A Negotiated Order Exploration of Critical Student-Faculty Interactions: Student-Parents Manage Multiple Roles

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One tremendous challenge in higher education today is meeting the needs of the diverse student populations in our classrooms and office hours. Currently, a growing number of college students are between the ages of 30 and 40 (Giczowski, 1990). For many individuals in this particular non-traditional segment of our student population, simultaneously managing multiple life-roles creates a variety of unique challenges. This study explores critical interactions between faculty and students when students are experiencing difficulties in managing school and family/work responsibilities from the framework of Negotiated Order Theory (Strauss, 1978). Data were collected through survey and critical interaction methods. Results demonstrate that childcare concerns most often triggered students to initiate negotiations with faculty members, informational support was often lacking for how to manage such negotiations, limited options were perceived by students, and faculty members not granting student requests often relied on rules-based or fairness rationales when framing their responses. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed, along with practical applications for university personnel. Keywords: student-faculty interactions, student-parents, critical interactions, negotiated order

One tremendous challenge in higher education today is meeting the diverse needs of the student populations in our classrooms and office hours. Currently, a growing number of college students are between the ages of 30 and 40 (Giczowski, 1990). In fact, recent Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac statistics report that across all types of institutions, students between the ages of 25 and 44 account for 32.6% of the overall student population. For many individuals in this particular non-traditional segment of our student population, simultaneously managing multiple life-roles creates a variety of unique challenges both inside and outside of the classroom. This study provides some initial explorations on the nature of communication in critical interactions between faculty members and students who are managing school and family responsibilities from the framework of Negotiated Order Theory (Strauss, 1978).

The unique challenges student-parents face outside the classroom become visible to faculty members only at particular times during the academic year. For example, the first author of this study remembers asking a question during her organizational communication mass lecture one morning. Of 250 students in attendance, only the 4-year old daughter of one student raised her hand—at least someone was awake. The child’s daycare arrangements had fallen through, so the student had called to ask permission to bring her daughter to class. Sick children, lost daycare, and paid work

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responsibilities are a regular part of the lives of this growing student population and influence how they meet classroom expectations.

Although much important research has explored student and faculty communication in the classroom (see, for example, Christophel, 1990; Haleta, 1996; Teven & McCroskey, 1996; Waldron & Applegate, 1998), this study focuses on student-faculty interactions outside the classroom. In particular, we explore faculty interactions with students who are also parents. We argue that three gaps exist in the literature which justify the focus of this study: (a) there is minimal research generally on student-faculty interactions outside the classroom, particularly communication-centered research looking at message behaviors (for exceptions see Fusani, 1994; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Nadler & Nadler, in press), (b) theoretical explanations for these limited findings are scant, and (c) finally, research focusing on the potentially unique needs of student-parents is limited. Briefly, we review below some of the background literature in the fields of communication education and higher education that provides the basis for these critiques. Following this review, Negotiated Order Theory (Strauss, 1978) will be presented as the overarching framework for this study of critical student-parent and faculty interactions, along with extensions of this framework that focus this research more explicitly on the framing of messages.

Student-faculty interaction outcomes. Higher education research has consistently shown that faculty interaction with students influences student persistence toward degree completion (Tinto, 1989), student achievement (Centra & Rock, 1971), student intellectual development and career decisions (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Students who interact more frequently with faculty members report significantly greater satisfaction with the college environment (Austin, 1977). An early review of the literature found that "with the influence of student preenrollment traits held constant, significant positive associations exist between extent and quality of student-faculty informal contact and students educational aspirations, their attitudes toward college, their academic achievement, intellectual and personal development, and their institutional persistence" (Pascarella, 1980, p. 544). Thus, the student-faculty relationship becomes important for a number of reasons. However, we don't know how nontraditional students fare in their relationships with faculty member. Given that we know non-traditional students including part-time, older, and commuter students consistently show a higher rate of attrition than their traditional counterparts (Bean & Metzner, 1985), the connection between nontraditional student-faculty interactions and student outcomes remains an important area of study. In particular, questions concerning how students managing responsibilities for both school and family interact with faculty members are yet unanswered. In addition, research in higher education does not explain these effects from a well-grounded theoretical perspective.

Student-faculty communication outside the classroom. Research in the field of communication education has also explored faculty and student interactions outside the classroom on a limited basis. Verbal immediacy and student motivation, for example, were found to be related to particular aspects of student-faculty out-of-class communication (OCC) (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Aspects of OCC studied by these authors included frequency of office visits, frequency of informal contact, length of office visits, topics of discussion, and student satisfaction with contact. Topics of discussion found in this study included coursework, personal problems, and socialization. Out-of-class student-faculty interaction has also been referred to in the literature as "extra class communication" or EEC (Fusani, 1994). Both students and faculty members reported task-oriented course related information to be the most
common topic of discussion (Fusani, 1994). Student satisfaction with student-faculty interactions was found to be related to verbal immediacy (Dallimore, 1995; Fusani, 1994) and student perceptions of instructor empathy and credibility (Nadler & Nadler, in press). This study explores student-faculty interactions that can be characterized as both coursework and personal problem related. We study interactions between students and faculty that are triggered by school and family conflict.

**Student-parent research.** Finally, the limited research on the needs of student parents has explored role conflict and coping strategies or perceptions of support. For example, an early study found (a) that participants perceiving high personal coping effectiveness used different coping strategies (perspective taking and recognition of societal influence) than those reporting low personal perceptions of coping strategies; and (b) women students also reported higher levels of overall role conflict \[ F(1,60) = 4.55, p < .05 \] (Gilbert & Holahan 1982). A negative relationship was also found between perceived effectiveness of support services and the extent of role conflict experienced (\( \beta \) coefficient = \(-.19, p < .01 \)) (Hammer, Grisby, & Woods, 1998). These authors defined student support services as support groups, exam babysitting services, and information support offices.

Thus, we argue that student-parent and faculty interactions must be further explored. Additionally, research needs to be theoretically grounded and allow us to explore the nature of these interactions as well as specific message behavior. Next, Negotiated Order Theory (Strauss, 1978) is proposed below as one alternative for exploring these interactions, along with an extension of this theory focusing on message framing (Enteman, 1993). Next, the resulting research questions are explored through data collected by critical interaction and survey methods. Finally, results of this study, limitations, and future directions for expanding this initial exploration are then discussed for researchers in the field of communication.

**Negotiated Order Theory and Student-Faculty Critical Interactions**

Strauss (1978) argues that social order is negotiated order. Negotiation, according to Strauss, is “one of the possible means of getting things accomplished when parties need to deal with each other to get those things done” (p. 234). In organizations of higher education, interactions between students and faculty members create and recreate the social order and, arguably the perceived culture at a university for student-parents. Social orders come about through a process of negotiation and must be continually reinstatitated to be seen as an existing or stable organizational structure. Negotiated order research, originally ethnographic in nature, first explored hospitals as social orders (Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, Ehrlich, & Sabshin, 1964); later organizational studies applied the theory to the intersections between technology and strategy (Fisher & Dirsmith, 1995), interorganizational fields (Nathan & Mitroff, 1991), and professional ideology (Chua & Clegg, 1989). Studies in the field of communication incorporating this perspective include work on hostage negotiations (Donohue & Roberto, 1993), discipline in the classroom (Hogelucht-Barquist & Geist, 1997), and frameworks for organizational communication (Johnson, 1997). To approach a social phenomenon from the perspective of Negotiated Order Theory, both the structural context and the negotiation context must be explored (Strauss, 1978).

**Structural Context**

The structural context includes both societal and organizational elements potentially influencing and being influenced by dyadic-level negotiations. In this study of
student-faculty interactions, the most relevant structural context is the university culture including the existence of university-sponsored programs and support systems as well as general perceptions of support from university personnel. Culture is not a unitary concept (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991); similar to the corporate organizations often studied by organizational communication scholars, university culture may be perceived differently by various groups of organizational members. Relevant differences in university culture have only been studied from the perspective of general “non-traditional students” and only in relation to the “culture shock” adults experience returning to school when navigating the registration and advising systems in universities as well as the similar shock felt by administrators and faculty members accustomed to dealing with 18 to 22-year-old students’ orientations to learning (Giczowski, 1990). Indeed, if we see university culture as a social order as defined by Negotiated Order Theory, over time culture can be seen to influence faculty-student interactions while, simultaneously, interactions work to create and recreate culture.

To attempt to understand some aspects of the structural context, this study will explore specific elements of the university culture as perceived by student-parents. Similar to Hammer, Grisby, & Woods (1998), we explored issues of perceived university support as well as both the use of and the perceptions of usefulness of programs targeted to student-parents will frame our first research question:

RQ1: How do students perceive elements of university culture: including, the existence of informational and instrumental support provided by the university, perceptions of use and usefulness of university sponsored programs, and frequency of supportive interactions with university personnel?

With the beginnings of an understanding of the structural context for student-parents, we now turn to a more specific exploration of the negotiation context in critical student-faculty interactions.

**Negotiation Context**

The negotiation context, according to Strauss (1978), explores the specific interactions that continually work to (re)create social order. The negotiation context is critical to our understanding of student-parent and faculty interactions and specific messages reported in these interactions, thus the remainder of our research questions will focus on this component of Negotiated Order Theory. We explore critical student-faculty interactions prompted by students’ felt conflict in managing school and family responsibilities. According to Strauss (1978), the specific properties of the negotiation context are (p. 238):

- The number of negotiators, their relative experience in negotiating, and whom they represent
- Whether the negotiations are one-shot, repeated, sequential, serial, multiple, or linked
- The relative balance of power exhibited by the respective parties in the negotiation itself
- The nature of their respective stakes in the negotiation
- The visibility of the transactions to others; that is, their overt or covert characters
- The number and complexity of the issues negotiated
- The clarity of legitimacy of boundaries of the issues negotiated
- The options to avoiding or discontinuing negotiation; that is, the alternative modes of action perceived as available

Strauss (1978) invites researchers to select from this list elements that can potentially influence their contexts of study. The present study focuses on one-time
interactions between two parties where students have approached a faculty member to request assistance. Specifically, we explore the negotiation context in terms of: (a) the issues triggering critical interactions, (b) the number and complexity of issues being negotiated, and (c) the options perceived by students. These elements of the negotiation context lead us to ask the following three research questions:

RQ2: What types of problems or issues trigger students’ reports of critical interactions?

RQ3: What types of assistance do students report seeking from faculty members?

RQ4: Other than getting faculty assistance, what other options did students perceive they had to resolve this situation?

In addition to exploring the broad nature of interactions per Negotiated Order Theory, we also wanted also wanted to expand its purview to more fully explore the communication behavior in these interactions. Negotiated Order Theory, as described above, draws our attention to important characteristics of student-parent and faculty interactions. It does not, however, focus as clearly on the message. The concept of framing allows us to extend this framework and ask some additional questions about the nature of communication. Past research has also coupled Negotiated Order Theory with framing to explore divorce mediation interactions (Drake & Donohue, 1996).

Entman (1993) argues that framing is about the selection of messages and the creation of salience. Thus, students and faculty members choose particular ways of talking about student-parents conflicts with school and family to highlight or “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Although theoretical approaches to the framing vary (see Putnam & Holmer, 1992), we take the position of Drake and Donohue (1996) in that frames are “communicative structures” (p. 302) or language choices that highlight particular aspects of talk. Frames are intended to guide the receiver’s perceptions of the situation by making particular types of information more noticeable or important. Through understanding the way student-parents and faculty members frame their arguments about school and family conflict, we can begin to understand how these particular communicators organize their beliefs about managing school and family conflicts and the role of faculty members in this process. This study attempts to identify frames in student recalls of messages. Linking frames to patterns of interactions (see Drake & Donohue, 1996) is discussed in the final section of this study as a direction for future research.

Thus, we asked the following questions about student-parent and faculty framing of messages:

RQ5: How do students frame their appeals for assistance from faculty members?

RQ6: How do students recall faculty members framed their responses to provide or not provide assistance to the student?

In addition to exploring the framing of appeals by students and faculty members, we also wanted to understand how these conflicts were resolved how satisfied students felt with these particular interactions. Student satisfaction measures with student-faculty interactions have been used in previous research (Fusani, 1994; Jaasma & Koper, 1999). These issues can further our understanding of communication in these particular interactions. Thus, the following research questions were asked:

RQ7: How were critical interactions resolved? What types of resolutions did students report with high and low levels of satisfaction?
Method

Participants
Participants for this study were solicited in two ways: (a) by attending meetings of a student-parent support group on the campus of a large, mid-western university and (b) by soliciting students through a university database. Thirty-nine undergraduate and graduate students participated in the project. Participants’ average age was 26 (Range of 19 to 41 years of age). Demographically, 10.3% of participants were male, 89.7% female; 51.3% reported their ethnicity as Caucasian, 5.1% Asian, 25.6% African American, 15.4% Latino, and 2.6% other. Relational status of participants was reported as 38.5% married, 12.8% divorced or separated, 38.5% single, and 10.3% currently cohabitating. Income levels of participants were relatively low with 56.4% of participants reported having a personal annual income of less than $10,000. Participants averaged 10.73 or approximately two college courses per semester, worked 20.01 hours of paid employment, and had between one and two children (average = 1.4 children).

Measures
Critical interactions. A series of open-ended response items were designed to solicit examples of critical “interactions” student-parents reported having with faculty members. Flanagan (1954) originally developed the “critical incident” technique to identify behaviors characteristic of effective and ineffective job performance. Critical incidents have also been utilized in past communication research, for example, on effective subordinancy (Downs & Conrad, 1979) and doctor-patient interactions (Ruben, 1993). Flanagan’s critical incident method was altered in the present study to more specifically focus participant’s attention on the communicative aspects of a particular interaction. Thus, the “critical interactions” gathered asked participants to describe a conversation they engaged in with a faculty member, university staff, or advisor concerning a conflict they were having balancing school and family responsibilities. All participants chose to report an interaction with a faculty member; faculty roles in these particular interactions were either that of classroom instructor or academic advisor. We prompted participants to solicit particular types of information specific to our research questions framed by Negotiated Order Theory. For example, in the context of describing an interaction, participants were prompted to talk about the types of assistance they were seeking, recall dialogue between themselves and the faculty member, describe the resolution, and provide perceived options other than getting faculty assistance.

After the recalling of a critical incident, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction level with the interaction. Satisfaction levels were gathered as a rating of 1 to 5 in Likert-type response to the item “How satisfied were you with the interaction you described above?”

Support items. Support services available to assist student-parents vary by higher education institution. Therefore, two focus groups were conducted to gather specific information to aid in the construction of specific structural constraints items. Ten student-parents generated lists of potential social support services in response to open-ended about how they balanced their responsibilities of being a parent and a student, what types of social support they needed and were currently receiving, as well as interactions with university personnel. These discussions were utilized to create a list of potential support services included on the final survey. For each service listed, survey participants were asked to indicate (a) whether they believed the service to be “useful” and (b) if they had ever used the service. Sample services
included informational and instrumental support related to governmental assistance programs, childcare, and financial aid.

Additional variables. A single item on intent to leave the university was also included ("I have considered dropping out of Midwestern University during the past year because of the stress of balancing my family and school obligations"). Intent to leave the university due to school and family conflict was added as one additional exploratory variable explored because of the strong links between student-faculty interactions and retention of students described in the higher education literature (Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Tinto, 1989). Additionally, it was determined that students' past experiences interacting with faculty could offer further explanation of students' communicative behaviors, particularly as related to the student's message framing. For instance, a student-parent with positive past experiences with faculty might frame appeals in a different manner than another student with predominantly negative experiences. Therefore, we wanted to understand how representative this particular interaction was of students' regular conversations with faculty. "Typicalness" of interactions was measured with a one-item, Likert-type response, 1 = not typical at all to 5 = very typical.

Focus group data referred to above also suggested that self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1997) might be a potential contributor to both interaction success and retention for student-parents. Bandura (1977) defines "self-efficacy" as a belief regarding one's ability to perform a defined task in a specific situation. Although not a component of Negotiated Order Theory, self-efficacy was added as an additional exploratory variable for analysis. Self-confidence, although somewhat different than self-efficacy, was found to influence single mothers beliefs in their academic success (Stone & Niemann, 1994). Four items were developed based on Bandura's domain specific definition of self-efficacy to reflect student-parent's beliefs in managing school and family conflict. Example items include, "I feel confident that I can deal with any conflicts between my school and family needs," "I feel confident that I can get the necessary assistance to manage my school and family needs." The reliability of this scale using Cronbach's alpha was α = .78.

Analyzing Critical Interactions
Participants in this study generated 35 recollections of critical interactions, four participants did not provide examples. The reported interactions most likely represent experiences that are memorable to participants because interactions were recent or particularly salient events, negative or positive. A critical interaction approach was used to allow for the emergence, not the imposition of a coding scheme that captures participants' perceptions of important interactions around balancing multiple roles. Initially, critical interaction data were analyzed to provide inductively developed categories by a team of researchers. Through this method, categories and themes emerged that were grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These categories were then used as a coding scheme for two trained coders. Intercoder agreement across the critical interactions portion of the questionnaire was 90% (Cohen's Kappa = .81, p < .05). All coding disputes were resolved through discussion resulting in universal agreement across all categories.

Results

Perceptions of Structural Constraints
The first research question addressed student-parent perceptions of various aspects of the university culture. Three types of support were measured: the existence of
informational support and instrumental support, and frequency of supportive interactions with university personnel (administrative, faculty, and/or staff). All items were measured using a 5-point Likert-type response scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The mean score for the existence of informational support items was 2.99 ($SD = 1.21$). Informational support included the provision of specific facts about relevant issues such as childcare, governmental assistance, and financial assistance. Additionally, instrumental support was conceptualized as physical help or assistance in managing tasks. The mean score for the six existence of instrumental support items was 3.28 ($SD = 1.39$). Finally, participants also indicated the general frequency of supportive interactions with academic personnel ($M = 3.34; SD = 1.19$).

In addition, students were asked the usefulness of various support services and whether they had utilized the services (see Table 1). Frequencies of students’ affirmative and negative responses were calculated as percentages. Across the eight programs measured, scores indicate that most participants perceived programs as useful. “Emergency Well-Child Services,” for example, were perceived universally useful (“yes” = 97.4%) while “Elder Care Referral Services” were perceived least useful (“yes” = 64.1%). On the other hand, although programs were perceived as overwhelmingly useful, participants did not indicate that they had often “used” or taken advantage of these programs. Most often used was the “Childcare Resource and Referral Services” (“yes” = 71.8%) while “Parenting Classes” (“yes” = 12.8%) and “Sick Child Care Services” (“yes” = 10.3%) were among the least used programs.

**Problems Triggering Interactions**
The second research question asked, “What types of problems trigger students’ reports of critical interactions?” Thirty-five responses were placed into seven possible categories: child illness, family illness (self or husband), lapse in daycare, financial difficulties, difficulty meeting daycare costs (specific to child care), inability to get short-term daycare, and other. “Child illness” was the difficulty most frequently described as triggering critical interactions with academic personnel ($n = 18$). Sample responses included: “My child fell sick on the day of an exam” and “I had to miss class because my daughter was sick.” Nine participants described more general “family illness” as causing critical interactions, such as “I needed to withdraw from school one semester when I unexpectedly found out I was pregnant” and “Husband’s grandfather had been ill since middle of semester.” Four participants described both “lapse in daycare” and “other difficulty”. Financial issues (“difficulty meeting daycare costs” and financial difficulties”) were mentioned least frequently ($n = 1, n = 1$, respectively).
Types of Support Requested

The third research question addressed the types of assistance students report seeking from faculty members. Thirty-four responses were categorized into five types of student assistance: “needing to miss class,” “needing to change assignment deadlines,” “contest grade,” “changing university deadlines,” and “other.” Students most frequently needed to alter assignment deadlines (n = 14) or miss class (n = 13). Six participants reported a need to contest a grade, such as changing a failing grade to an “incomplete” for the class. The remaining 10 responses were equally divided between the needs for altering university deadlines (n = 5) and other assistance (n = 5) (“I needed other options than the [internet] to look up info for papers,” “I set up an appointment to discuss how to juggle the [program’s] demands and make progress”). One participant reported asking for no assistance from university personnel (“I don’t feel comfortable talking to professor or any other staff member about my family life because I don’t think they really care.”).

Chi square analyses were run for type of problem with each type of assistance requested from student-parents. Students who reported experiencing “child illness” were more likely to seek assistance from faculty concerning “need to miss class” (χ² = 8.476, p = .004), “need to change assignment deadlines” (χ² = 7.577, p = .006), and “changing university deadlines” (χ² = 6.595, p = .01). Additionally, participants who reported problems related to “lapse in daycare” (χ² = 4.50, p = .03) and general “financial difficulties” (χ² = 5.976, p = .02) were more likely to seek “other” types of assistance from faculty than students experiencing other types of problems.

Perceived Options

Next, participants were asked to describe what other options (besides seeking out faculty help) they perceived were available for resolving the situation. First, the number of options listed by participants was totaled, without concern for content. The average number of options listed by participants was 1.75 (range 0–3). Most participants listed one option (n = 13) or two options (n = 11). However, five participants did not list a single option, other than addressing faculty members. After the options were totaled, the content of each option was evaluated. Six categories emerged from the overall consideration of the options: “none, no other options,” “another source of assistance,” “accept negative consequences,” “go over person’s head in hierarchy,” “drop class,” “other.” The majority of participants (n = 13) viewed “accepting the negative consequences” as their other option. Sample responses included “Deprive myself of sleep, chemically keep myself awake, and write the paper,” “Accept a failing grade,” and “fail the exam!” Eight participants listed “none, no other option” while seven reported they would “seek other assistance” such as “Talk to the ombudsman” or “Report him to the university president.” Four participants indicated they would consider “drop the class” to solve their problem (e.g., “Quit the program”).

Framing of Student-Parent Appeals

The fifth research question addressed the framing of students’ arguments when requesting assistance from faculty. Specifically, the question addressed the ways in which students reported framing their appeals for assistance from faculty. Thirty-two participants’ responses resulted in 40 categorizable messages. Five ways of framing appeals for assistance emerged from the open-ended data: exceptional circumstance, personal stress, child’s problem, similarity to professor, and other. The majority of participants referred to their child’s problem (or illness) when seeking assistance from faculty (n = 15). Sample responses included “My son is home sick
with the flu [so] I will not be able to take the exam tomorrow,” “I am calling to try and see if I could schedule some other time to take the exam because my son is in the hospital,” and “My son has severe behavioral problems and has become violent . . .” Several participants framed their appeals as an exceptional circumstances (n = 12) to enlist a professor’s aid (e.g., “I explained my situation . . . and how my pregnancy wasn’t planned,” “I told her that [the lower grade] was reflective of this situation and not my commitment to the material.”) Eleven of the student appeals to faculty focused on the student’s personal stress (n = 11) such as “I am overwhelmed and over stressed and need to get a late drop.”

**Framing of Faculty Responses**
The previous research question addressed student framing of appeals for assistance. The sixth research question identified student’s recalls of professor responses to those appeals. Most of the 32 responses indicated that faculty members agreed, granted the student’s request, or said “ok” (n = 16, 50%). If a faculty member declined a student’s request, however, he/she would most likely frame his/her response as an appeal to class rules or university policy (n = 8, 25%) (“There is a mandatory attendance policy in this class—no exceptions,” “I’m sorry about your son’s illness but I do not allow make-ups under any circumstances”). Some faculty pointed out the student’s personal deficiency (e.g., missed class all the time, didn’t call, etc.) when denying a student’s request for aid (n = 3, 9%). The remaining faculty rejections framed their responses from the perspective of fairness and equality (“if I give you extra credit, I’ll have to do it for everyone, so no” “There is nothing I can do because it will be unfair to the others who missed it.”).  

**Resolutions and Satisfaction with Interactions**
Our final research question addressed critical interaction resolutions and student satisfaction with interactions. The research question asked, “What types of resolutions did these critical interactions result in? What types of resolutions did students report with high and low levels of satisfaction?” The descriptions of critical interactions resulted in five resolution categories: “resolution not needed,” “request granted,” “[student] accepted negative consequences,” “new solution was created through discussion,” and “other.” Thirty-two participants generated 38 categorizable resolutions. Most students reported that their interaction was resolved by the faculty member granting their request (n = 20, 53%). If the student’s request for assistance was not granted, participants indicated they were likely to resolve the situation by accepting the negative consequences (n = 12). The remaining resolutions described by participants were equally divided between “new solution created” (n = 2), “resolution not needed” (n = 2), and “other” (n = 2) methods.

Overall student satisfaction with faculty interactions was at the midpoint of the 5-point response scale (M = 3.26, SD = 1.67). To assess how critical incident resolutions influenced student satisfaction with faculty, t-test analyses were conducted for each resolution strategy across satisfaction. Only two resolutions resulted in significant differences between those students experiencing a particular resolution and those students who did not. Students who resolved their critical interactions with the faculty granting their request, not surprisingly, exhibited significantly greater satisfaction scores than students whose faculty member did not grant the request (t = -4.04, df = 30, p < .000, M difference = -1.98). In turn, satisfaction was significantly lower among students who reported accepting the negative consequences of their incident (t = 4.99, df = 30, p < .000, M difference = 2.25).

In order to determine which resolution outcomes led to the greatest and least
satisfaction among students, ANOVA analyses were conducted among each of the incident resolutions and satisfaction \((f = 8.226, df = 3, p < .000)\). LSD post-hoc analyses revealed that students whose critical incident did not need resolution reported greater satisfaction than those students who accepted the negative consequences \((M \text{ difference } = 3.00, SE = .977, p < .05)\) or had “other” resolutions \((M \text{ difference } = 3.00, SE = 1.26, p < .05)\). However, when students’ interactions required resolution, students reporting that the faculty granted their request reported significantly more satisfaction with the interaction than either accepting the negative consequences \((M \text{ difference } = 2.17, SE = .497, p < .000)\) or “other” resolutions \((M \text{ difference } = 2.17, SE = .940, p < .05)\). When students’ satisfaction scores were used to rank order resolutions, the following list emerged: “no resolution needed” \((M = 5.00)\), “faculty granted request” \((M = 4.17)\), “accepted negative consequences” \((M = 2.00)\), and “other” \((M = 2.00)\).

**Additional Analyses**

To determine the “typicalness” of the interactions crosstabs descriptives using chi square analyses were conducted for typicalness by all categories of problems, faculty responses, and satisfaction groups. Participants were separated into two groups (very typical vs. not typical) using the mean score on the item “How typical is the conversation you described above of interactions you have with individuals at [Midwestern University]?” \((M = 2.97, SD = 1.34)\). Results indicated that discussing “family illness” problems with faculty is not typical \((\chi^2 = 3.97, p = .046)\) as other types of problems. In addition, the typicalness by faculty response categories suggested that the frequency on the “request granted” resolution is not universally typical. Results showed that individuals reporting that faculty members offered assistance or said “ok” were significantly more likely to be members of the “not typical” group \((\chi^2 = 3.77, p = .05)\). No significant differences were reported for satisfaction for the very typical/not typical groups \((t = 1.86, ns)\).

Finally, a correlation was run between the self-efficacy scale and a one-item measure of intent to drop out of school. A significant, negative correlation was found \((r = -.51, p < .001)\).

**Discussion**

This study of faculty-student interactions makes three broad contributions to communication research in education. First, this study focuses our attention on the needs of one particular non-traditional student population often neglected in communication education and higher education research. As this non-traditional, student-parent population grows across all types of institutions, our understanding of ways to communicate for effective and successful student-faculty interactions becomes increasingly important. Secondly, the essential role that faculty members play in student success has been the focus of research (see Tinto, 1989), however, understanding the nature of and the framing of messages during faculty-student interactions has not been the subject of much investigation. This study provides a descriptive and theoretically grounded exploration that can provide the point of departure for future studies of student-faculty interactions.

Finally, this study extends the use of Negotiated Order Theory. Hogelucht-Barquist and Geist (1997) used Negotiated Order Theory to frame their study of discipline in the classroom; however, this study looks at its use in understanding interactions between students and faculty outside the classroom. In addition, this framework was extended through the addition of framing as a concept through
which particular message behavior in the negotiation context can be explored. Although this theoretical perspective certainly has its limitations, Negotiated Order Theory focuses our attention on the influence of the structural context and the negotiation context of these particular interactions.

Limitations of both Negotiated Order Theory as a framework for research and of this particular study, however, must also be addressed. Two main criticisms of the use of Negotiated Order have been drawn (Chua & Clegg, 1989). First, the theory itself as well as this study does not address the "non-negotiable elements" of organizational and social life. We focused on the interaction of faculty and students in one particular negotiation context, future research needs to account for elements such as actual availability of social support, non interaction-based coping strategies, values, and preferences for conflict styles. Next, Negotiated Order does not provide a way to operationally connect the two levels of analysis it claims to be explaining the interaction between. Similar to the challenges of working with perspectives such as Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) or "meso" constructs (House, Rousseau, Thomas-Hunt, 1995), for example, going from micro-level analysis to macro-level concepts such as organizational culture and or social orders conceptually grows more troublesome at the operational level. This, however, is not to argue that the pursuit should be abandoned; in fact, the opposite should be argued. Future work using a Negotiated Order Theory perspective needs to incorporate work that's been done looking at operational issues across levels of analysis regardless of methodological orientations of researchers. In addition to these broad contributions, the results of this study draw our attention to both implications for student-faculty communication research and issues of practical application for university personnel.

Communication Implications
Issues of framing, perceived options, and self-efficacy are three important implications of this study and provide excellent points of departure for future communication research.

Student and faculty framing. An important contribution of this study is the exploration of reported communicative appeals or ways of framing arguments by student and faculty members. Participants' recalls of their own appeals and faculty responses reveals some interesting findings. Participants did not frame their arguments from the standpoint of emotional, value, or fairness appeals, all arguments centered on statement of facts (e.g., child sick) or a plea for help because of overwhelming circumstances (e.g., personal stress or exceptional situations). Drake and Donohue (1996) explore four types of frames based on past research (a) factual, (b) interest, (c) value, and (d) relational. Our participants more often relied on factual frames or arguments that focus on "appraisals of reality" (p. 303). Students attempted to highlight or make salient characteristics of the situation that they perceive as objective—a sick child or family member.

This finding may be most reflective of the power differences in this particular negotiation situation. Similar to research on upward influence in organizations (Keys & Case, 1990), subordinates are more limited in terms of influence strategies than superiors. These particular students may not have perceived that appealing to faculty's emotions or values as appropriate communicative behavior. Negotiated Order Theory also leads us to explore the perceived boundaries of particular negotiations. These findings help us to understand what student perceptions of these boundaries may be in these particular interactions. In addition, appeals to similarity were also rarely used, implying that students do not see themselves as the same (or
with the same kinds of problems) as faculty, although many faculty members can be parents as well. Future work needs to more fully explore student explanations for these negotiation boundaries. How do these boundaries develop? When do we communicate, if ever, outside these boundaries and what is the nature of the resulting interactions?

In addition to student appeals, when faculty members did not grant student requests participant recollections of faculty members’ responses reflect a lack of comfort in considering or framing “nontraditional” (e.g., students with kids) issues differently than traditional students needs. Professors continued to rely upon “rules” or fairness appeals that may indicate they do not see a distinction between the needs of traditional students’ needs and student-parents’ needs. Admittedly, recall data of conversations does not provide, perhaps, the most accurate or complete picture of interactions. Transcripts and or co-constructed recall data might be used in the future if possible to explore the nature of student-faculty interactions. Future studies with additional interaction data can explore the relation between particular frames and convergence or divergence of outcomes similar to the work of Drake and Donohue (1996). In addition, data must be collected from both student-parents and faculty members. Students and faculty members could be asked in future studies to use journals or some other method of tracking negotiations across a variety of issues over the course of a college term or academic year. Hogelucht-Barquist & Geist (1997), for example, videotaped student-teacher interactions and then asked the actors to explain their own motivations for enacting particular behaviors. Although videotaping actual student-faculty interactions may not be a viable data collection method for this particular context, asking both students and faculty members to reflect on recent interactions and explain values and assumptions behind strategies would begin to provide more depth to our understanding of the communicative process. In addition, designing studies to reduce the recall window for critical interactions to weekly or monthly would also work to increase accuracy and completeness of data.

Perceived options. Another important outcome of this study stems from the negotiation context element of “perceived options.” The small number of participants reporting that asking a spouse/partner, other family member, or friends for instrumental support (i.e., emergency childcare) was an alternative to approaching a faculty member was surprising. While 38.5% of participants reported being married and another 10.3% reported living with a partner, approaching these individuals for assistance was not reported as an option to manage the situation. Admittedly, this finding may also partially be a result of data collection. Critical interactions were solicited specifically for situations where participants had approached a faculty member. However, as Strauss (1978) points out, negotiations are often linked. What cannot be achieved in one relationship (i.e., spousal support) may become the topic of negotiation in another relationship (i.e., faculty-student interaction). When faculty members deny requests, participants did not look for or perceive having other sources of instrumental support, they just accepted the negative consequences. Interestingly, several people also reported “none” as their option. They saw no other options, other than approaching the faculty member. Although our survey instruments did not ask for students to recall previous, related conversations they’d had either with other potential sources of support or with this same professor, future research needs to tap more specifically into chains of interactions or negotiations. By exploring the nature of negotiations across both private sphere relationships (i.e.,
spouses, extended family members, family caregivers) and in public sphere relationships (i.e., faculty members, advisors, paid/formal caregivers), we can begin to understand how interactions across life boundaries influence one another. More extensive survey data on interactions or in-depth interviewing could be used to tap into questions of linked negotiations per Negotiated Order Theory.

**Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as a belief, a cognitive construct. Clearly, beliefs about one’s own ability to manage multiple life roles are shaped through numerous influences including vicarious learning, media socialization, but the role of interaction must not be overlooked. Repeated failure can lower self-appraisals and influence motivational levels and persistence in accomplishing a task (Bandura, 1977). Our study found a negative, significant relationship between self-efficacy and intent to remain in school. This finding should be further explored in relation to interactions between faculty members and student-parents. Repeated failures at negotiation interactions in this particular context may clearly influence student-parent success. Understanding how interaction influences self-efficacy may aid in explaining student attrition behaviors, instrumental support needs, and coping strategy use. Future longitudinal studies could follow entering student-parents over the period of their degree completion and measure changes in student self-efficacy in combination with periodic interviews or journaling methods to track interactions with faculty members over time.

Across issues of framing, perceived options, and self-efficacy, future data on issues of student-parent and faculty interactions needs to be collected at a broader range of educational institutions. Data were collected at a large, state 4-year institution for this study. The generalizability of these results is confined to a narrow band of institutions. Two-year institutions have historically had a greater percentage of non-traditional student populations in their classrooms. There may be much to learn from these institutions.

**Practical Applications**

In addition to research implications, this study also brings to the forefront issues of childcare and informational support for student-parents. These issues have implications for university personnel attempting to assist student-parents successfully complete their degrees.

*Childcare issues.* The most frequent topic that triggered negotiation was sick childcare concerns. Interestingly, however, two programs that were reported often “not used” by participants included “Sick Childcare Services” and “Well-Child Care Services” at this particular university. Childcare is needed, but the programs are not used. This paradox in findings may be explained in two different ways. First, although sick childcare services are offered, cost of using these programs may be prohibitive to student-parents. At Midwestern University, both students and faculty members had access to this program, but focus group data suggested that is may not be a viable option for these students with an average personal income of below $10,000 annually.

A second explanation of this finding relates to the underlying assumption of sick childcare services. Similar to private sector or corporate “sick child” programs, there is an underlying assumption that parents—given the option—will place their “sick” child in the care of someone else rather than missing work to provide care. These programs, similar to sick child care for student-parents, attempt to “remove” the impediment to coming to work (or school) as a way for parents to manage conflict between family and work. Perhaps, this is not a valid assumption. Being “allowed” to
occasionally miss school (or work) may be the preferred and, in the end, more effective way of meeting students needs as opposed to contracting for sick childcare services. Lack of use of a particular program (university-based or corporate-based) does not necessarily indicate a lack of need, but a potential misunderstanding of the preferences and values that people bring into the situation. University personnel need to assist faculty members in challenging their own assumptions that potentially come into play when interacting with non-traditional students, not only student-parents but also the widening range of diverse students in our classrooms in terms of race, color, and age.

Informational support. Finally, although faculty members’ support appears to be important, this assistance was not “typically” available for participants of this study. Although 50% of requests recalled for this study were granted, participants reported that these positive outcomes were not “typical” of regular interactions with faculty members. Thus, it may be interpreted that requests are not typically granted. The percentage of requests granted may be more indicative of the nature of recall critical interaction data than the reality of regular or “typical” interactions. Information about how to manage such interactions also appears to be needed. In fact, informational support concerning how to effectively negotiate with faculty members was the least likely to be reported as available (“Information about how to deal with difficulties I may have with instructors when family issues conflict with school responsibilities is available to me on campus” \( M = 4.05, SD = 1.15 \)). Every other informational support item averaged within the 2 to 3 point range. The findings from this study would support training or other mechanisms for information dissemination on creating effective dialogue between student-parents and faculty members when negotiating how to meet academic requirements. This information needs to be available for both students and faculty members along with the provision of university-wide support services that can potentially influence the perceptions of role conflict for student-parents (Hammer, Grisby, & Woods, 1998) and may influence perceptions of a supportive university culture. Support services alone, however, may not overcome the effects of negative interactions or perceived lack of support from faculty members for student-parents needs.

References


