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Learning Communities in the Basic Communication Course: Exploring Students' Perception of Power and Use of Compliance-Gaining Strategies

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Research exploring power in the classroom has traditionally focused on the instructor's use of power, including methods instructors employ to elicit control of and compliance from their students (Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984; McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, & Plax, 1987; Roach, 1995). The persuasive strategies instructors use can be classified as either positive (prosocial) or negative (antisocial), meaning that either a positive or negative sanction will follow if the student complies with or resists the task in question. The types of persuasive tactics instructors use have been previously studied to gain a better understanding of the associated impact on students; however, it has been only recently that scholars have launched research initiatives to determine if students employ these same tactics when attempting to persuade their instructors (Baker, Meyer, & Hunt; 2005; Golish, 1999; Golish & Olson, 2000). The lack of research in this area is especially problematic given renewed efforts to position classroom communica-

tion as a transactional process involving mutual student and teacher influence (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Shelton, Lane, & Waldhart, 1999).

An examination of students' persuasive strategies may be particularly relevant to basic course instructors utilizing learning communities (see Baker et al., 2005). Learning communities are becoming more prevalent as universities offer additional orientation options for incoming freshmen; however, few scholars have examined their use in the context of the basic communication course (Hunt, Novak, Semlak, & Meyer, 2005). Learning communities may involve both residential and curricular components (Cabrera, Crissman, Bernal, Nora, Terenzini, & Pascarella, 2002). It is often the case that students enrolled in learning communities live in the same residence halls, take many classes together, and engage in extracurricular orientation programs with faculty and other students (Brumm & Mickelson, 2002). Learning community programs are designed to create coherence in the curriculum, help students transition from high school to college, encourage intellectual interaction with faculty, and facilitate student retention (Howser, 1998; Matthews & Smith, 1996). Students in learning communities learn together, study together, and socialize with one another, and therefore have the opportunity to become a tight-knit group, which may influence their perception of power as well as the types of persuasive strategies they use with teachers. This could become more complicated in the context of a basic course staffed primarily by graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) as research indicates students feel they have more power with GTAs than professors (Golish, 1999). It

is critical that teachers, and those responsible for training them, become aware of the different ways students may attempt to exert influence in the classroom. Such awareness should allow instructors, especially GTAs, to more effectively manage the classroom and facilitate student learning. The literature on power in the classroom offers a solid foundation for understanding classroom management issues by exploring how teachers and students attempt to influence each other.

POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

Instructional communication scholars have developed an entire program of research examining the use of power in the classroom (see Richmond & Roach, 1992 for an extensive review of this literature). According to Kearney et al. (1984), power is defined as “the teacher’s ability to influence students to do something they would not have done had they not been influenced” (p. 725). Teachers wield their power in the classroom to acquire the attention of their students and to facilitate motivation, participation, and learning.

Research examining power in the classroom relies heavily on the following five bases of power elucidated by French and Raven (1960): reward, coercive, referent, legitimate, and expert. According to Roach (1995), coercive power is the degree to which people feel they will be punished if they do not comply with a person’s request, referent power is the desire for people to identify with or please the person, legitimate power is the assumed or initial right a person has to enforce his or her power on someone, expert power is based on a person’s knowledge

or expertise on a particular subject, and reward power is the ability of the individual to provide rewards or reinforcement for the performance of the desired behavior.

The actual tools or resources that teachers use to exert power are called compliance-gaining strategies. Wheelless, Barraclough, and Stewart (1983) define compliance-gaining as “the communicative behavior in which an agent engages so as to elicit from a target some agent-selected behavior” (p. 111). A series of studies, and the resulting typologies, provide a mechanism for understanding and labeling the persuasive strategies used in the classroom (Kearney et al., 1984; 1985; McCroskey et al., 1985; Plax, Kearney, & Tucker, 1986; Richmond et al., 1987; Roach, 1991). In particular, Kearney et al., (1985) created a typology of teacher behavior alteration techniques (BATs) and corresponding behavior alteration messages (BAMs). BATs are the specific tactics used by instructors to keep students on-task or to persuade students to perform a certain task (e.g., offer a reward to students for good behavior). BAMs are the actual verbal and nonverbal messages that instructors use in the course of employing persuasive tactics. For example, an instructor who wanted to increase student participation could use a reward strategy (BAT) and communicate to students that they will receive extra credit for participating actively in class (BAM). Again, these strategies can be classified as either prosocial (messages designed to benefit students by encouraging them) or antisocial (messages designed to punish students).

Many scholars have examined students’ resistance to teachers’ compliance-gaining efforts in the classroom (Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989; Kearney, Plax, &

Burroughs, 1991; Kearney & Plax, 1992; Lee, Levine, & Cambra, 1997). However, as Golish and Olson (2000) state, “In these studies, students are not viewed as catalysts of persuasion; they are merely reacting to their teacher’s compliance-gaining messages” (p. 295). Consequently, communication scholars began the task of identifying strategies students use to persuade the teacher. Because of power differences, students do not have a wide variety of strategies to choose from compared to their teachers (Richmond & Roach, 1992). As a result, students do not use the same BATs as teachers (Kearney et al., 1985). To determine what BATs students use, Golish (1999) had students read scenarios in which something needed to be changed (e.g., a grade or a due date) and then had them decide how they would handle the situation. The messages that the students constructed in Golish’s study were categorized into 19 prosocial, antisocial, and neutral BATs. This study revealed that students overwhelmingly use positive strategies (prosocial BATs) to persuade their teachers while they tend to use negative strategies (antisocial BATs) as a last resort.

In 2000, Golish and Olson reported that the BATs used most often by students include private persuasion (e.g., communicating indirectly to the teacher either by email, telephone, or after class), flattery (e.g., complimenting the teacher on his/her teaching ability or personality), group persuasion (e.g., trying to convince the teacher as a team), evidence of preparation/logic (e.g., using reasoning), and honesty/sincerity (e.g., simply telling the truth). The same study indicates that students use the following BATs less frequently: verbal force/demand (e.g., ordering the teacher to comply), ref-

erencing a higher authority (e.g., mentioning another professor, boss, or someone else with more power), punishing the teacher (e.g., using negative classroom behavior, giving a bad teacher evaluation, etc.), pleading (e.g., begging), and emotional displays (e.g., nonverbal facial expressions).

Beyond the development of a typology of students' persuasive strategies, Golish's (1999) research demonstrates that students generally feel that they have more power with GTAs compared to professors, especially in terms in persuasive efforts rooted in the power of the group:

Many students felt there was "strength in numbers" in that GTA's are more likely to "give in" to their persuasive attempts if the GTA is confronted by a group of students rather than a single individual student. Group persuasion may be a more appealing persuasive strategy given that students assume a more subordinate role. Students may perceive that the potential repercussions of their requests are lessened because the persuasive request is decentralized among a group of students. (p. 27)

If Golish's assumption is correct, it is possible that students in learning communities may use group persuasion as a BAT more often than students in non-learning communities because they feel safer performing persuasive attempts with a number of other students than they do on their own. Indeed, based upon the idea of "safety in numbers," students in learning communities may use a variety of BATs more frequently compared to students who are not enrolled in learning communities. The extant literature on the pedagogical implications of

learning communities provides additional insight into this possibility.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Today, learning communities have become quite popular at colleges and universities across the United States. Learning communities are “experiencing a renaissance, particularly as they respond to the combination of internal and external pressures to better meet the needs of undergraduates and expectation of their parents” (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 2). At present, approximately 400 to 500 colleges and universities, both public and private, have learning communities on their campuses, and this number continues to grow (Smith, 2001).

Learning communities may be based upon the major of the student, a general education grouping, or a particular thematic focus. Smith, MacGregor, Mathews, and Gabelnick (2004) identify three structural frameworks for creating learning communities: (a) learning communities within courses that are unmodified (involving at least two pre-existing courses without modifications to the curriculum), (b) learning communities of linked or clustered classes (involving the intentional linking of at least two courses typically comprised exclusively of learning community students), and (c) team-taught learning communities (involving at least two courses where faculty members collaborate to develop a shared syllabus). Students enrolled in learning communities often live in the same residence halls and engage in extracurricular orientation programs with peers and faculty (Cabrera et al., 2002). Therefore, students go to

courses knowing everyone in their class instead of just a few other students or no one at all.

Theoretically, there are many advantages of this cooperative approach to learning. Riel and Fulton (2001) state, students in learning communities “build on one another’s strengths, develop a sense of competence and empowerment in areas where they are most motivated or skilled, and can pull others who are weaker in these areas” (p. 519). Similarly, Lawrence (2002) claims that it is less likely that a student will drop out if they are involved in a learning community because the other members will support him or her and push the student to keep going. Other positive benefits of learning communities include increased academic achievement, retention, motivation, intellectual development, learning, and involvement in community (Kellogg, 1999). If students feel a sense of belonging, then they will be more likely to be involved in their “community” (Lawrence, 2002). Students confirm this statement by commenting, “...in learning community courses they are more comfortable asking questions, speaking in class, and seeking help from a teacher or classmate than in their non-learning communities courses” (Levine, 2000, para. 8). Ultimately, it is hoped that this level of student involvement will lead to improved learning and retention of the subject matter at hand (Lawrence, 2002; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

Extant literature clearly establishes the pedagogical advantages of learning communities. But one has to wonder what negative implications might exist for instructors if students in learning communities feel empowered by the group particularly when the group is being taught by a GTA. For example, the comfort level

that is present in learning communities often results in the students taking more risks than they normally would (Lawrence, 2002). Students in learning communities have greater opportunities to interact with one another and with instructors than students in traditional classrooms. A shared sense of community may prompt students to voice their dissent or dissatisfaction with assignments to their GTAs. Moreover, students' increased collaboration might make them feel as if they have more power over the teacher than a class of traditional students. First-year students in a learning community tend to be better acquainted with their peers due to outside social activities and similar class schedules. On the other hand, first-year students in a traditional class are typically strangers to one another and, without the additional interaction, do not have a shared sense of community. While most instructors likely view student willingness to take risks and voice dissent as clear advantages of participation in learning communities, they could become problematic if they lead to anti-social behavior. Jaffee (2004) asserts that as opposed to traditional classes, which are essentially comprised of a community of strangers, learning community classes are more homogenous and differ in terms of the internal dynamics of the peer group. Since learning communities are unique classroom environments, it is necessary to explore the ways in which these learning communities might differ from traditional classes. Therefore, the following research questions are posited:

RQ₁: Do the types of BATs students use with GTAs differ depending upon whether they are enrolled in a learning community or a non-learning community class?

- RQ₂: Do students' self-perceptions of power differ depending upon whether they are enrolled in a learning community or a non-learning community class?

METHOD

Sample and Data Collection

The participants consisted of 253 undergraduate college students from a large, Midwestern university. There were more females ($n = 145$) than males ($n = 108$) in the study. The average age of the participants was 18.30 ($SD = 1.34$) and the majority of participants were in their first year of school (first year $n = 250$, junior $n = 2$, senior $n = 1$). The racial and ethnic distribution of the sample was as follows: 85.7% Caucasian, 9.9% African American, 2% Latino/Latina, 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and .8% bi-racial.

The conditions in the sample were constructed by obtaining a list of all current sections (approximately 65) of the basic communication course (COM 110: Communication and Critical Inquiry). The basic course is a required component of the general education program and services approximately 1,500 students a semester. The focus of the course is public speaking, but it also includes units on group and interpersonal communication. The list was then divided into sections of learning communities and traditionally enrolled students. The learning community program at this university uses student cohorts that share common classes (the students are grouped by major, residence, or interest in a specific

theme) throughout their first year. In addition, students meet for a weekly seminar to discuss topics like course work and problems adjusting to college. Since the sample consisted of eight learning community classrooms and eight non-learning community classrooms, the number of classrooms on both lists was divided by eight. Next, a random number marked the first classroom on each list that was a part of the sample and each following 8th class was also part of the sample until each list contained eight classes to be surveyed. As a result, we obtained a relatively even distribution of students enrolled in learning community (50.2%, $n = 127$) and traditional (49.8%, $n = 126$) sections. It is important to note that all of the sections surveyed in the present study were taught by GTAs.

Measures

BATs. Student BAT use was operationalized using Golish's (1999) questionnaire containing 19 BAMs representing the 19 student BATs. The BAMs were classified into three categories: prosocial (e.g., approaching the instructor in private; evidence of hardwork or logic), antisocial (e.g., negatively evaluating the instructor; demands), and neutral (the strategy could not be identified as having a positive or negative valence) (see Golish, 1999 for a complete description of these categories). Students were asked to rate how frequently they use similar messages to persuade their teachers on a scale ranging from one (extremely unlikely) to seven (extremely likely). Importantly, BAT labels did not appear on the student's questionnaire. As other researchers have noted (Golish & Olson, 2000), given that the par-

ticipants responded to blockings of example statements, no clear factor solution was expected. As suspected, no meaningful factor structures emerged. Thus, the BAT instrument was viewed as 19 relatively distinct dimensions.

Power. Student perception of power was assessed using a measure similar to the power-base measure (PBM) developed by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). The scale consists of four items measuring each of the five bases of power (coercive, expert, legitimate, referent, and reward). However, Aguinis, Nesler, Quigley, Suk, and Tedeschi (1996) revised the scale to measure how much power GTAs perceived their supervisors to possess. In the present study, the scale was slightly altered from Aguinis et al.'s version to explore how much power students perceive themselves to have in the classroom. Students were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with each power statement by using a scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) argue that, given a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, this set of scales has an acceptable content validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. The alpha reliabilities for the current application were .86 for coercive power, .62 for expert power, .79 for legitimate power, .76 for referent power, and .64 for reward power.

RESULTS

The first research question examined differences between learning community and non-learning community

students in terms of the BATs they use to persuade their instructors. The results of a MANOVA revealed a significant main effect for BAT usage, Wilks $\lambda = .54$, $F(19, 231) = 10.26$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .46$. Univariate follow-up tests indicated that learning community students reported using the following BATs more than their

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of BATs for Learning Community
vs. Traditional Classes

	Learning Community ($n = 126$)	Traditional ($n = 125$)
	$M(SD)$	$M(SD)$
Honesty-Sincerity	5.80(.85)	5.98(.89)
Blame	4.00(1.67)	3.70(1.67)
Complaining	2.43(1.18)	2.32(1.16)
Pleading	2.36(1.34)	2.35(1.31)
Guilt*	4.38(1.41)	2.61(1.45)
Flattery*	4.51(1.39)	4.11(1.56)
Play on Teachers' Ability to Relate*	4.98(1.26)	4.01(1.60)
Group Persuasion*	5.07(1.39)	3.94(1.88)
Public Persuasion	3.85(1.64)	3.52(1.68)
Private Persuasion	5.19(1.32)	5.13(1.48)
Evidence of Preparation/Logic	5.24(1.27)	5.04(1.45)
Performance*	5.02(1.35)	3.88(1.73)
Stress/Overload*	4.68(1.61)	3.61(1.63)
Utilitarian Justice*	4.54(1.41)	3.61(1.59)
Emotional Displays	2.06(1.44)	1.88(1.31)
General Excuses*	2.54(1.49)	1.65(1.11)
Punishing the Teacher	1.44(.93)	1.37(.87)
Reference to Higher Authority*	3.19(1.60)	2.21(1.40)
Verbal Force/Demand	1.44(.88)	1.34(.76)

Note. There are significant differences in means for BATs with an asterisk.

peers enrolled in traditional sections of the basic course: guilt, $F(1, 249) = 95.57, p = .000, \eta^2 = .28$, flattery, $F(1, 249) = 4.52, p = .034, \eta^2 = .02$, play on the teacher's ability to relate, $F(1, 249) = 28.50, p = .000, \eta^2 = .10$, group persuasion, $F(1, 249) = 29.25, p = .000, \eta^2 = .11$, performance, $F(1, 249) = 33.63, p = .000, \eta^2 = .12$, stress/overload, $F(1, 249) = 27.62, p = .000, \eta^2 = .10$, utilitarian justice, $F(1, 249) = 24.59, p = .000, \eta^2 = .09$, general excuses, $F(1, 249) = 28.90, p = .000, \eta^2 = .10$, and reference to higher authority, $F(1, 249) = 26.87, p = .000, \eta^2 = .10$. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for BAT use by learning community and traditional students.

This study also explored whether learning community and non-learning community students differed in their perceptions of power. In short, we found no differences between the groups on any of the power bases, Wilks $\lambda = .99, F(5, 240) = .64, p = .672, \eta^2 = .01$. The

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of PBM for Learning Community
vs. Traditional Classes

	Learning Community ($n = 126$)	Traditional ($n = 125$)
	$M(SD)$	$M(SD)$
Coercive	8.78(3.96)	8.47(3.73)
Reward	16.10(1.87)	16.17(1.98)
Legitimate	13.45(2.65)	13.13(2.88)
Referent	16.35(1.98)	16.34(2.22)
Expert	14.34(2.43)	14.63(2.03)
Overall	69.02(8.03)	68.75(7.73)

means and standard deviations for the PBM are presented in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to identify differences between learning community and traditionally enrolled students in terms of their use of BATs and perception of power with GTAs in the basic course at our institution. Consistent with previous research (Golish, 1999; Golish & Olson, 2000), students in this sample did not report using all of the BATs frequently; however, they did report using all of the 19 BATs. In addition, the results are generally consistent with extant research in that students tend to favor prosocial strategies (e.g., private persuasion, flattery, group persuasion, evidence of preparation/logic, honesty-sincerity) when they attempt to persuade instructors (Golish, 1999; Golish & Olson, 2000). Students use arguments highlighting their hard work on assigned tasks and compliment instructors when they perceive they are doing a good job in the classroom. Students who use these strategies also engage the teacher during office hours or privately through email.

Importantly, we did observe significant differences between the learning community students and their regularly enrolled peers. The students enrolled in learning communities were found to use all of the BAT types (prosocial, antisocial, neutral) more often than students not enrolled in learning communities. In terms of the prosocial BATs, the students in learning communities were more likely to attempt to get the entire class

behind them to persuade the teacher (group persuasion), remind the teacher how much time they devote to the class (performance), compliment the teacher's ability and/or personality (flattery), and emphasize that compliance on behalf of the instructor would be better for the entire class in the long run (utilitarian justice). We also identified differences between the groups on the following antisocial BATs: general excuses (the students indicated that they would make up excuses that sounded realistic and play on the sympathy of the instructor) and reference to higher authority (the students indicated that they would threaten to talk with someone with more power to get their way). Finally, learning community students reported using more of the following neutral BATs compared to students not enrolled in learning communities: guilt (students attempt to make the teacher feel guilty for course requirements like assignment deadlines), play on teachers' ability to relate (students would use the teacher's common ground and experiences to persuade him or her), and stress/overload (students would tell the teacher that they are overly stressed or bombarded with homework).

It appears that a dynamic is at play for students participating in learning communities. Literature suggests that learning communities excel at fostering a sense of community, cohesion, and closeness with peers. Often, these students live in close proximity, engage in structured discussions, and enroll in many of the same classes. This increased cohesion may explain why students in learning communities report using more BATs compared to students who are not in learning communities. According to Johnson and Romanoff (1999), learning communities increase students' willingness to speak

up and to take a stand in class. Overall, the results of the current study paint a positive picture of students' participation in learning communities—in the present study learning community students appeared to be more willing to speak up and take a stand in class, compared to their peers in traditional sections of the basic course, as indicated by their use of specific influence strategies.

However, this positive assessment must be tempered by data suggesting that such students also engage in more antisocial compliance-gaining strategies compared to students enrolled in traditional sections of the basic course. Jaffee (2004), commenting in a recent article of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, explains the implications of this in the following terms:

Students' intensive communication with one another produces a heightened "class consciousness." Indeed, professors who teach in learning communities frequently detect a more adversarial, us-versus-them attitude among the students—a kind of class conflict. Students can appear less respectful, chattier, and more disruptive. They may work together to demand reductions in workload or changes in learning objectives. (p. B16)

Although this phenomenon has received scant attention in the education literature, past research examining organizational learning communities demonstrates that such programs offer participants communication networks outside of normal channels (Owenby, 2002). Students who take part in learning communities are afforded many opportunities to communicate that non-learning community students simply do not have. Perhaps this extra contact allows learning community students opportunities to develop compliance-gaining stra-

tegies as a group. This would seem to explain the differences we observed in the use of the group persuasion BAT. Again, this finding seems particularly germane to courses taught by GTAs as previous empirical research has failed to demonstrate any difference in BAT use based on students' participation in learning communities with professors (Baker et al., 2005).

Although this research reveals differences between these two groups in the persuasive strategies they report using, it does not show that the groups differ in their perception of their power in the classroom. A closer examination of the means for the PBM reveals that students in both groups perceived having the most power in the referent base and the least power in the coercive base. Previous research demonstrates that students typically avoid using direct and face-threatening strategies to influence their teachers (Golish, 1999). For the most part, students tend to avoid using coercive power unless they perceive that they have no other alternatives. It is interesting to note that students in both groups reported using referent power most frequently followed by reward and expert power. Golish and Olson (2000) found that students perceived themselves as using expert and legitimate power most frequently. The researchers argued that students are likely to tap into these bases of power in an effort to show their knowledge of the material and express their voice in the classroom. The students in this study also clearly perceived that they had an ability to impact how the teacher felt (referent power centers upon the perceived ability to make the target of persuasion feel valued, accepted, and important).

There are several pedagogical implications that arise from the current study. Initially, basic course directors should provide more information on compliance-gaining during teacher training. While some teachers may have a basic understanding of BATs, others, especially new GTAs, may have no background knowledge in the subject matter (see Meyer, Simonds, Simonds, Baldwin, Hunt, & Comadena, in press, for a review of this literature). Thus, it would be helpful for instructors to not only learn what compliance-gaining means, but to hear scenarios and examples of what a student might do or say to influence instructors. Then, these examples of regular classrooms could be compared to learning community classrooms. Focusing on compliance-gaining during training is an excellent way for basic course directors to better prepare instructors to teach learning community classrooms.

Also, the program directors of learning communities should be integrally involved in the training process to help prepare those teaching special sections of the basic course. Primarily, it is important to establish lines of communication between the program director(s) and those who teach learning community classes. At the site where we collected data, the only communication between the two parties is a letter to the instructors from the program director indicating that they will be teaching a learning community. It would be helpful if there were continual correspondence between the two throughout the course of the semester. The program directors could answer questions for the GTAs, give tips from past experiences, and explain what to expect from learning community students. Of course such a discussion should include information about the positive im-

plications of participation in learning communities in terms of student learning as well as tips for encouraging prosocial persuasion.

Beyond training for new GTAs, learning community program directors could infuse discussions of ethical classroom communication into the weekly seminars. Many learning community programs require that students meet once a week outside of class in their learning community groups. In this seminar, students could discuss how to use persuasion in the classroom without engaging in antisocial BATs. In addition, the seminar could become integrated with the classroom environment instead of being a separate entity. For example, it might be helpful to have the students' GTAs visit the seminars often to answer questions and explain to the seminar leaders how the students are doing in class. At a minimum, seminar leaders should be trained to discourage students from resorting to antisocial compliance-gaining strategies.

In addition, GTAs should assume responsibility for better preparing themselves for learning communities linked to the basic course. When preparing lessons and activities, they should take into account that students in learning communities may respond differently than regularly enrolled students. We are not suggesting that GTAs search for activities that limit student participation or dissent, but that they design activities that facilitate positive student participation. Having an awareness that students enrolled in learning communities may use different persuasive strategies than students in traditional sections could help instructors design pedagogies that create a positive climate for interaction and learning (Baker et al., 2005; Smith et al.,

2004). Also, instructors can incorporate some of what they learned during training into their own course. For instance, when discussing topics like ethical communication, instructors can teach the students the importance of using prosocial tactics when asking for help or favors. Although this may sound trivial, GTAs must remember that students in many basic courses are first-year college students who may not know how to act properly in a college setting, especially when they are in a close-knit group such as a learning community. Thus, if instructors make clear which BATs are unacceptable, the students might be less likely to use them.

It is also important that GTAs consider that the type of power they invoke in the classroom may be related to the type of power students use in response. If a teacher uses coercive or legitimate power, a student is more likely to feel powerless for fear of being chastised or ignored (Richmond & Roach, 1992). On the other hand, students may feel empowered by teachers who use referent or expert power and therefore use more prosocial BATs (Golish & Olson, 2000). Because a teacher with referent power is seen as being charismatic, students are more likely to develop positive affect for and develop a relationship with that teacher (Barraclough & Stewart, 1992). Thus, students would feel comfortable using a variety of prosocial BATs such as honesty, sincerity, or flattery when trying to alter the teacher's behavior. Similarly, Golish and Olson (2000) note that students use more prosocial BATs with teachers who have expert power because they want "to show respect and acknowledge the teacher's expertise" (p. 299). Rather than focusing on ways to control students by any means necessary, GTAs can be trained to work with students to de-

velop learning climates ripe for active learning and small group activities designed to build community (Baker et al, 2005). This approach has the added advantage of modeling for students how to use power and persuasion in a constructive fashion. In this way, GTAs can help students understand how a large repertoire of compliance-gaining strategies can be useful beyond the walls of the academy.

Although new GTAs enter the classroom without the kind of initial credibility possessed by many tenured professors, they can go a long way toward establishing credibility by acting professionally by upholding course policies, grading fairly, developing good rapport with students while simultaneously sustaining a professional relationship, dressing appropriately, and so on (Buerkel-Rothruss & Fink, 1993; Golish, 1999). As can be seen here, understanding the interplay of instructor and student power sheds light on specific strategies GTAs can employ to discourage and resist the antisocial compliance-gaining attempts of students.

Over the last several years we have dealt with a number of GTAs who reported having “bad” experiences teaching the basic course to learning community students. Unfortunately, these instructors were left with a negative attitude toward the learning community program. In fact, many reported feeling intimidated at times by students who they suggested would intentionally gang up on them and demand compliance. We hope that the reader does not infer from our writing that we disagree with the philosophy of learning communities or that we are seeking to identify ways to force students to act more passively in the classroom. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. We are strong advocates

on our campus for the learning community program and we believe that such programs can help students (especially those in their first and second semesters at college) feel more comfortable and confident expressing their opinions. Indeed, those in the communication discipline should be sympathetic to the goal of helping students to become more competent with the skills of argumentation. However, students will not benefit in the long run by intimidating instructors. Similarly, instructors, especially GTAs who are just learning how to teach, should not be placed in an environment where they feel intimidated by their students. If instructors, basic course directors, and learning community program directors work together, we believe they can go a long way toward the goal of creating classrooms that truly meet students learning needs.

Limitations and Future Research

Although these findings provide meaningful insights into students' perceptions of power and use of BATs, they must be tempered by the limitations of this study. Initially, we did not assess actual student behavior. As Burroughs (1990) has noted, students may think they are active agents of persuasion in the classroom, but their behavior may indicate otherwise. In other words, students may say they will use these compliance-gaining strategies but not actually put them to use in the classroom. Despite this concern, students' perceptions should not be overlooked because they are often precursors to their behavior in the classroom (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). Future studies should also assess the validity of using single items to measure student BAT

use (note, however, that this technique has been employed in a number of studies including Golish, 1999; Golish & Olson, 2000, and Baker et al., 2005). Future research might also combine student self-reports with instructor reports to obtain a more holistic view of the persuasive strategies actually employed in the classroom. In addition, these data could be triangulated with in-depth student and faculty interviews and focus groups to further enrich our understanding of classroom persuasion.

It would also be interesting to test the pedagogical suggestions discussed in the previous section to determine if one or more of them meaningfully influence student BAT use. Such an experimental study would go a long way in helping learning community instructors identify specific teaching strategies that limit students' use of antisocial BATs. Similarly, future research should examine the factors that trigger students' use of antisocial BATs. In addition, since not all learning community programs are structured in the same way, future studies should determine if significant differences exist from one learning community format to another. This line of research could also compare other class configurations such as honor classes and transition courses.

Additional research examining instructors' reactions to the persuasive strategies employed by students in learning communities is clearly warranted. For example, how does having a learning community actually change what goes on in the classroom? How does the community influence the relationship between the teacher and the student? A colleague of ours once commented that his learning community students told him

the following on the *first* day of class: “You’re going to have problems with us.” It would be profitable to further explore how such statements influence the teacher’s motivation and affect. Also, it would be interesting to test the effectiveness of students’ persuasive strategies. Do prosocial, antisocial, and neutral BATs result in teacher compliance? Similarly, the current study examined the types of persuasive strategies that first-year students use with GTAs in the basic communication course. It is likely that students alter the types of persuasive strategies they use with instructors as they progress through their college career. In addition, it is possible that the type of course students are enrolled in might influence their use of persuasive strategies. For example, students may have fewer opportunities to exert power in the basic math or science course. Also, these opportunities are likely to vary substantially as students progress through general education requirements and into their majors. Therefore, future research might explore students’ development and use of BATs over time and in multiple contexts.

Future research might also take a different approach to the measurement of student power. In this study, no differences were found in students’ perception of power. Initially, the expert and reward subscales of the PBM produced unusually low reliabilities in the present study and this could have contributed to the lack of significant results for this measure. Future scholars should consider revising this measure significantly. Another explanation for this finding may be that, although students feel they have the same level of power, learning community students feel more comfortable exerting, utilizing, and expressing their power in

the form of BATs because they are emboldened by the power of the group. One alternative to the PBM would be to utilize a measure of student empowerment. One could argue that students in learning communities experience a higher level of empowerment to learn because they employ BATs that provide them with more control. More research needs to be conducted to analyze the relationship between power and compliance-gaining in order to sort out what triggers actual BAT use.

The present study provides instructors with information about how students in learning communities attempt to exert influence. Although limited to the specific learning community format utilized at our institution (including the use of GTAs to deliver the course to students in their first year of college), the findings suggest that students enrolled in learning community sections of the basic course use more prosocial, antisocial, and neutral compliance-gaining strategies compared to their regularly enrolled counterparts. It is critical that instructors become more aware of the mutual power that exists between students and teachers. For far too long instructional communication scholars have focused exclusively on the ways teachers influence their students in the classroom. We agree with Golish and Olson (2000) that students must be viewed and studied as catalysts of persuasion. Influence is not a resource that teachers and students possess independently of each other. Ultimately, the ability of GTAs to utilize compliance-gaining strategies in the classroom that promote student learning is largely dependent upon their knowledge of the persuasive strategies their students utilize.

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