

The Impact of Teacher Immediacy and Misbehaviors on Teacher Credibility

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*This research investigated the impact of teacher immediacy and teacher misbehavior on student perceptions of their teachers' credibility on the dimensions of competence, trustworthiness, and caring (goodwill). While the results of the two studies conducted indicated the presence of strong positive main effects for teacher immediacy and strong negative effects for teacher misbehavior on all three dimensions of credibility (as hypothesized), significant interaction effects were observed between immediacy and misbehavior on all three dimensions of credibility. In most cases when teacher immediacy was low, whether the teacher was in the nonmisbehavior or misbehavior condition made no significant difference—both produced perceptions of low credibility. In contrast, when teacher immediacy was high, teacher misbehavior significantly lowered perceived credibility. Probing of the interaction results suggested that high immediacy tends to soften the negative impact of teacher misbehavior, particularly on the caring dimension. Since behaviors that are likely to be seen as "misbehaviors" by students are often unavoidable by teachers, it is very important that teachers maintain high immediacy to protect their credibility in the classroom. **Keywords:** teacher credibility, teacher misbehaviors, teacher immediacy, caring*

The impact of speaker credibility is a concept that has been scrutinized since the time of Aristotle. Aristotle referred to credibility as *ethos* and suggested that it consisted of three dimensions: intelligence, character, and good will. He believed that the three dimensions of credibility were perceptual sources of influence on a receiver. Andersen and Clevenger (1963), in an analysis of previous research and writing on *ethos*, defined it as "the image held of a communicator at a given time by a receiver—either one person or a group" (p. 59). While this definition does not account for the dimensions of credibility, it is not dissimilar to Aristotle's belief that credibility influences the receiver. Overall, Andersen and Clevenger (1963) concluded that "the *ethos* of a source is in some way related to the impact of the message" (p. 78).

McCroskey and Young (1981), in a more recent analysis of *ethos* and credibility, concluded that "contemporary research generally has supported the proposition that source credibility is a very important element in the communication process, whether the goal of the communication effort be persuasion or the generation of understanding" (p. 24). The "generation of understanding" is most relevant to the effects of credibility in the classroom. A major goal of teachers is to spark understanding in the minds of the students. In part as a function of increased attention to student evaluation of instruction, most teachers also hope to persuade students to develop positive affect toward themselves and the subject matter being studied. Affective learning involves attitudes, beliefs, likes/dislikes, and values. Affective learning goals lie along a continuum. They vary in terms of degree of internalization; for example,

from the point at which a student is aware that poetry exists, to being willing to read poetry, to reading poetry and liking it, to making an effort to seek out poetry, and, finally, to adopting a poetic outlook on life (Richmond & Gorham, 1992). Increased understanding would seem to be most related to more positive levels of affective learning, but the limited amount of research on credibility in the classroom has been related to recall, which is most associated with cognitive learning.

A series of studies reported in the 1970s clearly established the importance of source credibility in the learning process (Andersen, 1973; Dempsey, 1975; Wheelless, 1971, 1974a, 1974b, 1975). Wheelless (1975) found that perceived competence of a source, along with four other variables, accounted for significant variance in immediate recall. In another study conducted by Wheelless (1974a), he found that competence was the best predictor of selective exposure behavior. When the source was perceived to be competent, the likelihood of subsequent exposure to information was higher. In a carefully controlled experiment conducted in classroom conditions without students knowing they were in a research project, Andersen (1973) found that students exposed to other students' speeches learned substantially more from those presented by speakers they perceived as having higher credibility than they did from those they perceived as being less credible. From this research, it appears that teachers who are perceived to be more credible will produce more positive affect toward themselves and/or the content of the class and increase the likelihood a student will take another class in the same content area and/or with that teacher. It also indicates that the students' cognitive learning is related to their perceptions of their teachers' credibility—the higher the credibility, the higher the learning.

Credibility has a positive impact on learning, but as noted by Frymier and Thompson (1992), there is little research that offers advice that would help teachers increase their credibility. In an endeavor to provide teachers with such advice, Frymier and Thompson (1992) investigated the effects of affinity seeking behaviors on perceptions of teacher credibility. They found that affinity seeking behaviors were positively and significantly related to students' perceptions of teacher competence and character. Affinity as a concept was introduced by McCroskey and Wheelless (1976) as "a positive attitude toward another person" (p. 231). Individuals who engage in affinity seeking behaviors are seen as more likable, socially successful, and satisfied with their lives (Bell & Daly, 1984). Using a regression model, Frymier and Thompson (1992) found that affinity seeking behaviors as a whole accounted for 33% of the variance in perceptions of teacher character and 13% of the variance in perceptions of teacher competence.

Nonverbal immediacy is one of the categories of affinity-seeking techniques. According to Mehrabian, "Immediacy refers to communication behaviors that enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another" (Mehrabian, 1969, p. 77). Mehrabian (1971) suggested that "immediacy and liking are two sides of the same coin. That is, liking encourages immediacy and immediacy produces more liking" (Mehrabian, 1971 p. 77). A substantial positive impact of immediacy on students' evaluations of their teachers has been consistently observed in this culture as well as in cultures in other parts of the world (McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, Fayer, & Barraclough, 1995). Although liking and perceptions of credibility are far from isomorphic constructs, they both fall within the domain of affect. Since

immediacy appears to consistently be associated with more positive affect, the following hypothesis was advanced:

H1: Teachers who are more immediate will be perceived as more credible than teachers who are less immediate.

Since there has been no research in this area and there was no apparent reason to think immediacy would have a different impact on one dimension of credibility than another, this hypothesis was expected to apply to all credibility dimensions.

Another variable that has been found to have a major impact on students' perceptions of teachers in the classroom and student learning is teacher misbehaviors. The original research on teacher misbehaviors conceptualized teacher misbehaviors as "those behaviors that interfere with instruction and thus, learning" (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). The research involved a two-part study where Kearney and associates posed several research questions. Study One addressed the following question: What do college teachers say and do that students perceive as misbehaviors? Study Two addressed two research questions: How frequently do students report their college teachers engaging in each misbehavior type? and, What meaningful factor structure underlies misbehavior categories?

The purpose of Study One was to inductively determine what students perceive as teacher misbehaviors. Study Two was conducted to validate the categories of teacher misbehaviors obtained in Study One and to determine if a meaningful factor structure existed in the 28 categories. Factor analysis revealed three categories of misbehaviors. These were labeled incompetence, offensiveness, and indolence. Incompetence (or possibly more appropriately labeled "poor communication behaviors and instructional practices") included nine items: confusion/unclear lectures, apathetic to students, unfair testing, boring lectures, information overload, does not know subject matter, foreign or regional accents, inappropriate volume, and bad grammar/spelling. Offensiveness included six items: sarcasm/put-downs, verbally abusive, unreasonable/arbitrary rules, sexual harassment, negative personality, and shows favoritism/prejudice. Six misbehavior categories were included in indolence: absent, tardy, unprepared/disorganized, deviates from syllabus, late returning work, and information under-load.

The other study in the area of teacher misbehaviors utilized the measurement developed by Kearney and associates (1991) with only minor changes. Dolin (1995) examined the relationship of teacher misbehaviors to cognitive learning, affective learning, and student resistance. Dolin (1995), in questioning the face validity of the misbehavior items, split several of the original 28 items so that there were six additional items. One original item, for example, "lets class out early, rushes material to get done early," was split to make two categories. Frymier (1994) explains that if a teacher completes her/his material before it is time to dismiss class and detains the class anyway, then nonimmediacy may be created and would probably negatively impact state motivation. In other words, dismissing a class early is not always a misbehavior.

The results of Dolin's (1995) research indicate that teachers do not misbehave on a regular basis, but when they do, the impact is significant. Using a scale of 0 to 4, Dolin found that students' reports of teacher misbehaviors averaged less than 2 on each of the listed misbehaviors. Although the frequency of misbehaviors may be minimal, it is the impact that is of great concern. Students reported that they believed they were learning less in the classroom with a teacher that is misbehaving. Dolin

also found that students have less affective learning (lower positive affect toward content) with teachers who misbehave. Dolin's (1995) research indicates that students are less likely to engage in behaviors recommended in the classroom with an instructor who misbehaves. Students also indicated that the likelihood of taking additional courses in the same content area is diminished if a teacher is misbehaving. In addition, the results indicated that teacher immediacy was inversely related to the amount of teacher misbehavior. As a result, Dolin (1995) concluded that nonimmediacy may actually be a form of teacher misbehavior.

Dolin's (1995) results indicating teacher misbehaviors are associated with lower student affect for the teacher should generalize to credibility. Thweatt and McCroskey (1996) conducted a study to pursue the speculation (advanced by Dolin, 1995) that teacher nonimmediacy would actually be viewed by students as a form of misbehavior. Under controlled, laboratory conditions, they found that nonimmediate teaching behaviors were seen as not only nonimmediate (as intended) but also as representing misbehavior—even in the context of no other misbehaviors being present. Since this finding was replicated across two separate studies with different immediacy and misbehavior manipulations, it suggested that manipulating nonimmediacy may also inherently represent a manipulation of misbehavior. Hence, a “no misbehavior” condition, when crossed with a “non-immediate” condition, may become a “misbehavior” condition. If such were the case, as a function of the interaction between misbehavior and immediacy conditions, we would expect a negative impact in a “no misbehavior/low-immediate” condition approximately comparable to “misbehavior/high-immediate” and “misbehavior/low-immediate” conditions. Based on this research, the following hypothesis and research question were advanced.

H2: Teachers who engage in misbehaviors will be perceived as less credible than teachers who do not engage in misbehaviors.

RQ1: Do immediacy and teacher misbehaviors interact in influencing perceptions of credibility?

Method

Design

In a 2×2 factorial design, participants were exposed to one of four scenarios. The scenarios employed were those previously validated in the Thweatt and McCroskey (1996) studies. Teacher immediacy and behavior were manipulated in all four scenarios. After reading a scenario, students were asked to complete scales measuring perceived teacher credibility. A built-in replication (Study Two) was made possible by employing the multiple inductions previously employed by Thweatt and McCroskey (1996).

Manipulations

Immediacy. Teacher immediacy was manipulated in the four scenario descriptions. There were six nonverbal behaviors that were either highly immediate or nonimmediate. Two levels of immediacy were created by varying the proportion of behaviors that were immediate. In the high immediacy condition, the teacher was described as immediate in all six nonverbal behaviors. In the low immediacy condition, the no reference to immediate teacher behavior was included. Different immediacy behaviors were included in the replication (Study 2) than in the original study (Study 1). The inductions are reported in Appendix A.

Misbehavior. Teacher misbehavior was also manipulated in the four scenarios. There were three behaviors that were considered either appropriate behavior or misbehavior. Two levels of behavior were created by varying the proportion of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. In the misbehavior condition, all three teacher behaviors described were considered to be inappropriate. In the nonmisbehavior condition, the teacher was described as engaging in all appropriate behaviors. Different misbehaviors were employed in the replication (Study Two) than in the initial study (Study One). The inductions are reported in Appendix A.

Procedure

In large lecture classes at an Eastern University participants were exposed to one of four written stimulus behavior scenarios (see Appendix A). After reading the scenario, the participant was asked to complete scales measuring perceived teacher credibility (see below). The replication was identical to the original study except that different scenarios representing different operationalizations of immediacy and misbehavior were employed. After completing the instruments the students were thanked, debriefed, and the class in which they were enrolled continued. Different participants were involved in Study Two than participated in Study One.

Participants

Participants ($n = 197$ in Study One, $n = 188$ in Study Two) were students enrolled in undergraduate communication classes at a large Eastern university. Since the classes in which the students were enrolled qualified to meet general education requirements, students in both replications came from all areas of the university and were predominately sophomores. The number of males and females in each condition was virtually identical (which is characteristic of the population of students at that institution). All were given minimal course credit for participation. Participant sex was not associated with any other variable in the study (power $> .95$ for small effect size).

Measures of Teacher Credibility

The students' perceptions of their teachers' credibility was measured using an 18-item scale developed by Teven and McCroskey (1997). Each dimension was measured with responses to six, 7-point bipolar scales. Factor analysis revealed three clear dimensions: Competence, Caring, and Trustworthiness, consistent with the earlier results observed by Teven and McCroskey (1997). Cronbach's Alpha for Competence, Caring, and Trustworthiness were .89, .93, and .83, respectively.

Data Analyses

The data were subjected initially to two-way multivariate analyses of variance. To further examine the data, the data were subjected to two-way analysis of variance. Post-hoc cell comparisons were made where justified by a significant interaction effect. Alpha for all tests was set at .05.

Results

The results of the MANOVA revealed significant main and interaction effects. The analysis revealed a significant multivariate effect for level of immediacy in Study One and Study Two, $F(3, 178) = 50.61, p < .0001$ and $F(3, 169) = 38.45, p < .0001$, respectively. There was also a significant multivariate effect for level of behavior in both studies, $F(3, 178) = 20.10, p < .0001$ and $F(3, 169) = 25.25, p < .0001$,

respectively. A significant multivariate interaction effect was also found for both studies, $F(3, 178) = 10.09, p < .0001$ and $F(3, 169) = 7.38, p < .0001$, respectively. In order to help interpretation of the multivariate results, two-way analyses of variance were conducted for each of the three credibility measures for each study.

Hypothesis 1 stated that teachers who were more immediate would be perceived as more credible than teachers who were less immediate. In Study One and Study Two, immediacy had a significant impact on all three dimensions of credibility. Hypothesis 2 stated that teachers who engaged in misbehaviors would be perceived as less credible than teachers who did not engage in misbehaviors. Teachers misbehaviors also had a significant impact on all three dimensions of credibility in both studies.

Beyond the two hypotheses, which dealt with the main effects of teacher immediacy and misbehaviors, a research question was posed to investigate the interaction of teacher immediacy and misbehaviors on each dimension of credibility. In both studies, the results revealed that the two independent variables interacted to significantly affect each dimension of credibility with one exception. In Study Two, the interaction effect was not significant for the trustworthiness dimension.

Post hoc analyses were conducted using least squared means where interaction effects were significant. Comparisons of cell means revealed significant differences among manipulated conditions. These differences are further explicated for each dimension of credibility in both studies.

Study One

Teacher Competence. For dependent variable "Teacher Competence" the analysis for the overall model was significant, $F(3, 190) = 43.21, p < 0.0001$. Variance accounted for was 41%. Main effects for both independent variables were significant beyond the .05 level. The interaction effect was also significant [$F(1, 190) = 21.29, p < .0001$]. When teachers were seen as highly immediate and without misbehaviors, they were perceived as significantly more competent ($m = 35.80, p < .0001$) than the highly immediate teacher with misbehaviors ($m = 22.80$), the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors ($m = 25.50$), and the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors ($m = 21.56$). The teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors was perceived as significantly more competent than the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors. There was no significant difference in perceived competence between the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors and the teacher high in immediacy with misbehaviors (see Table 1).

Teacher Trustworthiness. For the dependent variable "Teacher Trustworthiness" the analysis revealed a significant overall effect, $F(3, 185) = 25.54, p < .0001$. Variance accounted for in Teacher Trustworthiness was 30%. Main effects were significant beyond the .05 level. The interaction effect was also significant, $F(1, 185) = 12.45, p < .0005$. When teachers were high in immediacy and without misbehaviors, Teacher Trustworthiness ($m = 32.60, p < .0001$) was rated as significantly higher than the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors ($m = 26.60$), the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors ($m = 23.30$), and the teacher high in immediacy with misbehaviors ($m = 23.10$). Teacher Trustworthiness was seen as significantly greater for the low immediate teacher without misbehaviors than the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors and the teacher high in immediacy with misbehaviors. There was no significant difference between perceived Teacher

TABLE 1
MEANS FOR IMMEDIACY/MISBEHAVIOR CONDITIONS

Dependent Variable	Study Number	Low Immediacy		High Immediacy	
		No Misbehavior	Misbehavior	No Misbehavior	Misbehavior
Teacher Caring	1	15.3a	15.9b	31.7abc	22.8abc
	2	18.0a	16.2b	32.3ab	25.0ab
Teacher Competence	1	25.5a	21.6a	35.8ab	22.8b
	2	26.1a	23.2a	36.2ab	24.1b
Teacher Trustworthiness	1	26.6ac	23.3a	32.6ab	23.1bc
	2	25.4a	23.9b	32.9ab	28.5ab

Note. Means with the same subscript, for the same study, on the same dependent variable are significantly different at (at least) the .05 level.

Trustworthiness for the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors and the teacher high in immediacy with misbehaviors (see Table 1).

Teacher Caring. The values for the overall model on dependent variable "Teacher Caring" were $F(3, 189) = 66.71, p < .0001$. Variance accounted for in Teacher Caring was 51%. Main effects for both independent variables were significant beyond the .05 level. The interaction effect was also significant, $F(1, 189) = 25.71, p < .0001$. When the teacher was more immediate and without misbehaviors, perceived Teacher Caring ($m = 31.69, p < .0001$) was significantly greater than when the teacher was nonimmediate with no misbehaviors ($m = 15.30$), highly immediate with misbehaviors ($m = 22.80$), and low in immediacy with misbehaviors ($m = 15.90$). There was a significant difference in Teacher Caring between the teacher high in immediacy with misbehaviors, the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors, and the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors. There was no difference in perceived caring for the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors and the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors (see Table 1).

Study Two

Teacher Competence. For dependent variable "Teacher Competence," the analysis for the overall model was significant, $F(3, 180) = 40.44, p < .0001$. Variance accounted for in the model was 40%. Main effects for both independent variables were significant beyond the .05 level. The interaction effect was also significant, $F(1, 180) = 23.68, p < 0.0001$. When teachers were seen as highly immediate and without misbehaviors, they were perceived as significantly more competent ($m = 36.17, p < .0001$) than the highly immediate teacher with misbehaviors ($m = 24.13$), the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors ($m = 26.09$), and the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors ($m = 23.18$). The teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors was perceived as significantly more competent than the teacher low in immediacy with misbehaviors. There was no significant difference in perceived competence between the teacher low in immediacy without misbehaviors and the teacher high in immediacy with misbehaviors (see Table 1).

Teacher Trustworthiness. For dependent variable "Teacher Trustworthiness," the analysis for the overall model was significant, $F(3, 177) = 19.47, p < .0001$. Variance accounted for in the model was 25%. Main effects were significant beyond the .05 level. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(1, 177) = 2.65, p < .11$. When teachers were high in immediacy, Teacher Trustworthiness ($m = 30.64, p < .0001$)

was rated as significantly higher ($p < .0001$) than the teacher low in immediacy ($m = 24.64$). Teacher Trustworthiness was significantly greater ($p < .001$) for the teacher without misbehaviors ($m = 29.14$) than the teacher with misbehaviors ($m = 26.14$).

Teacher Caring. For dependent variable "Teacher Caring," the analysis revealed that the overall model was significant, $F(3, 182) = 48.5, p < .0001$. Variance accounted for in Teacher Caring was 45%. Main effects were significant beyond the .05 level. The interaction effect was also significant, $F(1, 182) = 6.96, p < 0.01$. When the teacher was high in immediacy and without misbehaviors, Teacher Caring ($m = 32.34, p < .0001$) was significantly greater than when the teacher was nonimmediate and without misbehaviors ($m = 18.00$), nonimmediate with misbehaviors ($m = 16.24$), and immediate with misbehaviors ($m = 25.00$). There was no significant difference in Teacher Caring when the teacher was low in immediacy without misbehaviors and low in immediacy with misbehaviors (see Table 1).

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of teacher immediacy and teacher misbehaviors on student perceptions of teacher credibility. Two hypotheses were generated and one research question was posed. The first hypothesis predicted that immediacy would have a positive effect on students' perceptions of teacher credibility. The second hypothesis predicted that teachers' misbehaviors would have negative outcomes as indicated by students' perceptions of the teacher being less credible. The research question inquired whether the two primary predictor variables would interact in forming student perceptions of teacher credibility.

Strong main effects in the directions indicated in our two hypotheses were observed in both studies on all three credibility measures. However, the presence of significant interactions on all three dimensions of credibility in the first study and on two of the three in the second study indicate the impact of these variables is more complex than the hypotheses presumed. For Competence, the interaction effect of immediacy and misbehavior was significant in both studies. The clear-cut pattern of results indicted that teachers were perceived to be the most competent when they were high in immediacy and without misbehaviors. Nonimmediacy and misbehavior did not combine linearly to produce a uniquely negative effect. The presence of either negative element, however, had a strong negative impact on perceived competence.

For Teacher Trustworthiness, the interaction effect of immediacy and misbehaviors was significant only for the first study. In the first study, the pattern of results was virtually identical with those for competence. Teachers with high immediacy and no misbehaviors were seen as the most trustworthy. While this was also true in the second study, the impact of immediacy was much stronger in the misbehavior condition in that study, enough so that both immediacy and misbehavior produced main effects without an interaction.

For Teacher Caring, the interaction effect of immediacy and misbehaviors was also significant in both studies. The results show a very strong and consistent impact for immediacy, in that highly immediate teachers were consistently seen as more caring than nonimmediate teachers, regardless of whether any misbehaviors were noted. However, the absence of misbehaviors produced an even more positive

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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.