

School of Communication Studies
COMM 15000 MASS TESTING
Consent/Authorization

I consent to serve as a participant in Mass Testing as part of my research requirement for COMM 15000. I understand the following:

• Only researchers will be able to connect my name with the number on the questionnaires. They will maintain confidentiality.

• I will not be video/audio-taped.

• I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

• There is no deception involved in the mass testing procedures.

• My grade in COMM 15000 will not be affected by my responses to these surveys.

• I understand that I may be contacted later by a researcher to participate in the second part of an experiment. I will be given additional credit for this second participation. I do not have to participate if I do not want to.

• I will retain a copy of my signed consent; a copy will be put on file by the director of mass testing.

• All of the surveys and questionnaires I will be completing today have been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about this research project, contact Dr. Janet Meyer in the School of Communication Studies (330-672-0176). If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. John L. West, Vice President for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies (330-672-2704).

Signed  ______________________________________

Date:    ______________________________________

School of Communication Studies
P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio  44242-0001 (330) 672-2659  Fax: (330) 672-3510
http://www.kent.edu/comm
Appendix B
Letter of Purpose and Consent for Study II

May 2005

I am researching student-teacher conflicts. I am conducting this research as part of a study for my dissertation. I would like you take part in this project. If you decide to do this, you will be asked to participate in an hour-long period completing questionnaires related to the topic of this study.

The information collected from you will be compared to information collected from other students and used to better understand how students select their conflict resolution strategies. Your name will only be used to give you the two research points for completing this study. It will not be attached to your responses in any way. Your answers to all questionnaires will remain anonymous.

If you take part in this project, you may gain insight to your own conflict experiences and resolutions. Additionally, once the study has been completed, you may ask for a copy of the results of the research paper so that you can learn more about the how conflicts between students and teachers are resolved. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you do take part, you may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call me at (330) 672-0284 or contact my advisor, Dr. Rebecca Rubin, at rrubin@kent.edu. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University's rules for research, please call Dr. John L. West, Vice President and Dean, Division of Research Graduate Studies (Tel. 330-672-2704).

By completing and returning the survey, you are giving your consent to allow your responses to be used in the research study. This consent form is yours to keep.

Sincerely,

Becki Bowman
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Communication Studies
Kent State University
ribowman@kent.edu

School of Communication Studies ● P. O. Box 5190 ● Kent, OH 44242
Appendix C

Script for Student-Teacher Conflict Data Collection.

Hello. Thank you for coming to this research study today. This study is about student-teacher conflicts. You will be completing several surveys that are meant to gather data about what you would do if you were in certain conflict situations with an instructor. These surveys should take you approximately one hour to complete. If you complete this study successfully, you will earn two points for your participation.

To begin, if you have not already done so, you need to complete the bubble form you have been provided with the information here on the board. It is important that you fill in this information completely, and bubble in each letter or number. You will NOT get your points if this information is not completed correctly.

Once you have completed this and I have finished giving the instructions, you may begin filling out the questionnaires in front of you. You may use either pen or pencil on these surveys, and should write directly on the forms. The order of the surveys have been randomized, so your packet may not look exactly like those around you.

Please read the instructions for each section very carefully as they will tell you how to complete the forms. It is important that you take the completion of these forms seriously. This information may be presented at conferences or published in journals in the future, so please read each item carefully, and respond with honest answers to the best of your ability. Your responses are helping to create new theories and increase our understanding of how we communicate about conflict.

Please do not rush through the questionnaires. At times, you may feel that the same kinds of questions are being asked, but you should consider each item carefully. Any form that is turned in with the same number marked all the way down a column, or the same letter marked for every answer will not be able to be used.

Should you have any questions at all, don’t hesitate to raise your hand, and I will come to you. Once you have completed your form, please bring me the completed questionnaire packet and bubble sheets and you will also need to SIGN OUT on the pink attendance form. This also will verify that you were here today, should points not be assigned to WebCT.

Thank you for your kind attention. You may begin.
Appendix D

Student-Teacher Conflict Index

Instructions. The following scenarios are conflicts or potential conflicts reported by actual students. Read each of these scenarios and imagine that you are the student in the situation. For each scenario, indicate what you would do in the situation by selecting the response that most closely matches the primary action you would take if you were in the situation. Your primary action may not be the initial response, and may lead to other responses, but is the main action you would take. You should circle your responses directly on this form.

Scenario #1:
You are assigned to write a paper in your English Composition class. You work very hard on the paper, and are proud of the work that you did. After you turn in the paper, your instructor grades it and returns it to you with a “C.” You thought you would earn at least a “B” on the paper.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. Ask the teacher to explain how I earned a “C.” (I)
   b. Tell the teacher that I worked really hard on the paper, and think a “C” is too harsh. (D)
   c. I would just accept the “C.” (A)

Scenario #2:
You look through the course catalog to decide what classes you will take in the fall semester. You find one course that looks especially interesting because it will explore issues about how the mass media influence our ideas of romance, love, and relationships. You sign up for the course. During the first week of class, the instructor passes out a syllabus that details the topics of discussion, assignments, and test schedule for the semester. As you look over it, you realize that the course will focus on the history of mass media and how it is used in politics rather than how it influences romance, love, and relationships. That topic doesn’t seem to be on the syllabus at all.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. I’d stay in the class and take the course even though it wasn’t what I was expecting. (A)
   b. I’d ask the teacher if the course has changed since the catalog was printed. (I)
   c. I’d complain to the chair of the department about how the catalog and the syllabus don’t match. (D)
Scenario #3:
In one of your history classes, the instructor has a policy that you cannot miss more than three days of class. For every day missed after three, your final grade is lowered by two percent. This semester, you have missed eight classes because of various reasons: you were sick for a week with the flu, your grandmother died and you had to fly home for the funeral, and you had a dentist’s appointment. You haven’t told your instructor why you’ve missed class.

On one of the papers that you turned in, along with the grade, your instructor wrote, “You have now missed eight days of class. Your final grade will be penalized 10%.”

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. I’d tell the instructor that the absences shouldn’t drop my grade because they were legitimate. (D)
   b. I’d tell the instructor that I forgot to show documentation for my absences, and ask if I could still bring in documentation to excuse them. (I)
   c. I would accept the deduction since I had failed to tell the teacher why I missed class. (A)

Scenario #4:
You are taking an education class that is required for your major. Your class meets for 50 minutes, three times a week. Most days, the class begins with your teacher asking if anyone watched a particular television show the previous night. Today, the teacher begins by asking if anyone watched The Simpsons last night. The class has a 15-minute discussion about how the animation in the show has changed in the last decade. Your teacher also talks about the episode when the town in the show decided to legalize gay marriage. You are entertained by the discussion, but know that you need to know the concepts from the chapter before the next test.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. I’d stay quiet and just wait until the teacher talks about the chapter. (A)
   b. After class, I’d let the teacher know that I’m interested in this course and ask if there’s a reason we discuss television shows every day. (I)
   c. I’d interrupt The Simpsons discussion and ask the teacher to begin talking about the chapter. (D)
**Scenario #5:**

In one of your classes, your teacher assigns between 15 to 20 hours of homework a week. You’re very interested in the material, but you also are a full-time student and have a part-time job. You want to do well in the class, but also don’t want to neglect your job or other courses. This week, the teacher has given you an extra reading assignment in addition to the ‘normal’ homework. You know you will not be able to complete it all.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   
   a. I’d just do as much of the homework as I could. (A)
   
   b. I’d explain to the teacher that having this much homework doesn’t allow me time to study in other classes, and I’d ask if the teacher has tips for how to complete the homework in a more timely manner. (I)
   
   c. I’d tell the teacher that no other class expects this much from students, and it is unrealistic to expect this much from students. Then I’d ask for the teacher to reduce the amount of homework. (D)

**Scenario #6:**

You are a biology major hoping to get into medical school. You’re taking Biology this semester, and your instructor is a graduate student. Occasionally, your instructor comes late to class, and once didn’t show up at all. When the instructor is there, you feel the lectures don’t make sense and the material isn’t explained very well. You’ve tried asking questions in class, but the instructor had to look up the answer and read it out of the book. For the last exam, the instructor had the students write the questions for the test. Usually, you get out of class early, because the instructor doesn’t have enough material prepared. You don’t feel you’re learning any of the things you’re going to need to get into medical school.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   
   a. I’d tell my instructor that I’m concerned I’m not learning enough in the class and ask what suggestions could be offered to change that. (I)
   
   b. I’d tell the director of the department about how the graduate student is incompetent and it’s unfair that I’m paying money for this class and not being taught anything. (D)
   
   c. I would just learn the material as best as I could. (A)
**Scenario #7:**
You have an exam coming up in one of your major classes. Your instructor gave your class a study guide one week before the exam. Although you have notes from the class, you focus your studying on the material in the study guide. You carefully memorize every vocabulary word and concept on the study guide. On the day of the test, you feel confident that you have learned the material. When you get the exam, you look over the questions and realize that the majority of the questions are over material that was not on the study guide.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. I would just take the test and try to study harder on the next one. (A)
   b. I would ask the professor what I could do to be better prepared for the next exam. (I)
   c. I would tell the professor that the study guide was unfair and ask why bother to give one out if it’s not going to be what’s on the test? (D)

**Scenario #8:**
You are taking a Calculus class, and have a teacher from China. The instructor is brilliant, but speaks with a thick Chinese accent, which you have a hard time understanding. Calculus is a difficult subject for you anyway, and when in class, you don’t understand most of the things the instructor says during the lecture.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. I would try to find a tutor who could help me learn the material. (A)
   b. I would tell the instructor that I have a difficult time understanding the lectures, and ask for suggestions about what I could do. (I)
   c. I’d tell the instructor to slow down and speak more clearly. (D)
Scenario #9:

In your Introduction to Psychology class, the teacher will ask students questions and if they don’t know the answer, or say the wrong answer, the teacher sighs loudly and says, “Come on, people! This is right in your textbook! Are you stupid?” He often puts students down and is rude to them. You are going to miss class next week for a choir concert, and need to have the instructor sign a paper for the activity. After class there are several students waiting around to ask the professor a question. You approach the teacher and explain why you’ll be gone, and that you need to have your form signed, and the teacher just rolls his eyes and says, “What do I care if you’re going to miss class? It’s a huge lecture. I won’t even notice you’re gone anyway.” He then turns his attention to the next student. You still need to have the paper signed.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. I’d tell the teacher that there was no need to be rude, especially when he was still going to have to sign the paper. (D)
   b. Nothing; it’s not worth getting yelled at just to get the paper signed. (A)
   c. I’d ask the teacher if he was angry with me for some reason or if I’d done something inappropriate. (I)

Scenario #10:

In your theatre class, you believe that the teacher favors some students more than others. One day in class, the teacher sternly tells you, in front of the class, that you need to work harder on your acting scene. Another day, you come into class a few minutes late, and the teacher tells you that if you can’t be in class on time, you shouldn’t bother to come at all. Another student comes a few minutes later, and the teacher says nothing. Finally, this week, you got a paper back that you turned in one day late, and it had a one-letter grade penalty taken off the grade. Another student, who also turned in the paper late, did not have any penalty.

1. If you were the student in this situation, which of the following answers best represents the primary action you would take?
   a. I’d tell the teacher that if I’m not treated fairly from now on, I’m going to write bad evaluations for the class at the end of the semester. (D)
   b. I’d ask the teacher if I was doing something differently for me to be treated differently from other students. (I)
   c. I’d try to do better in class so the teacher wouldn’t need to single me out anymore. (A)
Appendix E

Types of Conflict Strategies

I. AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES (No direct discussion of the problem takes place.)
   A. Nonstrategies (Discussion is perceived to be unnecessary).
      1. Letting the issue resolve itself. The problem either disappears or
         is expected to without any active attempt to resolve it.
      2. Empathic adjustment. Understanding develops between the
         parties and the problem is resolved without explicit attempts to
         communicate.
      3. Disregarding the issue. The problem is dismissed as
         unimportant.
   B. Avoidance strategies (Discussion is avoided to minimize negative
      reactions from the partner.)
      1. Avoiding the issue. The problem is tolerated to avoid negative
         reactions from the partner.
      2. Avoiding the person. The partner is avoided, communication is
         minimized, or the relationship is terminated to avoid conflict.
   C. Indirect strategies (The actor communicates indirectly. There is no
      explicit acknowledgement that a problem exists.)
      1. Hinting. Indicating perceptions and feelings through nonverbal
         communication and indirect comments only.
      2. Setting an example. The partner is expected to observe and
         imitate the actor’s own behavior.
      3. Joking. The problem is discussed jokingly. The actor does not
         disclose actual feelings of concern or irritation. The problem is
         made to seem less serious than the actor perceives it to be.
   D. Submissive strategies
      1. Yielding. Passively complying without providing input to the
         solution of the problem.
      2. Submissive emotion. An emotional display which indicates
         weakness and passivity, such as crying or acting hurt or sick.

II. DISTRIBUTIVE STRATEGIES (Explicit acknowledgement and discussion of
    conflict which seeks concessions from the partner).
   A. Noncoercive compliance-gaining
      1. Requesting. It is simply suggested or requested that the partner
         change his/her behavior. There is little elaboration or disclosure.
      2. Demanding. Same as requesting except that the request is
         assertive or aggressive. A negative evaluation of the partner is
         stated or implied.
      3. Persuading. The partner is given reasons for complying. The
         appeal attempts to change outlook, as well as behavior.
   B. Coercive compliance-gaining
1. *Aggressive emotion.* Emotional behavior is directed against the partner to gain compliance (e.g., insults, slurs, profanity, yelling or anger).

2. *Threat-aversion.* Punishment is threatened or carried out for failure to comply.

### III. INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIES
(Explicit acknowledgment and discussion of conflict which sustains a neutral evaluation of the partner and does not seek concessions).

1. *Disclosure.* The actor provides and elicits information to facilitate understanding of perceptions, feelings, and reasons for behavior. No attempt is made to explore alternative solutions to the problem. The problem may be viewed purely as a misunderstanding or the parties may “agree to disagree.”

2. *Problem-solving.* Same as disclosure, except that the actor shows a willingness to consider alternative solutions to the problem that are mutually acceptable (Sillars, 1980a, p 188).
Appendix F

*Argumentativeness Scale*

**Instructions:** This questionnaire contains statements about *arguing controversial issues.* Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by circling the appropriate number in the columns on the right to match your response to the following statements. Remember, consider each item in terms of *arguing controversial issues.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Almost Never True</th>
<th>Rarely True</th>
<th>Occasionally True</th>
<th>Often True</th>
<th>Almost Always True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. While in an argument, I worry that the person I am arguing with will form a negative impression of me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I enjoy avoiding arguments.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Once I finish an argument, I promise myself that I will not get into another.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When I finish arguing with someone, I feel nervous and upset.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get into an argument.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am happy when I keep an argument from happening.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I prefer being with people who rarely disagree with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I consider an argument an exciting intellectual challenge.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. I feel refreshed and satisfied after an argument on a controversial issue.

18. I have the ability to do well in an argument.

19. I try to avoid getting into arguments

20. I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument.
### Appendix G

*Verbal Aggressiveness Scale*

**Instructions:** This survey is concerned with how we try to get people to comply with our wishes. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by circling the appropriate number in the columns to the right to match your response to the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost True</th>
<th>Rarely True</th>
<th>Occasionally True</th>
<th>Often True</th>
<th>Almost Always True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am extremely careful to avoid attacking individuals’ intelligence when I attack their ideas.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When individuals are very stubborn, I use insults to soften the stubbornness.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I try very hard to avoid having other people feel bad about themselves when I try to influence them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When people refuse to do a task I know is important, without good reason, I tell them they are unreasonable.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When others do things I regard as stupid, I try to be extremely gentle with them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If individuals I am trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When people behave in ways that are in very poor taste, I insult them in order to shock them into proper behavior.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I try to make people feel good about themselves even when their ideas are stupid.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance, I lose my temper and say rather strong things to them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. When people criticize my shortcomings, I take it in good humor and do not try to get back at them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off.
12. When I dislike individuals greatly, I try not to show it in what I say or how I say it.
13. I like poking fun at people who do things which are very stupid in order to stimulate their intelligence.
14. When I attack persons’ ideas, I try not to damage their self concepts.
15. When I try to influence people, I make a great effort not to offend them.
16. When people do things which are mean or cruel, I attack their character in order to help correct their behavior.
17. I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks.
18. When nothing seems to work in trying to influence others, I yell and scream in order to get some movement from them.
19. When I am not able to refute others’ positions, I try to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.
20. When an argument shifts to personal attacks, I try very hard to change the subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost True</th>
<th>Rarely True</th>
<th>Occasionally True</th>
<th>Often True</th>
<th>Almost Always True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H

*Personal Report of Communication Apprehension*

**Instructions:** This instrument is composed of statements concerning your feelings about communication with other people. Indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling the appropriate number in the columns to the right to match your response to the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Many of the statements are similar to other statements. Work quickly, and just record your first impression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I dislike participating in group discussions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have no fear of giving a speech.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I like to get involved in group discussions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.  

18. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.  

19. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.  

20. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.  

21. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.  

22. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.  

23. I’m afraid to speak up in conversations.  

24. While giving a speech I get so nervous, I forget facts I really know.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

*Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale*

*Instructions:* Here are some statements about how people interact with other people. Indicate the response that best reflects YOUR communication with others by circling the appropriate number in the columns to the right to match your response to the following statements. Be honest in your responses and reflect on your communication behavior very carefully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Seldomly</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I allow friends to see who I really am.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I can put myself in others’ shoes.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am comfortable in social situations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When I’ve been wronged, I confront the person who wronged me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My conversations are pretty one-sided.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My conversations are characterized by smooth shifts from one topic to the next.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My friends can tell when I’m happy or sad.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My communication is usually descriptive, not evaluative.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My friends truly believe that I care about them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I accomplish my communication goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J  
*Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDSII)*

**Instructions.** Consider the situation above. The items below concern your impressions or opinion of the cause or causes of this conflict. Circle one number for each of the following questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is the cause(s) something:</strong></th>
<th>9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. That reflects an aspect of yourself</td>
<td>Reflects an aspect of the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Manageable by you</td>
<td>Not manageable by you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Permanent</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. You can regulate</td>
<td>You cannot regulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Over which others have control</td>
<td>Over which others have no control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Inside of you</td>
<td>Outside of you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Stable over time</td>
<td>Variable over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Under the power of other people</td>
<td>Not under the power of other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Something about you</td>
<td>Something about others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Over which you have power</td>
<td>Over which you have no power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Unchangeable</td>
<td>Changeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Other people can regulate</td>
<td>Other people cannot regulate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I believe the instructor in this scenario:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. Wants to resolve the conflict</th>
<th>9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. Is willing to cooperate to solve the problem</td>
<td>Doesn’t want to resolve the conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Is trying to resolve the conflict</td>
<td>Is not willing to cooperate to solve the problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** The total scores for each dimension are obtained by summing the items, as follows: 1, 6, 9=locus of causality; 5, 8, 12=external control; 3, 7, 11=stability; 2, 4, 10=personal control. Items 13, 14, and 15=intent to cooperate.
References


Forgas, J. P. (2001). Affective influences on communication and attribution in relationships. In V. Manusov & J. H. Harvey (Eds.), *Attribution, communication behavior, and close relationships* (pp. 3-20). New York: Cambridge University Press.


