

Teacher Nonimmediacy and Misbehavior: Unintentional Negative Communication

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This study involved the manipulation of teacher immediacy and teacher misbehaviors to determine their individual and combined impacts on perceived teacher immediacy and teacher misbehavior. Participants in the study were students enrolled in undergraduate communication classes. The results indicated that teacher nonimmediacy and teacher misbehaviors could not be manipulated independently. Analysis of variance indicated that nonimmediate teachers were perceived to be misbehaving even when no misbehaviors were induced in the experiments. It was concluded that students perceive teachers who communicate in nonimmediate ways as misbehaving.

Although immediacy has been clearly defined within the field of communication (see Mehrabian, 1969; Andersen, 1978), nonimmediacy cues have been viewed as nothing more than the opposite of immediacy cues. For the purposes of this research, immediacy is defined as "those communication behaviors that reduce perceived distance between people." Immediate behaviors may actually decrease the physical distance, or they may decrease the psychological distance. The more immediate a person is, the more likely he/she is to communicate at close distances, smile, engage in eye contact use direct body orientations, use overall body movement and gestures, touch others, relax, and be vocally expressive. In other words, we might say that an immediate person is perceived as overtly friendly and warm" (Andersen, 1979). In instructional research, some immediacy cues that have been manipulated are eye contact, smiling, movement in the classroom, general

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friendliness/approachability, and enthusiasm. Conversely, nonimmediacy has been manipulated as not smiling, lack of eye contact, lack of movement in the classroom, etc. The impact of immediate and nonimmediate cues have been the focus of a considerable amount of research in which it was found that immediacy has positive impacts in the classroom and nonimmediacy less positive impacts. Students have been shown to have more positive affect for teachers high in immediacy which leads to increased affective learning (Andersen, 1979; Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond, McCroskey, Plax, & Kearney, 1986). Research also indicates that students are unable to differentiate prosocial from antisocial Behavior Alteration Techniques when used by more immediate teachers (Kearney, Plax, and Burroughs, 1991).

Extant research on immediacy has not identified precisely what students' perceive nonimmediate communication behaviors to be. In a study investigating the impact of teacher immediacy on teacher misbehaviors, some evidence was uncovered that may help classify certain behaviors as nonimmediate cues and, hence, aid in the explanation of the less than positive impact of nonimmediacy in the classroom. Teacher misbehaviors have been defined as "those teacher behaviors that interfere with student learning" (Kearney, Plax, Hays & Ivey, 1991). As a result of her research, Dolin (1995) suggested that nonimmediate communication behaviors of teachers may be perceived by students as misbehaviors, because they clearly interfere with their learning. The present study sought to investigate that speculation directly under controlled experimental conditions. Since this research was based more on informed speculation than on firm theory, and reasonable explanations for divergent outcomes were clearly possible, we chose to pose a research question rather than an hypotheses. The following question was posed: "Can teacher immediacy/nonimmediacy be manipulated independently of teacher misbehaviors?" An affirmative answer to this question would indicate that teacher nonimmediacy is seen as just that, not as a form of teacher misbehavior. A negative answer to the question would confirm Dolin's (1995) speculation that students perceive teacher nonimmediacy as misbehavior. In agreeing with Dolin, we anticipated the negative outcome. However, since the misbehavior and immediacy constructs were developed independently, it was seen as quite possible they might be completely independent constructs.

METHOD

Design

In a 2 x 2 factorial design, participants were exposed to one of four scenarios. Teacher immediacy (immediate/nonimmediate) and teacher misbehavior (appropriate behavior/misbehavior) were manipulated across four scenarios. After reading a scenario, participants were asked to complete scales measuring level of perceived immediacy and level of perceived teacher misbehavior. This research also included a built-in replication.

Procedure

In large lecture classes at West Virginia University participants were exposed to one of four stimulus behavior scenarios (See Appendix A). After reading the scenario, the participant was asked to complete scales measuring perceived teacher immediacy and perceived teacher misbehavior. The replication was identical to the original study except that different scenarios representing different operationalizations of immediacy and misbehavior were employed (See Appendix A).

Participants

Participants were 382 undergraduate students enrolled in communication classes. These classes were ones which serve all segments of the undergraduate student body and enroll approximately equal numbers of females and males. All were given credit for a course assignment for participation. There were 195 participants in study one and 187 in study two.

Manipulations

Immediacy. Teacher immediacy was manipulated in the four scenarios. All immediacy and nonimmediacy cues were derived from the work of Andersen (1979). Six nonverbal behaviors were manipulated to create two levels of immediacy. In the high immediacy condition, the teacher was immediate in all six nonverbal behaviors. In the low immediacy condition, the teacher engaged in no immediate behavior. Different immediacy behaviors were included in study two than in study one.

Misbehavior. Teacher misbehavior was also manipulated in the four scenarios. Three behaviors were manipulated that were considered either appropriate behavior or misbehavior. Two levels of behavior were created by varying the amount of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. In the misbehavior condition, the teacher engaged in only inappropriate behaviors. In the nonmisbehavior condition, the teacher engaged in all appropriate behaviors. Different misbehaviors were employed in study two than in study one.

Measures

Subjects completed rating scales which measured perceived teacher immediacy and misbehaviors. Both scales employed two-item, seven-point response formats.

Subjects were provided with the definition of immediacy. The level of immediacy of the teacher in the scenario was measured with two adjective pairs: "very immediate/very nonimmediate" and "approachable/unapproachable." Scores could range from 2 to 14 with a higher score indicating a more positive answer. The obtained alpha reliability for this two-item measure was .94.

A definition of teacher misbehavior was also provided for the subjects. Perceived frequency of misbehavior was measured by responses to two adjective pairs: "never/very often" and "frequently/seldom." Scores could range from 2 to 14 with a higher score indicating more frequent misbehavior. The obtained alpha reliability for this two-item measure was .98.

Data Analyses

The dependent variables and manipulation checks were subjected to two-way analyses of variance. Post-hoc cell comparisons were made to probe significant interaction effects obtained in both studies. Alpha for all tests was set at .05.

Immediacy. Analysis of variance for the manipulation check for immediacy indicated the inductions in both studies were generally successful. In Study One, the highly immediate teacher was perceived as significantly more immediate ($F(1,188) = 113.58, p < .05, \eta^2 = .37$) than the less immediate teacher, $m = 11.5$ and $m = 5.9$ respectively. In Study Two, the highly immediate teacher ($m = 11.4$) also was perceived as significantly more immediate ($F(1,180) = 151.4, p < .05, \eta^2 = .44$) than the teacher low in immediacy ($m = 5.3$).

The impact of the manipulation of misbehavior did not impact perceived immediacy in either study ($F < 1.0$).

There was a significant cross-over interaction observed in both studies (Study 1, $F(1, 188) = 4.68$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$; Study 2, $F(1, 180) = 11.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). As noted in Table 1, the perceived immediacy in the low immediacy condition was somewhat higher in the "misbehavior" condition than the "no misbehavior" condition in both studies. In contrast, the perceived immediacy in the high immediacy condition was somewhat higher in the "no misbehavior" condition than in the "misbehavior" condition for both studies. Tests between cell means reflecting the interaction were significant for the second study, but were not significant in the first study. Given the low effect sizes for these tests, this interaction probably should not be seen as particularly important, particularly considering the very large main effects observed.

TABLE 1
Means for Immediacy Conditions

Dependent Variable	Study Number	Low Immediacy		High Immediacy	
		Appropriate	Misbehavior	Appropriate	Misbehavior
Immediacy	1	5.3ac	6.5bd	12.0ab	10.9cd
	2	4.5adf	6.1bef	12.3abc	10.6cde

Note: Means with the same subscript in the same study are significantly different at (at least) the .05 level.

Behavior. The analysis of variance for the measures of teacher misbehavior indicated that a significant amount of variance was accounted for on perceived teacher misbehavior by the two induction variables in both Study 1 ($F\{3, 190\} = 20.8$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .25$) and Study 2 ($F\{3, 186\} = 23.8$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .28$). The interaction effect was significant in both studies and, as indicated in Table 2, it was the primary explanation for the overall significant AOV models. In both studies the "high immediacy/appropriate behavior" condition was reported as having significantly less teacher misbehavior than the other three conditions (which did not significantly differ from each other). Thus, the condition in each study in which no teacher misbehaviors were induced was seen as having a high level of teacher misbehavior if the teacher was described as nonimmediate. For the participants in these studies, then, teachers who allegedly behaved in nonimmediate ways were seen as misbehaving, even if they were performing *none* of the behaviors described as misbehavior in previous research.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of these studies was to investigate the mediating effect of immediacy on perceived teacher misbehaviors. While subjects did perceive differences in immediacy and misbehaviors for all scenarios, the results indicated that immediate teacher behaviors and teacher misbehaviors cannot be manipulated fully independently (or, at least, were not in these studies). The low immediate, non-misbehaving teacher was perceived as misbehaving as much as the low immediate teacher that was misbehaving.

TABLE 2
Means for Misbehavior Conditions

Dependent Variable	Study Number	Low Immediacy		High Immediacy	
		Appropriate	Misbehavior	Appropriate	Misbehavior
Misbehavior	1	9.8a	8.7b	4.9abc	9.5c
	2	9.3a	10.1b	5.0abc	9.3c

Note: Means with the same subscript in the same study are significantly different at (at least) the .05 level.

This particular result is counter-intuitive in that it was expected that the low immediate, misbehaving teacher would be rated as misbehaving more than all of the other teacher types. Apparently there is an upper limit on perceptions of teacher misbehavior, and nonimmediacy reaches that limit all by itself.

This leads to the most important conclusion we may draw from this research: Nonimmediacy is seen by students as misbehavior. Dolin's (1995) research indicated that some misbehaviors previously identified by students are actually nonimmediate behaviors. This research indicates that the reverse also appears to be true. In the present studies nonimmediacy overwhelmed the impact of good behaviors. This suggests that nonimmediacy acts as a misbehavior, even though students do not necessarily recognize it as a misbehavior at a conscious level. Students did not, in Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) research, generate nonimmediacy as an actual misbehavior. One explanation for this is that students may perceive this simply as "normal" bad teaching behaviors as a result of the numerous teachers they have seen engaging in these behaviors. Such common-place acts of nonimmediacy are actually behaviors or misbehaviors that serve to interfere with the learning process. It can be concluded that, for the most part, teachers who engage in misbehaviors and are low in immediacy do not produce greater perceptions of misbehavior than the teacher who is low in immediacy, but engages in no other misbehaviors, at least of the type investigated in this research.

CONCLUSIONS

From the results of this investigation, it can be concluded that nonimmediate teacher behaviors can be classified as teacher misbehaviors. Thus, teachers who, either by choice or ignorance, fail to engage in immediate behaviors are misbehaving, at least in the eyes of their students. This may explain why students perceive the nonimmediate teacher, who functions in an otherwise efficient manner, less positively than the immediate teacher who may not even be efficient in accomplishing his/her duties. At least in these studies, students consistently evaluated the immediate teacher more positively than the nonimmediate teacher who engaged in no misbehaviors, even if the teacher was misbehaving. Students consistently evaluated the nonimmediate teacher as engaging in a high level of misbehavior, even if that teacher was credited with otherwise only appropriate behavior. For teachers, it is necessary to realize that simply doing one's job correctly is not enough. Teachers must make students comfortable about approaching her/him and ensure students that he/she is comfortable with approaching students. Creating a

feeling of closeness, whether it is psychological or physical, ensures the teacher who may be forced to engage in what students perceive to be inappropriate behaviors (misbehave) on occasion that he/she will not lose the positive affect of the students. Future researchers may wish to consider extending this research by manipulating nonimmediacy cues as misbehaviors rather than just nonimmediate behaviors.

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APPENDIX A EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATIONS

Scenarios - Study 1

Scenario 1: Immediate Teacher/Misbehavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who smiles frequently, uses vocal variety, and gestures. Moreover, this teacher is enthusiastic, walks around the classroom, and seems relaxed in the classroom. He/she frequently cancels class without notice, does not follow the syllabus, and is usually unprepared for class.

Scenario 2: Immediate Teacher/Appropriate Behavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who smiles frequently, uses vocal variety, and gestures. Moreover, this teacher is enthusiastic, walks around the classroom, and seems relaxed in the classroom. He/she is always on time for class, follows the syllabus, and arrives at class prepared.

Scenario 3: Nonimmediate Teacher/Misbehavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who lacks facial expression, uses monotone, and doesn't

gesture. Moreover, this teacher is unenthusiastic, stands behind the podium throughout class, and seems tense. He/she frequently cancels class without notice, does not follow the syllabus, and is usually unprepared for class.

Scenario 4: Nonimmediate Teacher/ Appropriate Behavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who lacks facial expression, uses monotone, and doesn't gesture. Moreover, this teacher is unenthusiastic, stands behind the podium throughout class, and seems tense. He/she is always on time for class, follows the syllabus, and arrives at class prepared.

Scenarios - Study 2

Scenario 1: Immediate Teacher/ Misbehavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who seems very relaxed, looks at the class when teaching, and walks around the room during the lecture. Moreover, this teacher engages in a lot of eye contact and is generally perceived as friendly and approachable. He/she assigns an excessive amount of homework, lectures in a confusing manner, and is generally unprepared for class.

Scenario 2: Immediate Teacher/ Appropriate Behavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who seems very relaxed, looks at the class when teaching, and walks around the room during the lecture. Moreover, this teacher engages in a lot of eye contact and is generally perceived as friendly and approachable. He/she assigns a reasonable amount of homework, lectures in an organized manner, and is generally prepared for class.

Scenario 3: Nonimmediate Teacher/ Misbehavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who seems very tense, looks at the board while talking, and stands behind the podium throughout the lecture. Moreover, this teacher looks at the board when lecturing and is generally perceived as unfriendly and unapproachable. He/she assigns an excessive amount of homework, lectures in a confusing manner, and is generally unprepared for class.

Scenario 4: Nonimmediate Teacher/ Appropriate Behavior

You are taking a class from a teacher who seems very tense, looks at the board while talking, and stands behind the podium throughout the lecture. Moreover, this teacher looks at the board when lecturing and is generally perceived as unfriendly and unapproachable. He/she assigns a reasonable amount of homework, lectures in an organized manner, and is generally prepared for class.