CREDIBILITY AND THE PROFESSOR:
THE JUXTAPOSITION OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS
AND INSTRUCTOR BELIEFS

by

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An Abstract
of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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As credibility is defined by receivers, the study of teacher credibility continuously involves rigorous studies of student perceptions regarding teacher credibility levels. While information regarding student perceptions is quite helpful, few measures have been made to directly apply student perceptions to individual professors through cross-analysis. Additionally, the majority of studies operationalize credibility through the use of only closed-ended, numerical measurement tools. Although beneficial, teachers are rarely provided with specific, detailed information regarding credibility influencing behaviors. This qualitative study analyzes the correlations and inconsistencies that occurred among student perceptions and teacher beliefs of credibility influencing behaviors and credibility levels in five cases. This study found that the addition of open-ended questions provides an acute sense of depth to the measurement of credibility by identifying specific, influencing behaviors utilized by professors.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Research in the field of education, including communication education, often strives to discover which types of behaviors, personalities, and teaching styles are most effective in a classroom setting, (Check, J. F., 1986; Heffernan, T., Morrison, M., Sweeney, A., & Jarratt, D., 2010; Helterbran, V. R., 2008; Polk, J. A., 2006; Powell, R., & Arthur, R., 1985). The hope is that this knowledge, when properly put into practice by communication scholars and teachers, may aid in both professional growth and increased effectiveness in teaching. Unfortunately, as teachers’ schedules become inundated with committee, faculty, and student meetings, preparation or curriculum development time, and other various tasks; time dedicated to personal development and improved teaching techniques may become scarce, thus causing this helpful information to often be overlooked (Grady, Helbling, & Lubeck, 2008). In other cases, it may be disregarded altogether by thinking that simply knowing content equates positively to an ability to both teach and practice their profession well (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1977). The question remains, however, does credibility flow solely through a thorough knowledge of one’s professional content?

This query arose while the researcher was attending a panel discussion at a national conference for communication scholars and educators. Despite the fact that each presenter in the panel was both a scholar in the field of communication and employed as an instructor or professor at a university or institution of higher learning, the presentations mirrored little that is taught to underclassmen in public speaking or basic communication courses. Rather, the presentations reflected behaviors that basic public speaking courses and texts are designed to
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illuminate and diminish (Beebe, S.A. & Beebe, S.J., 2009). Shockingly, the presentations included little to none of the following: eye contact, vocal variance, engaging delivery style, or creation of immediacy. Rather, these professional presentations consisted of merely reading research papers aloud in muffled, monotone voices. Although it could be argued that this panel was a rare incident at a national convention for communication scholars and instructors, the fact that this was the norm for an entire panel of presenters suggests a wider spread problem. For that reason, it is imperative to ask how widespread this problem really is. During the panel, the researcher felt that the presenters’ source credibility was minimized due to their monotonous presentation of the material. The researcher began to wonder how credible these professors were perceived to be by their respective students. More so, to wonder if they were even cognizant of the poor practices that they employed during their presentations, or how their credibility might be impacted as a result of their behaviors. Simply stated, were they unable to practice what they teach?

The study of credibility first began with Aristotle, and continues to be studied extensively today. Teacher credibility is viewed as one of the most important elements of teacher effectiveness (Hurt et al., 1977). Research has proven that when instructors are perceived as credible, there is an increase in motivation, affective learning, and cognitive learning among students (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). When credibility is not established, the entire class is affected negatively, as credibility impacts student learning, behavior, outcomes, and instructor evaluations (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Therefore, the study of teacher credibility remains one of great importance.

Teacher credibility is best defined as “the attitude of a receiver which references the degree to which a source is seen to be believable” (McCroskey, 1998, p. 80). It is especially
important to note that a teacher’s credibility is defined by the perceptions of others (Hurt et al., 1977). In a classroom setting then, the perceptions of the students define a teacher’s credibility. For example, if a teacher is perceived as incompetent in the subject matter, then he is not seen as credible, despite the fact that his educational background is rooted in that particular subject. Throughout the years, teacher credibility has been measured by organizing teacher characteristics under a variety of themes, which have since been categorized as: competence, character, and caring (McCroskey, 1998). Competence refers to a teacher’s relationship with the subject matter; whether or not she is comfortable and confident relaying accurate information. If students view the teacher as lacking competence, students resist and/or reject the information presented by the teacher (Hurt et al., 1977, p. 105). Character is defined as the perceived goodness of a teacher’s personality; whether or not she is trustworthy, honest, and loyal. If students do not perceive the teacher to be of high character, they are uncertain of whether or not to trust the teacher, which results in a hesitance to trust information given by the teacher (Hurt et al., 1977, p. 105). Caring, centers on whether or not an instructor genuinely values the wellbeing of his students, and looks specifically at instructor empathy, understanding, and responsiveness (Finn, Schrodt, Witt, Elledge, Jernberg & Larson, 2009). When students perceive a teacher as disinterested in student learning and growth, students will avoid outside communication with the teacher, which poses problems when students need further explanation or help in the subject matter. The three elements of credibility are all viewed as essential elements by students, as each facet not only affects student achievement, but also the student/teacher relationship, as well as classroom dynamics.

Although discouraging, the previously mentioned scenario occurring at the national conference is not uncommon. Hurt et al., (1977) report, “One of the most common
misconceptions about teaching is the assumption that a person who is well qualified in subject matter and sincerely wishes to be an effective teacher will be perceived positively by the students in that classroom” (p. 102). As scholars, it is quite easy to become inundated with research on subject matter content and intellectual gain, but as research has shown, subject matter competence is only a fraction of one’s credibility mosaic (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). This means that student perceptions of instructor credibility can drastically vary from the perceptions of the instructor, who may think he is presenting himself in a very poised and professional manner. In order to be perceived as credible, one must not only know the subject matter, but also understand how to effectively teach the content, and relate to students on an interpersonal level. Meaning, the most effective teachers are not only masters of content, but also have the ability to foster relationships and manage communication dynamics in the classroom (Catt, Miller, & Schallenkamp, 2007). As Hurt et al., (1977) posit, “the single best predictor of how well students will do in a teacher’s class is the way the teacher is perceived by those students” (p. 102). If students perceive a teacher as lacking credibility, it is likely that student achievement will not reach its full potential, thus negatively impacting teacher effectiveness and student learning (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Thus, it is imperative that teachers are perceived to be credible by their students.

It is equally as important that educators become aware of students’ perceptions, because it increases opportunities to work towards the establishment of favorable credibility in the classroom. Sadly, Hurt et al., (1977) state, “most teachers seldom think about how they are perceived by the individual students in their classroom, and those who do think about this problem seldom do much to alter their image” (p. 102). Meaning, even if a teacher thinks that she is perceived poorly by students, often, little is done to improve her image. This becomes
problematic as perceptions of a teacher’s credibility and student achievement levels are so closely linked (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). This mindset may also contribute to a lackadaisical approach to teaching, or breed poor teaching habits, wherein the students are done a disservice. It is the responsibility of institutions of higher education to provide students an education grounded in credible instructors using sound teaching practices. When student perceptions and teacher beliefs regarding credibility levels vary drastically, the entire classroom environment suffers (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Therefore, teachers must become more fully involved and engaged in credibility evaluation and management techniques, which as Hurt et al. (1977) explain, have been lacking. Galbraith and Jones (2008) explain,

> It is the self-awareness aspect of becoming a teacher of adults that is an essential component in the journey toward understanding who you are and how it relates to the other dimensions of teaching and learning, such as the design, organization, and facilitation processes. Self-awareness lays the groundwork for developing a vision for teaching, becoming authentic and credible, and understanding your teaching perspective.

(p. 2)

By asking professors to actively reflect upon behaviors that could influence student perceptions of credibility, professors will become more self-aware of their teaching practices, ergo, more consciously engaged in the credibility establishment process. In doing so, students are provided with a strong standard of excellence and sound academic experience.

In the status quo, the majority of feedback that instructors receive regarding their teaching and credibility come from student evaluations at the end of a semester. This limits the opportunity to alter negative behaviors and improve rapport with the students providing the feedback. Adding to the complexity of post-semester evaluations is the issue of commonly low
response rates by students, which often only represent the extreme dichotomies of the classroom (Greimel-Fuhrmann & Geyer, 2003; Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002). The students who most often fill out teacher evaluations are those who experience strong emotions, either positive or negative, towards the class and teacher (Marlin, 1987). This sample then, does not represent the class perceptions accurately. Evaluation comments received then, are often rejected and dismissed for various reasons, including: viewing evaluations as simply an avenue for students to vent frustration, or not seeing students as qualified individuals to comment on professional practices (Franklin & Theall, 1989). In summary, the current means of gathering student feedback is not often viewed by educators as a valid way to judge one’s teaching effectiveness and credibility.

Furthermore, aside from student evaluations, very little is done to measure a teacher’s credibility (Kwan, 1999). Frymier and Thompson (1992) posit, “there is comparatively little research that provides teachers with advice or strategies to increase their credibility” (p. 388). Since their study in 1992, extensive research has occurred addressing this lack of knowledge by experimental measurements of isolated behaviors and classroom scenarios (Finn et al., 2009). As helpful as this information may be, it does not provide teachers with adequate and functional information directly relating to their specific credibility and effectiveness as educators. If a teacher is not fully aware of her students’ perceptions and attitudes, she cannot work towards improving her behaviors, as well as the way she is perceived. If teachers were provided with a detailed account of student perceptions, awareness of their own credibility-limiting behaviors would potentially increase. Since traditional, end of semester student evaluations are often not viewed as overly reliable or as an efficient and effective means to measure credibility and improve teaching practices, it is crucial to investigate a more functional method of evaluation that would better suit studying student perceptions of a teacher. (Hurt et al., 1977).
If a more balanced and functional method of gathering student feedback is established, educators may be more willing to accept it as an opportunity to consciously work towards monitoring and improving teaching practices. One such way of doing so may be through the practice of self-monitoring, which requires individuals to deliberately reflect upon actions in an attempt to evaluate and adjust behaviors as necessary (Schunk, 1991). This practice is often utilized in the fields of education, psychology, and health; in attempts to improve performance, behavior, and motivation, as it is extremely important in the process of learning (Daly & Ranalli, 2003; Gaines, T. & Barry, L., 2008; Ganz, J.B., 2008; Kuiper, R., Murdock, N., & Grant, N., 2010; Michie, S., Whittington, C., McAteer, J., & Gupta, S., 2009; Sheffield, K., & Waller, R.J., 2010; Soares, D.A., Vannet, K.J., & Harrison, J, 2009). Although not as commonly utilized in the field of communication, the research of how beneficial self-monitoring techniques can be in the afore mentioned fields is enough to provide a strong foundation of proof that once teachers are aware of behaviors potentially injurious to their credibility, they may then begin the process of altering said behaviors through the practice of self-monitoring, thus improving credibility and student achievement. Moreover, this practice could also be useful to monitor and reinforce positive behaviors and classroom practices, which impacts derived and terminal credibility by increasing self-awareness (Galbraith & Jones, 2008).

To further expand the scope of available research concerning teacher credibility, this thesis will first define the notion of teacher credibility and review the history of how the measurement of credibility has changed. Second, an analysis of the perceptual differences that occur among students and teachers, focusing particularly upon how research is lacking within the area of perceptual comparisons will be advanced. Finally, multiple research questions are posed to identify whether or not the addition of juxtaposing student and teacher perceptions by
implementing qualitative research methods provide novel and pertinent information to the scope and study of teacher credibility.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to fully understand the perceptual differences between students’ and teachers’ views of credibility, it is important to first understand the overall concept of credibility. Therefore, this review will begin by examining the definition of teacher credibility, as well as trends in credibility research throughout the past. Then, there will be an examination of the two varying perceptions of the importance of credibility to students, as well as to teachers. Finally, there will be a brief analysis of the absence of inclusive research that focuses on both students and professors, thus providing a rationale for this study.

Communicating and Measuring Credibility

Studying the credibility of speakers first began when Aristotle discussed notions of speaker ethos in relation to persuasion. He identified ethos characteristics as source intelligence, trustworthiness, and goodwill (Cooper, 1932). Since then, researchers have strived to find the most accurate way to measure the characteristics related to credibility.

In early attempts to compile an accurate and updated list of credibility characteristics, Whitehead (1968) studied various scales created to measure speaker ethos based upon those produced by Hovland, Janis, & Kelley (1953), Lemert, (1963), and McCroskey, (1966), by conducting a “separate analyses of high and low credibility sources to verify the previously identified dimensions of source credibility and the scales for measuring it” (p. 59). Whitehead found that there were, indeed, new characteristics identified that influence one’s level of perceived credibility. Many of these characteristics were not seen as being as influential as the overarching themes of trustworthiness, professionalism, dynamism, and objectivity, all of which
had been previously identified as influential to credibility, but Whitehead concluded that “we can no longer regard ethos or source credibility as simply a three-factor structure composed of expertness, trustworthiness, and dynamism,” (p. 63) as it had been in the past.

Whitehead’s study illustrated the need to measure credibility differently, which then encouraged other researchers to specifically examine credibility in relation to situation, message, and goals of the speaker. This led researchers such as McGlone and Anderson (1973) to consider the credibility of individuals working in instructional settings, aptly named, teacher credibility. It was at this point that the concept of teacher credibility began to separate from general source credibility (McGlone & Anderson, 1973). With a more specific focus, McGlone and Anderson (1973) sought to “identify the dimensions of teacher credibility, to assess their stability over time during a complete school term” (p. 197). Their study was among the first to specifically analyze teacher credibility as a separate type of source credibility. Additionally, it was one of the few that approached their research using a longitudinal model by surveying students four times throughout a semester. Their factor-based scale was based loosely upon measures of credibility in persuasive situations, but it proved to be an ineffective tool, as it lost stability over time. Essentially, the results were unable to provide any explanation for instability, or change in credibility (p. 199). What this meant was that previously created measurement scales that utilized “traditional categories of source credibility should not be used to delineate instruments for investigating teacher credibility” (McGlone & Anderson, 1973). Up until the McGlone and Anderson study, measurement tools were effective in measuring only initial credibility, or credibility assumptions based upon first impressions and brief interactions. Their study proved that previously created scales cannot accurately measure derived or terminal credibility, those that are created during and after interaction, thus excluding credibility from an ability to change
over time. McGlone and Anderson’s study (1973) demonstrated the importance of “identifying variables more specific to teaching effectiveness” (p. 199-200). Old scales based upon source credibility in persuasive situations were ineffective when applied to specific teacher applications or contexts.

Studies such as the McGlone and Anderson study were only the beginning of researchers’ hesitance of using identical scales for varying situations and never challenging the true validity of this practice. A one size fits all approach was not valid. Although scales such as McCroskey’s Scale for Measuring Ethos (1966) were viewed as empirical, Applbaum and Anatol (1973) questioned the reliability of using this scale, along with others similar to McCroskey’s scale, without alterations based upon situation specificity. More specifically, the researchers felt that time, or extensive exposure to the source, would cause perceptions of credibility to change. To test this, Applbaum and Anatol created numerous scales based upon previous scales designed by: McCroskey, 1966; Berlo, Lemert & Mertz, 1969-70; and Whitehead, 1968, in an attempt to locate changing perceptions based on exposure amount. Their findings confirmed that “the factor structure, including the number of significant factors and amount of variance accounted for by the factors, does change over time” (p. 132).

As research continued to prove that credibility differs depending on the subject, source, exposure time, and situation, McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb (1974) sought to create a credibility measurement tool that focused specifically on communication instructors, thus eliminating previous concerns regarding measurement tool validity. In a method similar to Applbaum and Anatol (1973), McCroskey et al. (1974) used numerous previously created semantic differential-type scales to create a teacher credibility measurement tool. In their study, the researchers found five overarching themes to be prevalent: character, sociability, composure,
extroversion, and competence (McCroskey et al., 1974). After several replications, the newly created tool to measure teacher credibility was shown to be valid. This tool was used as the primary means to measure teacher credibility for the following two decades (Finn, Schrodt, Witt, Elledge, Jernberg & Larson, 2009). Later however, McCroskey and Young (1981), compiled the five primary themes into three overarching elements: competence, trustworthiness (character), and goodwill (caring), believing that competence and character far surpassed the importance of caring (Finn et al., 2009).

Due to the thoughts of McCroskey and Young (1981), factor analysis studies began to focus primarily on measuring the first two elements of credibility (competence and character), and tended to overlook the impact of goodwill (caring) on credibility. After revisiting Aristotle’s discussion of goodwill, McCroskey and Teven (1999) sought to reinstate the importance of measuring all three components of credibility equally, viewing them as interrelated entities that best complement one another when used together (Finn et al., 2009). Through their research, they found that goodwill / caring is equally as important, if not more important than competence and character when measuring teacher credibility; thus validating the empirical value of the three dimensional approach to measuring credibility categories. This prompted McCroskey and Teven to refine the scale previously created by McCroskey, Holdridge and Toomb. The newly refined scale is now the primary tool used to measure teacher credibility (Finn et al., 2009).

Simply stated, many different tools have been created and universally agreed upon as reliable credibility measurement sources over the past sixty years (e.g. McCroskey, 1966; McCroskey, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1974; McCroskey & Teven, 1999; McGlone & Anderson, 1973; Whitehead, 1968). These studies share numerous similarities, as most have created semantic differential or Likert-type measurement scales to quantitatively measure credibility.
Most significantly though, each of these studies challenged previously designed measurement tools, highlighting characteristics that had been left out, while questioning whether or not an encompassing and effective tool has yet been created to quantitatively measure teacher credibility.

When looking at qualitative research on teacher credibility, additional problems arise due to the scarcity of available studies. The few studies that do employ a qualitative methodology tend to be extremely case-specific, narrowly focusing only on variables such as: race, minorities, or sex in relation to credibility (Brown, Cervero, Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Hendrix, 1997; Mazer & Hunt, 2008; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). Although extremely helpful, these studies focus on variables that are extremely difficult to change, thus not advocating changes in manipulative variables, such as behaviors. Therefore, although adding to the general body of research, the studies provide little opportunity to increase credibility.

Even more limited than qualitative studies on teacher credibility, is the amount of research that include an analysis of both teacher and student perspectives, therefore leaving a substantial void in the general scope of research. In order to fully understand the importance and impact credibility has on teaching effectiveness, it would be advantageous to increase the amount of qualitative accounts of credibility research to broaden the overall extent of teacher credibility research. As Finn et al., (2009) explain after concluding a meta-analytical review of teacher credibility, “future researchers are encouraged to use the three-dimensional credibility scale in the operationalization of teacher credibility. Researchers should also continue testing more sophisticated models of teacher credibility, teacher behaviors, and student outcomes” (p. 532). Integrating the credibility concepts of McCroskey and Teven’s three dimensional credibility scale into a qualitative method may be one such way of enhancing sophistication.
Perceptions of Credibility

Student Perceptions of Teacher Credibility

Several studies (Brann, Edwards & Myers, 2005; Martinez-Egger & Powers, 2002; Pogue & AhYun, 2006; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998) have been conducted measuring student perceptions of teacher credibility on numerous levels. Typically, the studies are quantitative in nature and are set up as experiments, wherein the researchers manipulate specific teacher behaviors in hypothetical situations and gather student responses. For example, Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) composed four different scenarios that described various nonverbal behaviors used by a hypothetical teacher. Once student respondents read each scenario, they were asked to complete perceived teacher credibility measurement scales. Although studies of this nature provide helpful information, they are experiments, thus conducted in a lab with manipulated variables. The results provided then, are created in a laboratory, and are not an authentic account of student / teacher interaction in the classroom. Therefore, these experiments can only serve as assumptions at best towards the application to true representations of teacher credibility. Further, the majority of studies provide information pertaining to initial credibility, that being based upon first impression. But one must wonder, how much can a person accurately judge another’s level of competence, caring, and character based solely upon initial reaction?

Pogue and AhYun (2006), measured teacher nonverbal immediacy and credibility on student learning. Immediacy is often closely linked to credibility practices, as it builds psychological closeness, or a connection between students and the teacher, which can be perceived to be part of the caring and character elements of teacher credibility (Teven & Hanson, 2004). The researchers found that both credibility and immediacy attempts significantly influenced student learning and motivation (Pogue & AhYun, 2006, p. 340), thus reinforcing, in
order to be effective, teachers are required to be both experts of content and to engender sincere interpersonal connections with their students.

Other studies examine the relationships between instructor’s socio-communicative style and credibility on student motivation (Martin, Chesebro, & Mottet, 1997), use of technology and credibility (Schrodt & Witt, 2006), teacher affinity seeking behaviors in relation to credibility (Frymier & Thompson, 1992), use of argumentative messages in relation to credibility levels (Schrodt, 2003), and teaching philosophy and credibility (Brann, Edwards, & Myers, 2005) in much the same way. Students report, and research supports that credibility highly influences student motivation, learning, and attitudes about the class, content, and instructor. These studies highlight the vastness of the research literature on credibility and its influences from a student perspective. Although vast and wide in breadth, these studies usually measure student responses only one time per study, which contributes to a lack of depth amongst what is known of derived and terminal credibility levels.

In an attempt to enhance the depth and breadth of research surrounding student perceptions of teacher credibility, Myers and Bryant (2004) conducted a study occurring at the end of the semester, measuring student’s perceptions of communicative behaviors that define a teacher’s level of competence, caring, and character (p. 23). Research in the past has extensively explored overarching themes of credibility, but as Myers and Bryant (2004) explain, “the specific communicative behaviors instructors use to convey these dimensions of credibility remain unexplored” (p. 23). Through the use of an open-ended survey and content analysis, the researchers found that “instructor competence is conveyed through content expertise, affect for students, and verbal fluency; instructor character is conveyed through immediacy, flexibility, promotion of understanding, and trustworthiness; and instructor caring is conveyed through
responsiveness, accommodation, and accessibility” (p. 26). The use of an open-ended survey allowed researchers to obtain specific examples of specific behaviors, rather than using a prescribed scale. The focus was therefore shifted from a numerical measurement of what credibility was to the specific types of behaviors that teachers used to communicate and reinforce credibility, which begs the question, would the implementation of a more qualitative method to the study of credibility enhance common understanding among teachers and students?

**Teacher Perception of Credibility**

Although one’s level of credibility is established by receivers, it is first communicated by a source, who is seemingly overlooked in the current study of credibility analysis. We must not forget that there are two parties involved in communication exchange, thus making it imperative to study credibility from a source perspective as well. Clearly, teachers are involved in communicating their credibility to the classroom, however, the perceptions of teachers are rarely taken into consideration in credibility studies, since credibility is most often student-defined (Hurt et al., 1977). Further, if teachers’ perceptions are viewed in a study, it is rare that the same study examines students’ perceptions, or employs any sort of cross-analysis of data. The researcher found only one study of credibility that analyzed both teacher and student perceptions in actual teaching situations, Erdle, Murray, and Rushton, (1985). Although this study investigated both student and teacher perceptions, it was focused primarily on personality traits in relation to teaching, not specifically teacher credibility. The question remains, do student and teacher perceptions function together to create credibility?

Including teachers in the measurement of credibility has been a severely underutilized and understudied. As Erdle, Murray, and Rushton (1985) explain, “student ratings are the most widely used measure of teaching effectiveness in North American colleges and universities” (p.
394). This makes some sense, as students are the receivers of instruction. However, teachers do not work solely with students. Erdle et al. (1985) sought to inquire whether or not students and colleagues view sound teaching practices and effective teaching strategies in the same way. Their study, focusing primarily on teacher personality traits, did report high correlations between student and teacher perceptions. Both parties viewed highly effective teachers as fitting into one of two types of personality traits: “one type reflecting Achievement Orientation (e.g. dominance, intelligence, leadership) and the other reflecting Interpersonal Orientation (e.g. supportiveness, nonauthoritarianism, nondefensiveness” (p. 404). Although credibility is not specifically named in either orientation, several defined characteristics fit under the defined credibility categories. For example, trustworthiness and goodwill would be viewed as more of an interpersonal orientation, as those behaviors are primarily focused upon support, care, and trust. Whereas competence would be viewed as more of an achievement orientation.

Many teachers use student involvement and feedback to lectures and classroom activities as indicators of how to proceed and as a means of reflection upon effectiveness. In a self-study of her teaching practices, Shadiow (2010) noted that she assigned credibility levels to her students, and then allowed those prescribed levels to influence how she managed class time. After further investigation, she came to realize that the students she viewed as most credible were the students who were most like her. The students that were given the least amount of attention and viewed as the less credible were the students who were the least like her. As a result, these students were often avoided in the class. When this occurs, it can lead to a false pretense of thinking that credibility is being communicated clearly, when it reality, it is not (Shadiow, 2010). Shadiow (2010) referred to this as the “perception of credibility” (p. 58). Meaning, teachers can often allow their own views of students, the classroom environment, and their self-confidence level to
construct a sense of false credibility. Shadiow allowed her affinity bias to identify specific students as the ‘perception of credibility’ indicators, which in turn, defined and dictated class involvement, causing overall student achievement to suffer.

Just as credibility influences student achievement and perceptions regarding teacher effectiveness, teachers’ perceptions regarding their own practices influence instructional effectiveness. Often, a teacher’s inability or refusal to monitor credibility can negatively influence both teaching techniques and students. Although Shadiow’s (2010) study did focus on teachers, the instructor’s perception of credibility and class effectiveness was based solely upon the nonverbal reactions of students, not any sort of verbal feedback. Therefore, the teacher was basing effectiveness on his/her interpretation of student reactions rather than specific verbal feedback from students. The receiving of verbal feedback could have provided an excellent validity check on the perception process.

Powers, Nitcavic, and Koerner (1990) posit that “…an integral aspect of teachers’ perception of self was a concern for establishing positive credibility…” (p. 277) enforcing the importance of credibility to both teacher and student. It is imperative, then, that teachers first, understand the differences between their beliefs and their students’ perceptions, and second, be willing and able to self-monitor self-perceived credibility and its impact on teaching effectiveness. Further, Powers et al. (1990) continue by stating, “ personal credibility was reasoned to represent the highest initial exploratory potential regarding communication related internalized characteristics” (p. 227). Despite the substantial importance placed upon teachers’ self-perceived credibility, very few studies have measured teacher perceptions of self-credibility. Therefore, Powers et al. created a quantitative measurement tool based upon instruments focusing on external sources measuring someone else’s credibility (e.g. McCroskey, Jensen, &
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Todd, 1972; McCroskey, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1974). Their measure mirrored previous measures created with only minor exceptions. Rather than measuring only external views of competence, character, and caring, the tool created by Powers et al. measured teachers’ self-perceptions of extroversion, competence, composure, and character. This tool would seem to be critical to teachers continuously monitoring teaching effectiveness. Without self-reflection, there is very little chance for growth.

Ochs and Whitford (2007/2008) investigated the links between credibility and communication studies, noting that credibility is focused primarily on “message and source believability,” which are commonly linked to persuasion in communication (p. 502). In delivering messages to a class, teachers must consider appearance, creating immediacy, and nonverbal communication, among a myriad of other elements. Message creation is a complex process that is highly influenced by said factors—factors that are often less intentional, or somewhat second nature to teachers. However, when attention is paid to teaching behaviors, Ochs and Whitford state that “credibility is enhanced by a teacher’s own sense of comfort and confidence… their enthusiasm and interest” (p. 502). Essentially, when one is seen as credible, his/her ability to persuade an audience increases. It seems likely then, that when teachers take the time to examine their own practices, conscious efforts can be made to enhance credibility, which will ultimately positively affect the academic environment within the class by fostering student acceptance of messages or content, as well as student perceptions of credibility levels.

Absence of Inclusive Research / Summary

In the field of communication, the establishment of credibility becomes especially important, as it is imperative that teachers model what is taught to their students. It is very
difficult to invest in knowledge when the source of the knowledge lacks credibility. Hurt et al., (1977) state,

To be completely credible, a teacher needs to be perceived as competent, of high character, sociable, composed, and at least moderately extroverted. If any of these circumstances are not true, the teacher is likely to be perceived as much lower in credibility and to be much less effective in classroom communication with students. (p. 107)

In order to teach communication courses effectively, teachers must not only be credible sources of content, but also must be viewed as credible in character and caring behaviors, or interpersonal behaviors. Additionally, if viewed as highly persuasive, which is closely tied to credibility (Cooper, 1932), acceptance of information will increase. If one or more of these realms of credibility are lacking from a student perspective, then the overall level of teacher credibility becomes lower.

With the exception of the Myers and Bryant’s (2004) study, the majority of research on teacher credibility occurs in isolated, experimental events, and focuses on one specific behavior or element of credibility (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998, Martinez-Egger & Powers, 2002; Brann, Edwards & Myers, 2005; Pogue & AhYun, 2006). This provides a very limited scope of the importance of terminal and derived credibility, and whether or not credibility changes over time. As insightful as the previously noted studies are, the current research continues to lack a thorough investigation of qualitative student feedback regarding credibility influencing behaviors that could then be used to enhance possible self-monitoring or teacher reflection practices in an effort to improve credibility. If instructors took a more active role in self-monitoring behaviors that negatively influenced credibility, there is an opportunity for change, which could then
improve credibility and student achievement. But to self-monitor, a heightened sense of awareness of credibility influencing behaviors is needed. Currently, very little research has been done analyzing perceptions of credibility from both the teachers and students involved. Finn et al., (2009) explain “broadly speaking, most investigations of teacher credibility can be classified into one of two general types: (1) studies that explore teacher characteristics and behaviors thought to enhance credibility, and (2) studies that examine student outcomes associated with teacher credibility” (p. 520). It is extremely rare, if not unheard of, then, that credibility research compares the student and teacher perceptions to one another. Due to this, it is difficult to hypothesize whether or not teacher and student perceptions of credibility are linked together in validity and consistency, leaving a void in the understanding of the full depth and breadth of teacher credibility. As Finn et al., (2009) posit, “clearly, continued research on teacher credibility is needed to more fully explicate the role of this important construct in the instructional communication process” (p. 532).

By analyzing the juxtaposition between student and teacher perceptions of credibility qualitatively, educators will be provided with an insurmountable amount of helpful information. To begin, instructors will be able to see whether or not their efforts to communicate credibility to their students are noticed by students, thus showing effectiveness. Secondly, teachers will be provided with specific feedback from students related to their own behaviors and practices that impact their credibility, which will provide teachers with an awareness of behaviors that negatively impact credibility. Becoming aware of these behaviors may aid in the establishment of higher credibility levels. The more aware teachers are, the stronger the propensity to self-monitor behaviors that negatively impact credibility, which may improve teaching practices and alter student perceptions. By exploring the relationship between student and teacher perceptions
of credibility, both teacher credibility levels and student achievement will likely improve. Therefore, this pilot study poses the following research questions:

RQ 1: Are teachers’ efforts to communicate credibility recognized by students?

RQ 2A: Is there consistency between the behaviors teachers identify as credibility enhancing and those identified by students?

RQ 2B: Is there consistency between the behaviors teachers identify as destructive to credibility and those identified by students?

RQ 3: Do teachers self-monitor behaviors that may impact their teacher credibility?

RQ 4: Does the pairing of quantitative and qualitative credibility research measures enrich the depth of research, thus increasing the propensity for teachers to see it as functional?
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the posed research questions, a pilot study utilizing primarily qualitative research measures was employed. Research gathered by Finn et al., (2009) stated that it is imperative that researchers continue to explore more thorough models of measuring teacher credibility. This served as the catalyst for this interdisciplinary approach to the study of teacher credibility, as it attempts to strengthen conventional methods of data collection. Therefore, a survey consisting of both open and closed ended questions was used for students. Personal interviews consisting of similar questions were conducted with participating teachers.

Sample

Participants in this pilot study consisted of both students and teachers from the communication department at a mid-sized Midwestern University. Five instructors that teach upper level communication courses comprised the teacher sample population. Although the sample was one of convenience, efforts were made to ensure that the five instructors chosen represented a variety of variables, including: teaching styles, age, sex, content area of expertise and experience. Professor A was chosen as a representative of male professors with an extensive teaching career. Professor A began as a high school teacher and has been teaching for over 40 years, more than 30 of those being at the same university, and describes himself as having a teaching style that is focused primarily on lecture and thought provoking discussion. Professor B is a female with roughly ten years of teaching experience at the collegiate level, with the majority of those years occurring at the same university. She teaches a variety of classes, some of which being labs, which makes her teaching style somewhat dependent on the format of the
class. Professor C is a male with approximately 20 years of teaching experience, with the majority of those years taking place at the same university. He describes his teaching style as being less formal than most and focused on student engagement. He employs a variety of teaching techniques in his classes, including lectures, discussions, group work, and activities. Professor D is a female with an extensive teaching career at both the high school and college levels. Professor D has been teaching for over 30 years, the majority of those years at the same university. She describes her teaching style as being dependent on the type of class she is teaching, but tries to employ a variety of techniques to increase student involvement. Professor E is a male professor with approximately seven years of teaching experience, and is still considered as one of the newer faculty members. He teaches many lab-based classes and considers his teaching style to foster self-direction among his students. Participation was voluntary and was in accordance with human subjects guidelines (see Appendix B).

The student population was comprised of roughly 60 individuals. Eligible students must have had one of the five participating professors for at least two classes within their major or minor in communication studies. A target of ten students was set to comment upon each teacher’s credibility via online survey. Thirteen students comprised the population that commented upon Professor A (21%). Nine students responded regarding Professor B (14.5%). Professor C received 18 student respondents (29%). Both Professors D and E received 11 student respondents (17.7%). Although the student sample was one of convenience, efforts were made to provide a population representative of a diverse student body to evaluate each professor. The sample consisted of 36 females (59%) and 25 males (41%). All of the participants had taken at least two courses from the professor they commented upon. Of these participants, one student was a freshman (1.6%), one student was a sophomore (1.6%), 13 were juniors (21.3%), 29 were
seniors (47.5%), and 17 responded as other in regards to class rank, which comprised the graduate student and undergraduate student with more than four years of coursework populations (27.9%). The age sample ranged from 18 to 65, with the vast majority of respondents being between 18-25 years of age (75.4%). Diversity of racial representations was somewhat sparse, although fairly representative of the university’s student population, as 53 responded as Caucasian (85.5%), one as African American (1.6%), three as Asian American (4.8%), three as international (4.8%) and two that responded as other (3.2%). Participation was voluntary and was in accordance with human subjects guidelines (see Appendix C).

Measurement Design / Data Collection

Because the three-dimensional scale created by McCroskey and Teven (1999), stemming from the original source credibility research gathered by McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb (1974), is universally agreed upon as the most conclusive tool to operationalize teacher credibility, it was used as the foundation in the creation of the measurement tools for this study (Finn, Schrodt, Witt, Elledge, Jernberg & Larson, 2009). The created measurement tools contained two sections. The first section, making use of primarily open-ended questions focusing upon teacher levels of caring, competence, and character in relation to credibility, served as the means of gathering qualitative data. The second being the quantitative approach, utilizing semantic differential scales to measure credibility rankings, along with the scale created by McCroskey and Teven (1999), and Likert-type scales to measure the frequency of behaviors used by professors.

1 As will be discussed in chapter 6, an error led to the later abandonment of the semantic differential survey results, which were consequently not needed to answer the research questions posed for this study.
The five teachers that participated were interviewed by the researcher in late January / early February in the spring semester of 2011. After student data was gathered, aggregate results were given to each professor to review. Each professor was then asked a series of follow-up questions focusing on their response to the data collected. The follow-up communication occurred in March of the 2011 spring semester.

During the initial interview, teachers were asked a series of open-ended questions requesting them to reflect upon teaching practices, behaviors, and character traits that they purposefully exercise to communicate credibility to their classes, therefore potentially impacting student perceptions of their credibility as defined by the areas of competence, character, and caring. Topics that were discussed included: behaviors practiced to communicate initial credibility, actions used to build upon derived credibility, in-class and out-of-class behaviors that contribute to credibility, possible behaviors that detract from establishing and maintaining credibility, and whether or not self-monitoring techniques are utilized. The closed-ended questions were based upon semantic differential scale, asking the teacher to rank his / her own credibility against others in the department and across the University. The final element of the interview consisted of each teacher completing McCroskey and Teven’s (1999) Teacher Credibility scale. This element was intentionally placed at the conclusion of the interview so as to not lead teachers in their answers during the open-ended portion of the interview (see Appendix D and F).

Student participants completed a 38-item online survey consisting of both open and closed-ended questions, mirroring those asked to the participating teachers (see Appendix E and F). The closed-ended questions were based upon a seven-step semantic differential scale that asked students to rank the professor’s credibility against others in the department and across the
University, as well as whether or not their perception of the professor’s credibility changed after concluding the class, and a five-step Likert-type scale regarding the frequency of times they felt teachers engaged in various credibility-influencing behaviors (almost always, frequently, sometimes, occasionally, hardly ever). The majority of the questions, however, were open-ended, asking students to describe specific behaviors the teacher conveys that influence perceptions of credibility. More specifically, students were asked to reflect upon and identify behaviors rooted in the three elements comprising teacher credibility (competence, caring, and character) that either detracted from or enhanced credibility both inside and outside of the classroom, and whether or not perceptions have changed from initial interaction. The survey ended with the afore mentioned Teacher Credibility measurement scale. Again, this element was intentionally placed at the conclusion of the survey so as to not lead students in their answers during the open-ended portions of the survey.

*Data Analysis*

Once all interviews had been conducted and transcribed, and each professor had roughly ten student survey respondents, two coders were trained by the researcher to distinguish themes and commonalities among the answers provided by the students examining each professor’s credibility level. Because of the small sample population commenting on each professor, a theme or trend was identified as one that was acknowledged by at least three different participants. The coders identified reoccurring trends among the open-ended student answers, noting specific behaviors that enhanced or detracted from each teacher’s level of credibility within each realm of credibility (competence, character, and caring). Then, the overarching themes / answers given by student respondents were compared to the answers provided by the instructors during their initial
interviews to identify correlations or discrepancies between the students’ and professors’ perceptions. The comparison of data provided answers for research questions 1, 2A and 2B.

Follow-Up Communication

Once correlations and discrepancies between student and professor answers were identified, each professor was supplied with an aggregate from of the data, highlighting the similarities and differences between the results. Additionally, professors completed a follow-up questionnaire asking them to comment upon their reactions to the data, whether or not said data would encourage them to self-monitor their credibility attenuating behaviors more, and whether or not they found this data to be more usable than data provided by traditional closed-ended measurement scales and end of the semester evaluations. The analysis of the feedback provided answers to research questions 3 and 4.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

As was previously recognized, five separate case studies comprised this pilot study. Data was collected from students via measurement tools created to identify behaviors that enhance and detract from credibility within the context of perceived levels of character, competence, and caring among the participating professors. The same professors were interviewed, and asked to identify intentional behaviors used to communicate credibility to their students, along with behaviors they are aware of that could possibly detract from their perceived level of credibility. In an individual analysis of the data compiled from each case, detailed, case specific examples are provided to answer research questions 2A and 2B. Further investigation of the remaining research questions (1, 3, and 4), along with a broader examination of generalities for research questions 2A and 2B will follow.

RQ 2A: Is there consistency between the behaviors teachers identify as credibility enhancing and those identified by students?

RQ 2B: Is there consistency between the behaviors teachers identify as destructive to credibility and those identified by students?

Case 1 - Professor A

When analyzing the data provided by both the students and Professor A, it was apparent that Professor A has a grounded and realistic understanding of how his students view him as a professor, as well as how his actions influence his students’ perceptions of his credibility. However, seemingly not as evident were the consequences students identified that resulted from some of his credibility detracting behaviors.
In order to answer research question 2A, an analysis of the correlations between student and professor feedback was conducted. Upon completing the analysis, it was evident that some of Professor A’s intentional credibility enhancing behaviors are recognized by his students, and that he is quite skilled at identifying which behaviors would be viewed as enhancing in the eyes of his students. For example, when asked specifically about his teaching style and competence credibility, Professor A remarked that he hoped he came across as firmly grounded and articulate in the content. The vast majority of students replied strongly in favor of Professor A being exceedingly competent in his subject matter, and therefore is viewed as a credible source. Both parties identified the following specific behaviors used to enhance competence credibility: use of external sources, examples, and life experiences. Although not as strongly correlated, another theme appeared within the realm of caring credibility levels. Professor A candidly remarked on his willingness to engage with students in conversation outside of class and his accessibility, but feared that he may actually not be viewed as being as accessible as students would like him to be due to his schedule. His fear was not confirmed in the slightest, as his students found him to be extremely accessible and always willing to engage in conversation outside of the classroom. In fact, this was one of the behaviors on which his students seemed to place the most value and importance.

There was undoubtedly a prevalent correlation between the two parties among negative behaviors related to character credibility. Hence, RQ 2B is answered positively. Professor A remarked that he may come across to students as being quite opinionated and inflexible, which could possibly detract from his credibility. This theme was quite clear in respondents’ comments. Several students felt that he was extremely opinionated, with few remarking that they sometimes felt uncomfortable expressing opinions that differed from his. This instance showed that yes,
some of Professor A’s behaviors are agreed upon and identified by both students and professors as being destructive to credibility. While an answer was provided for research question 2B, further analysis of student comments on this destructive behavior showed that it is possible Professor A is not fully aware of the repercussions of said behavior. Students felt that Professor A would frequently become sidetracked in discussions, which would often lead to tangents focusing on opinions and views loosely or unrelated to the academic content being discussed. This is not something that came up while interviewing Professor A. Students felt that when involved in a tangent, the connection to academic content was unclear, thus resulting in a decrease in class organization and an amplification of student confusion and frustration.

Despite the existence of correlations regarding credibility enhancing and detracting behaviors, there were minor incongruities among student perceptions and teacher beliefs worth noting, although these behaviors were not targeted in any research question. While several positive behaviors were identified by both students and Professor A within the domain of competence credibility, there were also numerous minor inconsistencies among the two parties. While Professor A did briefly comment upon his presentation of content, the majority of student respondents expounded upon his love for teaching, as exhibited by his passionate teaching style, which strongly influenced their perception of his credibility. Perhaps not as notable or noticeable to Professor A is the power his apparent love and enthusiasm for teaching has in the eyes of his students. Additionally, several students mentioned his competence being enhanced by his age and level of experience. These were not characteristics identified by Professor A as attributes he thought would influence his credibility in the eyes of his students. Lastly, although the use of personal stories and examples were viewed to be critical to the enhancement of understanding and did contribute to Professor A’s competence credibility, several students found that the
examples were often repeated and reused, which was seen as distracting, and sometimes even destructive to his credibility.

In a statistical examination of his overall credibility levels, it was once again made apparent that both Professor A and his students are in close accord. Students ranked Professor A’s overall terminal credibility at a 6.1 with a mode of seven on a seven point scale (one being less credible, seven being highly credible). Professor A ranked his own overall credibility at a six. When students were asked to rank Professor A against all other professors in the same department, students’ mean score was a 5.9, with a mode of seven, while Professor A ranked himself at six. When asked to rank Professor A against all other professors at the University, students’ mean score was 6.1 with a mode of seven, while he ranked himself a six. Although there were minor inconsistencies between Professor A’s thoughts and his student perceptions, it seems as though they share a fairly common view of his classroom credibility.

Case 2- Professor B

Professor B was extremely accurate in identifying behaviors that enhance and detract from her students’ perceptions of credibility. In fact, Professor B seemed to employ a heightened sense of awareness, past the thoughts of her students, which resulted in an ostensible tendency to analyze smaller behaviors far more than her students did as potentially influencing behaviors to credibility.

When analyzing behaviors related to the positive establishment of credibility, it was quite clear that Professor B’s character traits were strongly represented as traits that also communicate caring to her students. Thus, the two areas of credibility were analyzed together in this case. Professor B remarked that she is very intentional in showing students she cares by utilizing the following behaviors: learning names as quickly as possible, asking how students are doing in
areas of life outside of the classroom, and checking up on students who are noticeably struggling with issues. This was apparent in her students’ answers as well, as the majority commented upon her friendliness and caring personality. Additionally, several respondents felt that she was quite willing to accommodate students and help them achieve success by altering plans and providing additional opportunities for corrections and extra credit. Professor B went into great detail explaining her willingness to accommodate students and provide opportunities for improvement and success. In regard to competence credibility, one prevailing theme was present. Professor B explained that she tries very hard to integrate outside examples and relate class content to the real world. She remarked that she spends a great deal of time finding practical examples and supplemental material to aid in understanding. The majority of her students commented on this as well, as it did enhance their understanding and provided a contextual application of the material. Students felt that her use of external sources highly influenced her competence credibility. These correlations show that many of the behaviors Professor B uses to build credibility are recognized by her students, thus answering research question 2A positively.

Professor B was also quite accurate in identifying behaviors that detract from her credibility in the eyes of students, therefore answering research question 2B positively as well. Just as character and caring traits were linked together as credibility enhancers, it seems as though character and competence are linked together among traits detrimental to credibility. Therefore, they were analyzed simultaneously. One such example of this is Professor B’s perceived level of confidence, which could be argued as both a character and competency trait. Both the professor and students commented upon the fact that there are instances when it is quite clear that Professor B is not fully confident in her ability to clearly articulate the content effectively. Students felt this visible display of a lack of confidence severely harmed her level of
credibility. Students expounded on this and explained that, although Professor B was able to articulate prepared content easily, the explanation of unprepared content, such as answering student questions, lacked the same level of ease and confidence. Secondly, both parties commented upon the fact that Professor B can sometimes come across as being somewhat scattered and unorganized, which harms her levels of competence and character teacher credibility.

Although not addressed by any research questions, there were minor inconsistencies between student perceptions and teacher beliefs worth noting. When explaining how she exhibits caring to her students, Professor B expounded upon the following specific behaviors: learning students’ names quickly, utilizing previews of the day, and taking note of personal issues that students may be having. These specific behaviors were not identified as trends among student answers, leading the researcher to believe that some of Professor B’s intentional behaviors utilized to enhance credibility are not being recognized by her students.

The statistical analysis of Professor B’s overall credibility rankings further highlighted minor inconsistencies among student perceptions and professor thoughts. On average, she ranked herself slightly lower, leading the researcher to believe that she may view herself more negatively than her students perceive her to be. When asked to comment upon her terminal credibility, students’ mean score averaged 5.1 with a mode of six. Professor B ranked her own overall credibility being between four and five. When comparing her to the rest of the professors in the department, students’ mean score was 4.8 with a mode of six, while she ranked herself slightly lower, between four and 4.5. In comparison to all the professors at the University, Professor B ranked herself between four and five. Her students ranked her on the higher end of her prediction with a mean score of 4.9 and a mode of six. Overall, numerous correlations exist
among Professor B and her students, however, the numerous inconsistencies should not be ignored.

*Case Study 3- Professor C*

Perhaps the strongest links between professor and student answers came through in the study of Professor C. It became apparent that many of Professor C’s intentional actions to communicate credibility were easily identified by his students, thus improving his credibility in the classroom in all three measurable areas. However, there were still minor inconsistencies, namely among those behaviors that could detract from Professor C’s credibility.

An analysis of consistencies among professor and student answers discussing credibility enhancing behaviors quickly answered research question 2A. It is quite clear that many of the behaviors identified by Professor C as intentional to the establishment of credibility are visible to his students. One of the most predominate themes that emerged from student answers relating to competence was Professor C’s presentational presence. Students felt as though Professor C has the ability to easily hold students’ attention while making the learning environment enjoyable and engaging. While interviewing Professor C, he spoke in great depth about his desire to make the classroom interactive and interesting. Students felt as though Professor C clearly demonstrated the presentational skills he teaches his class in his own lectures and teaching style by creating such an inviting and interactive environment, which is something Professor C hoped he modeled to his classes. Similarities between students and professor were plentiful in relation to character and caring credibility levels as well. Both parties noted that Professor C’s animated persona was a characteristic that positively influenced his credibility. When analyzing caring behaviors, both parties mentioned the use of nonverbal communication, more specifically eye contact, as a means to communicate caring to students. Finally, Professor C hoped that his
students viewed him as approachable and personable. This was clearly echoed by his students, as they felt that Professor C was an extremely genuine individual and had the utmost respect for him. The majority of students felt that Professor C made conscious efforts to demonstrate his desire and willingness to help, guide, and advise students. Professor C specifically commented upon these actions and intentional behaviors that communicate caring to his students, and named them as some of the highlights of his job. It is quite apparent that his love for advising is noticed by his students.

Research question 2B was answered quite easily as well, as very few of Professor C’s behaviors were identified as being destructive to his credibility by students. What few behaviors were mentioned, Professor C identified as well, which answered RQ 2B positively. One interesting consistency arose in the discussion of a behavior that could not wholly be defined as one destructive to credibility, rather as one that could potentially harm credibility. While being interviewed, Professor C commented upon his use of humor being positive but how sometimes it may be distracting, thus detracting from his credibility. Student respondents ultimately commented the same way, remarking that the use of humor was appreciated, but sometimes seemed to be distracting to other students. It is important to note, however, that students commented upon their perception of other students’ views of humor rather than their own opinion of his use of humor. The only behavior clearly defined as diminishing to credibility that was recognized by both professor and students was a behavior categorized under caring traits. Both Professor C and students responded that Professor C’s difficulty in responding to emails quickly sometimes communicated a lack of caring to his students. These examples provide partial support in the answering of RQ 2B, as some of Professor C’s behaviors that could
potentially impact teacher credibility levels negatively are identified by both students and professor.

As was the case in the previous two case studies, there were several noticeable inconsistencies among the students’ and professor’s answers regarding behaviors that influence credibility. Respondents named several other behaviors and techniques that highly influenced Professor C’s competence credibility that were not discussed in his interview. The vast majority of his students commented on Professor C’s use of practical experience and examples to better link the content to the business world. Additionally, students felt that his confidence made him appear quite competent. Although it could be argued that confidence is simply one element of having a strong presentational presence, which was previously identified as an enhancing behavior, several respondents specifically noted his confidence as being influential, whereas Professor C did not. Finally, students felt that Professor C’s ability to think quickly on his feet by answering questions and providing clarification also improved his competence credibility.

Alternatively, Professor C mentioned his intentional use of minimalistic PowerPoint presentations as something he felt would enhance his credibility by showing students that he need not rely on information-heavy slides to instruct. This was not identified as a behavior that altered his credibility by any of his students.

There were two significant inconsistencies in relation to Professor C’s character traits that influence credibility levels. Student respondents noted his dedication and love of family and his college community as elements of Professor C’s character that strongly influence his credibility. This was not mentioned by Professor C as an intentional strategy used to increase credibility. Another inconsistency arose as Professor C commented that his rapid dialect may actually detract from his character credibility as it may be perceived as a result of being uncomfortable or
nervous. None of the respondents mentioned anything about his dialect or rate of speech. The final inconsistency arose as a caring trait dealing with informal interactions and Professor C’s approachability in informal settings. While being interviewed, Professor C remarked that due to his quick nature and fast-paced lifestyle, it could be perceived by students that he is in a hurry or busy outside of the classroom, thus affecting his caring credibility by sending a sort of unwelcoming message to approaching students. However, student respondents felt as though Professor C was always extremely welcoming, friendly, and approachable in any setting outside of the classroom.

Statistically, minor inconsistencies arose as well. Professor C’s terminal credibility was ranked by students with a mean score of 6.7 and mode of seven. Professor C ranked his overall credibility at seven. When comparing himself to other professors, Professor C consistently ranked himself lower than his students perceived him to be. In comparison to the rest of the department, Professor C ranked himself at six while the students’ mean score was 6.6 with a mode of seven. In comparison to the rest of the University, Professor C again ranked himself at six, whereas his students mean score averaged 6.4 with a mode of seven.

Case Study 4- Professor D

Overall, Professor D seemed to have an accurate grasp on her students’ perceptions of her, but similarly to Professors B and C, it seemed as though Professor D viewed some of her behaviors as being far more detrimental to her credibility than her students did. It seemed as though Professor D was exceptionally critical of herself and thought less of herself than did her students.

When analyzing Professor D’s credibility enhancing behaviors, several trends emerged. In regards to competence credibility, it was apparent that her students thought quite highly of her
in this regard. The vast majority of students commented upon her extensive knowledge base and thorough understanding of content, which is something Professor D hoped was seen by her students. Additionally, both parties identified her ability to speak off the cuff and answer questions easily and thoroughly as being a behavior that positively influenced her competence credibility. Finally, Professor D’s use of external sources and outside materials were also viewed by both professor and students as being influential to her credibility.

As was the case for Professor B, many characteristics and caring traits were discussed together, almost as one, which was clear by the continuous spillover in student and professor comments. Students spoke of Professor D as being a very empathetic and supportive individual who was willing to meet with and help students in need. Professor D commented upon this fact and hoped that her students saw her this way. Further, both professor and students felt that Professor D articulated caring about students’ wellbeing by responding quickly to emails and always providing extensive feedback or comments on assignments and projects. The correlation between student and professor answers among credibility enhancing behaviors is proven by these examples, answering research question 2A positively- many of Professor D’s behaviors that are seen to influence credibility positively are recognized by her students.

Although the examples are not nearly as extensive, both teacher and students were able to identify behaviors that may be destructive to credibility levels, thus answering research question 2B similarly- some of Professor D’s deterring behaviors are recognized by students. To begin, Professor D commented that she has struggled with procrastination her entire life, and continues to struggle with it in her career. Students did identify this as a characteristic that detracted from her credibility and also communicated a lack of caring to her students, as they felt it took an especially long time to receive returned assignments and grades.
While Professor D did do an exceptional job at identifying behaviors that students may see as influential to credibility, several inconsistencies remained between student perceptions and professor thoughts or beliefs. The majority of students commented upon Professor D’s academic reputation as being a major contributing factor to her high competence credibility. Students commented upon her published research and the fact that she is well known in the field of communication studies, remarking that she could easily be employed at a larger university. Surprisingly, Professor D did not recognize her academic reputation as something that students would perceive as important. Additionally, Professor D felt that she lost credibility at times by loosing her place or seeming forgetful. None of the student respondents mentioned this as a behavior that detracted from her credibility.

When looking specifically at character and caring traits, Professor D seemed to be quite critical of herself. While being interviewed, Professor D spoke about the possibility of being viewed as a tough, assertive female, which may lead students to believe she is intimidating and unfriendly. This was not a theme among student answers; rather, they focused on her positive characteristics, such as her being supportive and empathetic to students’ needs in addition to being a thoughtful listener. Furthermore, Professor D spoke about her temper and sometimes losing it in front of her class. Again, this was not a theme present among student comments; rather, they viewed her as extremely laid back and relaxed. Professor D defined herself as an introvert and felt that students may view her as being serious and unappreciative of informal interactions outside of the classroom. This was not the case; students categorized her as focused, but always willing to interact. During her interview, Professor D explained that sometimes, she purposefully responds to student comments or discussions as the devil’s advocate, and sometimes utilizes witty or sarcastic comments in certain situations. Professor D wondered if her
choice of language was viewed as a negative behavior, thus detracting from her credibility. Student respondents mentioned nothing of the sort. Additionally, Professor D felt as though she may come across as being impatient and unkind to her students, which could be perceived as a lack of caring, but again, there were no such comments among student answers.

Multiple inconsistencies were present among the statistical rankings of each party as well. When analyzing Professor D’s levels of overall credibility, she was given a mean score of 6.6 with a mode of seven by her students in regards to terminal credibility, while she ranked her overall credibility between a five and six. When comparing Professor D’s credibility to the rest of the department, students averaged a mean score of 6.7, while she placed herself in the top ten percent, which is quite similar. When comparing her credibility to the rest of the University’s faculty, Professor D ranked herself as average, equating to roughly a four on the seven-point scale. Her students viewed her as being much more credible with a mean score of 6.7.

Case Study 5- Professor E

When identifying student perceptions, Professor E was fairly accurate, as there were very few inconsistencies among student and professor answers. After an analysis of the data provided by students and professor, it became clear that, just as with each of the other case, many of Professor E’s credibility enhancing behaviors are recognized by his students, answering research question 2A. When analyzing Professor E’s competence, both parties articulated two techniques that positively attribute to his credibility: use of experience and external examples, and knowledge of equipment. Professor E felt that competence credibility was something that was built upon throughout the semester, which is congruent with his students’ answers. Reasoning for this was evident in student comments focusing on Professor E’s modeling of how to run the equipment, thus increasing the perception of competence credibility throughout the semester. He
also mentioned using external examples from his projects or from the broadcasting world to aid in the understanding of concepts. Students felt that his use of these outside sources and modeling of equipment usage greatly influenced his credibility.

In regards to character credibility, Professor E explained that he felt he was able to relate to his students easily, and hoped that they felt comfortable speaking with him about issues or concerns. Professor E’s students described him as being fair, open-minded, honest, easy going, and most commonly, genuinely nice, mirroring Professor E’s hopes. More so, the student respondents continuously commented upon Professor E’s personality and character and how influential they were in establishing his credibility. When analyzing caring behaviors in relation to credibility, it once again became clear that the majority of intentional actions used by Professor E are apparent and identifiable by his students as influential to his credibility. Professor E spoke in great length about his desire to focus on the students’ individual goals and wellbeing, and the majority of his students commented on his genuine interest in them as individuals. Both recognized his attempts to learn about each student’s personality and how knowing that contributed to his ability to be there for his students when in need.

Although not as in depth, support was provided to aid in the answering of research question 2B, as Professor E was also quite accurate in identifying traits that could negatively influence credibility. To begin, both professor and students identified his organizational skills as a trait damaging to credibility. Professor E explained it as the creative mind syndrome. Students felt it led to discombobulated presentation that led to an increase in confusion. Additionally, students identified feelings of frustration with his grading system, noting that feedback and grades were rarely given, which is something Professor E identified as problematic to credibility and a cause for student frustration in his interview.
As with the other four studies, interesting trends arose among the inconsistencies within the student and professor data that are worth noting. Although Professor E did briefly address his personality in relation to credibility, he placed far less emphasis on his character being a contributing factor to credibility levels. It was clear that Professor E’s students thought very highly of him as a person, which influenced how they saw him as a professor. The final inconsistency identified was concerning thoughts on availability. Professor E thought that some students may view him as being somewhat inaccessible or not available as much as he could or should be. However, students did not identify this, rather, they spoke about the ease of access to Professor E, and his willingness to aid students.

Adding to the inconsistencies is the statistical data ranking credibility levels. Professor E consistently ranked himself lower than his students did when doing comparative credibility rankings. When comparing himself to the rest of the department, Professor E ranked himself between and four and five while his students provided a mean score of five with a mode of six. When comparing himself to the rest of the faculty at the University, Professor E ranked himself at four while his students perceived him much higher at a 5.1 with a mode of six. Students ranked his overall terminal credibility at a mean score of 5.4 with a mode of six, while he scored himself lower, within the four to five range.

Examination of Research Questions

RQ 1: Are teachers’ efforts to communicate credibility recognized by students?

During the coding and analysis process, it became clear that RQ 1 was merely a broader, more vague summation of both RQ 2A and RQ 2B. It also became clear that it would be impossible for each professor to describe every conscious effort made to communicate credibility. Consequently, it is difficult to fully answer RQ 1. However, the cross analysis of data
was able to provide backing for positive answers in each case study, as many efforts to communicate credibility are recognized by students, as was previously discussed in the analysis of RQ 2A and 2B. Specific answers will be provided per each case for RQ 1 before a broader conclusion is made.

Professor A

Analysis of the themes present amongst students’ and Professor A’s responses clearly highlights that the majority of Professor A’s intentional actions to communicate credibility are correctly identified and recognized as influential to his credibility by his students. This was highlighted most specifically within the realm of competence credibility.

Professor B

The study of Professor B showed that she has an acute sense of how she is perceived by students and that her larger behaviors are clearly identified by her students as influential to her credibility, as seen most clearly among her competence and caring credibility levels. However, it seems as though many of her smaller, less noticeable, intentional actions are in fact, were not identified or noticed by her students, thus not influencing her credibility levels as much as possible. Due to these inconsistencies, RQ 1 can only be answered as partially in the case of Professor B.

Professor C

Many of the intentional actions implemented by Professor C to communicate credibility were clearly articulated by his students, which was quite apparent in the analysis of all three elements comprising credibility. However, there were minor inconsistencies, especially within competence credibility, that lead the researcher to believe that some of Professor C’s intentional behaviors are not perceived to be influential to his perceived level of credibility by his students.
In relation to character and caring credibility levels, students seemed exceptionally attune to Professor C’s teaching mannerisms and behaviors that communicate credibility.

Professor D

After analyzing the open-ended and statistical data for Professor D, it was apparent that, yes, the majority of Professor D’s intentional actions to communicate credibility that she described in her interview are being noticed by her students. This was most apparent in the investigation of the establishment of her competence credibility.

Professor E

As was the case with all five of the participating professors, it was proven that the majority of behaviors and techniques intentionally used by Professor E to communicate credibility were noticed and identified by his students. This was especially apparent within the establishment of character credibility.

Summary

Knowing that it would be nearly impossible to compile a conclusive list of all behaviors professors use to communicate credibility made providing a fully conclusive answer to RQ 1 rather difficult, due to the vague wording of the question. However, each of the provided case studies lends support to the fact that some, if not many, behaviors used by the five participating professors are indeed recognized and perceived by students to be influential to the establishment of credibility, thus providing a partial answer to RQ 1, at the very least. Yet, two of the five case studies (Professors B and C) showed that some behaviors consciously used are in fact, not recognized by students. In summary, it is safe to say that some, but not all, of professors’ efforts to communicate credibility are recognized by students, and that some of credibility is established somewhat accidentally.
RQ 2A: Is there consistency between the behaviors teachers identify as credibility enhancing and those identified by students?

Summary

As seen in each case study, there were multiple instances of correlation among student and professor perceptions of credibility enhancing behaviors utilized in the classroom. The clearest illustration of this being among competence credibility behaviors within the study of Professors A, C, and D and character credibility traits of Professors C and E. Although several similarities were present, multiple discrepancies also arose, namely in the cases of Professors B and C, as they identified intentional credibility enhancing behaviors that were not recognized by students.

RQ 2B: Is there consistency between the behaviors teachers identify as destructive to credibility and those identified by students?

Summary

Question 2B proved to be a bit more difficult to answer definitively, as the majority of case studies showed correlation of destructive behaviors identified by both parties, but also significant inconsistencies that far outweighed said correlations. For example, although Professor A did identify the resounding behaviors detrimental to his credibility, his students added multiple related behaviors that further impacted his credibility negatively that Professor A did not identify. Professors C and D were able to correctly identify which behaviors their students deemed as being destructive to credibility, but continued to list multiple behaviors and traits that they felt could be viewed as destructive to their credibility that their students did not mention as influencing their perception of credibility, thus making the inconsistencies among teacher and student answers far outweigh the similarities.
The only study that clearly answered research question 2B was that of Professor B. Due to the fact that Professor B was quite critical of behaviors and teaching presence, it was quite apparent that many of her behaviors deemed as destructive to credibility were identified by students as well. Therefore, in the case of Professor B, research question 2B can be answered positively, as yes, there is correlation among student and teacher perceptions regarding credibility detracting behaviors. However, the answer is not nearly as clear-cut for the remainder of the case studies. Although some behaviors were correctly identified by both parties, there were far more inconsistencies, which forces a broader, more partial answer to RQ 2B only of somewhat. There is correlation among some of the behaviors, but many inconsistencies, especially among those behaviors destructive to credibility.

RQ 3: Do teachers self-monitor behaviors that may impact their teacher credibility?

Professor A

When asked whether or not Professor A employs any sort of self-monitoring techniques, he explained that he takes student evaluations quite seriously and looks for trends within the feedback. If a trend is represented, and he feels it is a legitimate claim, then he will try to alter the behavior or provide clarification. A legitimate claim was identified as one that appeared consistently throughout semesters or numerous times in one semester.

Professor B

When explaining her self-monitoring techniques, it was clear that Professor B actively employs reflection techniques on a daily basis. She explained how she monitors in the classroom by observing student reactions and nonverbal communication, and how she reflects upon the class after it has concluded, pinpointing what worked well and what should be altered in the future. She also explained how highly she views student evaluations. She commented that even
one negative comment is enough to grab her attention. She articulated that she does try to alter negative behaviors identified by students if she feels they are valid and legitimate claims.

Professor C

Professor C explained that he does try to practice what he preaches by evaluating his presentations each day. Although not done formally, he spends time in thought about what worked and what could stand improvement in the future. He also takes student feedback quite seriously and tries to alter his teaching and assignments based upon student comments.

Professor D

Professor D answered this question by saying she does indeed employ self-monitoring techniques by reflecting upon what has worked in the classroom and what has not. Although her reflection practices have become more informal throughout the years, she focuses on how to create cohesion in the classroom. This occurs by reflecting after the class has concluded, and noting which elements worked and which ones would benefit from alteration. She also examines student evaluations, taking special note of comments that are made by more than one student.

Professor E

Also along with his colleagues, Professor E does employ self-monitoring techniques by jotting notes in a lesson plan book when things don’t go as smoothly as would have liked. Although he does look at student evaluations, he feels that he is already aware of many of the negative comments that have become trends (namely is grading system and organizational skills) but has not yet to do much to alter these destructive behaviors.

Summary

Each of the professors interviewed for this study do use various self-reflection techniques, in an attempt to increase effectiveness and credibility in the classroom. The majority
of this reflection comes in the form of examination of end of the semester evaluations, with caveats placed on the legitimacy of student claims. The majority of professors employ active self-reflection techniques throughout the semester when evaluating the effectiveness of their classes, lectures, activities, etc. However, very little discussion arose regarding the self-monitoring of behaviors that professors know to be detrimental to credibility, perhaps being linked to the Professor’s views of the illegitimacy of claims among student evaluations.

RQ 4: Does the pairing of quantitative and qualitative credibility research measures enrich the depth of research, thus increasing the propensity for teachers to see it as functional?

Summary

The majority of professors that responded to the follow-up questions answered strongly in favor of the use of qualitative measures to enrich the depth of credibility research. They viewed the provided data as extremely helpful in identifying specific credibility influencing behaviors, and appreciated having an opportunity to compare their thoughts to students’ perceptions. Acknowledging the usefulness of quantitative measures, Professor D remarked that the data gathered in the forms of means and trends is quite helpful. However, she sees exceptional value in the specific feedback provided by a qualitative measure, which provides additional depth that can only be received from written feedback via open-ended questions. Due to the specificity of individual behaviors provided by this study’s results, professors did articulate that they would be closely monitoring those behaviors deemed as destructive in the future.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Although the use of quantitative scales such as McCroskey and Teven’s (1999) Teacher Credibility Scale does provide excellent information regarding student views of credibility levels, they lack a certain depth that only the addition of open-ended questions can provide, as was shown in this study. McCroskey and Teven’s Teacher Credibility Scale from 1999 has been empirically proven and does inquire about specific behaviors in relation to credibility. Nevertheless, early on in the study of teacher credibility it was proven that this sort of blanket approach might not be the most effective way to gain conclusive results in all situations (McGlone & Anderson, 1973). It could be argued that the rankings gained from the use of quantitative measures have the ability to lead to general assertions regarding behaviors used to exhibit the traits asked about on the survey. However, as was seen in each case study, many assertions made regarding specific credibility influencing behaviors were in fact, incorrect. The sole use of quantitative measures to measure credibility leaves a significant gap in the evaluation of specific credibility behaviors, many of which still have not been studied, thus making educators unaware of the importance or value of specific behaviors (Myers & Bryant, 2004).

Because teachers closely link their individual perception of self to being perceived as credible, and because student success hinges upon positive perceptions of credibility, it is imperative that professors hold an accurate portrayal of the way their students view their teaching practices as they work to establish credibility (Hurt, Scott & McCroskey, 1977; Powers, Nitcavie & Koerner, 1990). When professors are provided with specific data regarding which of their intentional behaviors are going unnoticed by students or which behaviors are viewed as
damaging to credibility, actions can occur to adjust or highlight said behaviors, thus improving credibility levels and overall teacher effectiveness.

Frymier and Thompson (1992) and Myers and Bryant (2004) described research on the unknown specific credibility behaviors as lacking. With the addition of open-ended questions grounded in the credibility concepts laid out in McCroskey and Teven’s survey, this type of research is now occurring. This study provided specific, concrete examples of teacher behaviors that influence credibility both positively and negatively; behaviors that would be less identifiable by only using a closed-ended semantic differential scale to measure levels of teacher credibility. For example, if a professor sees that he has been ranked on the Teacher Credibility Scale as being highly self-centered, he knows simply this- that his students view him as being highly self-centered. By adding open-ended questions, the professor is suddenly provided with specific behaviors that students feel attributes to his self-centeredness, which are thus negatively affecting his credibility.

Now that the participating professors are more aware of the correlations and multitude of misnomers among their beliefs and their students’ thoughts on credibility, they have a more perceptually sound understanding of how they are perceived by students. Additionally, they now are each provided with an opportunity to correct those behaviors that are perceived as harmful and improve credibility. When asked a series of follow-up questions regarding how beneficial the aggregate data was to them and whether or not it will be used in the future, Professor B explained that she would use the information provided to try to monitor her organizational skills and display of confidence when presenting new information with which she is not entirely comfortable. These two destructive behaviors would have remained as simply assertions in the mind of Professor B if the open-ended questions were not utilized. Professor D commented that
she would use this data to help her continue to monitor her procrastination habits, as well as her self-statements and personal concerns in an attempt to improve her credibility in the classroom. Professor A said he would use the information provided to communicate a softer image, of sorts, through the act of self-monitoring. Simply stated, the research gathered by the pairing of qualitative and quantitative measure together will continue to influence the actions of the participating professors in their goal to established higher credibility levels.

It is important to remember the findings of Finn, Schrodt, Witt, Elledge, Jernberg, and Larson, (2009) in their meta-analytical review of teacher credibility measurement scales, “future researchers are encouraged to use the three-dimensional credibility scale in the operationalization of teacher credibility. Researchers should also continue testing more sophisticated models of teacher credibility, teacher behaviors, and student outcomes” (p. 532). By integrating the use of qualitative measures, along with a cross-examination of both teacher and student perceptions, the researcher believes that the data gathered from this pilot study did add a level of depth to the knowledge of credibility altering behaviors, student perceptions, and shared understanding of said behaviors among the five professors studied. Albeit far from perfect, this pilot study did achieve success in providing a more sophisticated look into credibility perceptions and behaviors among five professors.

Out of curiosity, the researcher asked each professor to compare the data provided from this study to the feedback they typically receive from end of the semester evaluations. One professor felt that the information gleaned from a study such as this did not provide data that was viewed as more or less beneficial than that received from student evaluations. However, both Professors B and D felt that the information provided by this study was much more valuable than the feedback provided from evaluations, both mentioning the rising difficulty of obtaining usable
information, since the implementation of voluntary electronic evaluations. In the cases of these two professors, student evaluations were seen as a valuable tool to aid in the self-monitoring of credibility destructing behaviors, but due to a lack of feedback caused by various reasons, namely the implementation of electronic evaluations, the opportunity to gain legitimate feedback has been minimized. It could be assumed then, that the practice of self-reflection and monitoring is faltering, based on the lack of usable feedback being gathered. Instances such as this support Franklin and Theall (1989) in claiming that the standard evaluation process is failing to provide feedback viewed as legitimate, reliable, and credible. In order to provide professors with the most accurate and legitimate feedback possible, standard means of evaluation, especially at this university, must be reevaluated.

Although this pilot study’s results do provide data to support the research questions and offers a list of behaviors seen to influence credibility, the most interesting outcomes of this study were actually not any that were identified by the research questions and were not targeted as being a primary focus of the original study. The researcher was astounded by the amount of inconsistencies that were identified. Namely, behaviors mentioned by students but not professors, especially in the cases of Professors C and D. There were several trends among the student samples in each of these cases regarding multiple behaviors and traits that were seen as credibility enhancers that were not identified by professors (examples being Professor C’s strong academic reputation and Professor D’s visible adoration for family and involvement in the campus community). It is possible that these traits and behaviors were simply not thought of during the interview, but it led the researcher to believe that much of credibility is actually established unintentionally, by subconscious behaviors. This concept would be interesting to investigate further in the future.
Conversely, these same two professors provided an extensive list of behaviors that they thought could be seen as detrimental to their classroom credibility, few of which were mentioned by any students. This led the researcher to wonder if these two professors in particular, did not view themselves quite as credibly as their students did or feared being perceived as less credible than they hoped. Statistically, they were ranked by students to have the highest overall credibility out of all who participated in the study, yet they were the two who were exceptionally critical of their potentially destructive behaviors. In the future, it would be noteworthy to further investigate the inconsistencies present and try to identify a cause for such major differences in professor thoughts and student perceptions.

The final area of interest in this study revolved around gender, another theme not identified as one by the researcher as being a focus to this study. While analyzing the data of each case study, the coders and researcher found it quite interesting that behaviors identified as those showing caring were combined with those seen as character traits, ultimately combining the two factions of credibility into one. This occurred on two occasions, in the study of Professors B and D, the two female professors in the study. In her explanation of culturally created gender roles, Julia Wood (2009) explains that females are taught they should “care about and for others” and “learn to accommodate others,” ultimately leading females to an assertion that their purpose is to please others (p. 177-178). Due to these culturally created roles, certain expectations arise from each gender, which in this case, caused the realms of character and caring credibility to be seen as one, as the role of caregiver is expected to be part of females’ character. This was evident in the research findings as the female professors’ character traits identified by students were primarily traits that exhibit caring. This leads the researcher to believe that culturally created gender roles grossly alter the expectations we place on female and
male professors, despite them doing the same job. Further analysis of student perceptions of
caring and character credibility among professors may provide interesting information regarding
the gendered expectations we place on educators.

Limitations of this Study

Since this study was set up as a pilot study with the intention of recreation on a grander
scale in the future, each limitation that arose allowed for an opportunity to refine and improve
this study before further implementation. If used on a grander scale, several changes will occur
based on the following limitations.

The primary limitation to this study is that the research only provides a surface look to
credibility altering behaviors used among the five participating professors, as it was merely a
pilot study. Due to the small sample size commenting on each professor, it was difficult to
confidently identify significant trends as credibility altering behaviors. Consequently, it would be
ill advised to use this data to make generalized claims or conclusions regarding each of the
participating professor’s actions. Thus, the scope of findings remains quite small. To offer more
conclusive results, this study would benefit from substantially increasing the number of student
respondents.

Another limiting factor to this study was the lack of specificity in the language used in
the measurement tools. Essentially, a more definitive way to provide a more conclusive look at
credibility altering behaviors among the participating professors would be to further design the
measurement instruments. Both the student survey and interview questions created for this study
proved to be a limiting factor of this study that was not realized until the coding and analyzing
processes. It became quite apparent that there was a significant level of ambiguity present within
certain words and definitions, primarily among the words character and caring. It could be
argued that many behaviors used to exhibit caring to students could also serve as personality traits, or character traits. This became exceptionally problematic in the coding process, as many comments did not quite fall under one specific category, which was exceedingly apparent within the description of the female professor’s behaviors. In the future, it would be beneficial to provide more definitions or explanations of each credibility category before asking questions about behaviors that fall under that category. By providing stronger definitions and more specific questions, it is possible that the comments given would have provided stronger links and trends to credibility altering behaviors. Although the use of open-ended questions provided excellent qualitative data relating to the study of teacher credibility, the vague wording of the measurement tools created for this pilot study allowed for results that were somewhat indeterminate of concrete answers.

Also suffering from ambiguous wording were the research questions. While analyzing the data and answering the posed research questions, it became apparent that the answers were either quite similar due to closely worded research questions (as was the case for RQ 1 and RQ 2A) or called for little explanation (as was the case for RQ’s 2A, 2B, and 3). A more in-depth study would benefit from different wording, perhaps focusing on the types of behaviors used rather than focusing on the existence of consistency among student and professor views in identifying behaviors.

While the collected research was going through the coding process, it was realized that the semantic differential scale created by McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb (1974) was mistakenly included in the measurement tools rather than the more current and conclusive model created by McCroskey and Teven (1999). When originally designed, the researcher and committee thought it would be interesting to see if the qualitative data did truly support or
contradict the quantitative study of teacher credibility. This minor oversight prevented the researcher from fairly analyzing teacher credibility quantitatively, in addition to qualitatively through the use of open-ended questions. Since a comparison of quantitative and qualitative teacher credibility data sets, nor an analysis of quantitative data were the focus of this study, and because it was being included simply because those involved thought it might be an interesting side note, the majority of the quantitative analysis was removed, due to it being unnecessary to answer the posed research questions.

Suffice it to say, this pilot study merely scratches the surface of teacher credibility levels among the participating professors. Although it does provide professors with a very general baseline of possible credibility altering behaviors, it could do so even more by increasing the size and specificity of the study. While a study such as this is rarely utilized in the communication discipline, it does contribute to the wider body of research on teacher credibility, supporting the findings of Finn et al., (2009) that emphasized the importance of continuing to research the relationship between credibility influencing behaviors and student outcomes. This study showed that the use of open-ended questions in the study of teacher credibility does provide specific feedback regarding credibility influencing behaviors that cannot be articulated as clearly by only using closed-ended questions. The study of teacher credibility lends to a natural pairing of both qualitative and quantitative measures to reach greater levels of depth and understanding.

Suggestions for Future Research

As previously mentioned, in order to further increase the depth of knowledge and attempt to provide sounder generalities, a study of this nature requires a sample population of much greater magnitude. In addition, it would be beneficial to increase the amount of participating professors in an attempt to further expand the research on specific credibility influencing
behaviors. An increase in participation would improve the diversity of the student population and expand understanding of possible variables among professors that are unknowingly influencing student perceptions of credibility. If or when this study is repeated in the future, it should occur on a much larger scale.

Also beneficial would be the addition of the correct Teacher Credibility Scale created by McCroskey and Teven in 1999, as its integration would provide statistical backing and could highlight inconsistencies among the closed-ended and open-ended answers worthy of researching further. More so, by utilizing the quantitative and qualitative instruments together in the same study, it is the hope of the researcher that their true complementary nature would be more clearly seen and validated.

Although not as clearly linked to this specific study, it would be quite interesting to further investigate the connection between the three elements of credibility (competence, character, and caring) in relation to gendered expectations placed upon professors, as this study unintentionally identified. It may require an altering of the measurement tools utilized in this and other studies measuring credibility, but may provide an interesting look into student expectations and whether or not varying degrees of importance are placed upon the three elements of credibility based on gender of the professor.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

The study of teacher credibility has undergone several changes in the past five decades. While great progress has been made in depth and breadth and excellent measurement tools have been created, it has been made clear that a void of research continues to remain. Within this void lays the detailed specifics of behaviors teachers employ both subconsciously and consciously that influence their students’ perceptions of credibility (Myers & Bryant, 2004). Adding to this void is the growing hesitancy to view typical student evaluations as legitimate and usable (Franklin & Theall, 1989).

By incorporating qualitative measures to the traditional means of the study of teacher credibility, teachers are provided with feedback regarding credibility altering behaviors that can be easier to change due to the specificity of data provided. Because formatted quite differently than typical, end of the semester student evaluations, it is possible that professors will view the results with less skepticism and more acceptance. Although timely, encouraging professors to reflect upon their own views of credibility naturally builds investment in the results produced and credibility establishment process. By comparing student and teacher perceptions, both parties benefit. Credibility altering behaviors are recognized, which clearly builds awareness. With awareness comes an opportunity to monitor behaviors, thus improving teacher credibility levels and student achievement.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
Human Subjects Letter of Approval

Date: January 18, 2011
To: Nicole Freeman
From: Janice Putnam
Associate Dean of The Graduate School
RE: Human Subjects Review

Dear Nicole Freeman,
Your research project, ‘Credibility and the Professor: The Juxtaposition of Student Perceptions and Instructor Beliefs’, was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee on 1/18/2011. This approval is valid through 1/18/2012.

Please note that you are required to notify the committee in writing of any changes in your research project and that you may not implement changes without prior approval of the committee. You must also notify the committee in writing of any change in the nature or the status of the risks of participating in this research project.

Should any adverse events occur in the course of your research (such as harm to a research participant), you must notify the committee in writing immediately. In the case of any adverse event, you are required to stop the research immediately unless stopping the research would cause more harm to the participants than continuing with it.

At the conclusion of your project, you will need to submit a completed Project Status Form to this office. You must also submit the Project Status Form if you wish to continue your research project beyond its initial expiration date.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the number above.

Sincerely,

Janice Putnam Ph.D., RN
Associate Dean of The Graduate School
putnam@ucmo.edu

cc: Jack Rogers
APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM- TEACHERS

Identification of Researchers: Nicole Freeman, a graduate student in the Communication department at University of Central Missouri, is doing this research. Dr. Jack Rogers will be supervising.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher credibility levels by examining both students’ and teacher’s perceptions of credibility, as well as identifying whether or not both party’s perceptions align.

Request for Participation: I am inviting you to participate in a study on perceptions of teacher credibility. It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them. You may withdraw your data at the end of your interview. Teachers will be protected by the use of anonymous names in the completed thesis. Information (data) given to the teachers gathered from student respondents will be in aggregate form only. There will be no way for the teachers to know which students participated in the study and measured their credibility levels.

Exclusions: You must be a teacher of major courses in the Communication department at the University of Central Missouri.

Description of Research Method: This study includes the researcher individually interviewing each teacher on two separate occasions. The first interview will focus on gathering your perceptions on your own level of credibility, and will take roughly 30 minutes to complete. The second interview will take place after the student data has been collected and will involve sharing the anonymous data, and will take roughly 20 minutes to complete. Students who have had one or more of the participating teachers as a professor at least two times will be asked to complete an online survey. This will not occur until all participating professors have signed the teacher consent form. Aside from demographic items, the majority of the survey questions will ask students to rate the teacher’s credibility level. This will be done by asking students to recall specific behaviors of the professor that either enhance or detract from his / her credibility in the classroom. The questions will revolve around the themes of competence levels, character, and goodwill (care for students). Student surveys will be anonymous and the data shared will be shared in aggregate form only.

Privacy: Data collected from teachers will be kept confidential in a locked cabinet in a locked room. Further, teachers will not be referred to by name in the written results.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.
**Explanation of Benefits:** You will benefit from participating in this study by getting firsthand experience in communication research. Additionally, teachers will be enlightened to the ways in which students perceive them as credible sources.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this study, please contact Nicole Freeman. She can be reached at nfreeman@ucmo.edu or at (660) 543-8646. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4621.

If you would like to participate, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep. Students, if you would like to participate, please proceed with the online survey.

I have read this letter and agree to participate.

Signature: 

Date: 

Reviewed 10/2010 JP
APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM- STUDENTS

Due to student data being gathered electronically, the informed consent information was included prior to the survey. Students had to agree to the terms before being able to access the survey.

Identification of Researchers: Nicole Freeman, a graduate student in the Communication department at University of Central Missouri, is doing this research. Dr. Jack Rogers will be supervising.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher credibility levels by examining both students’ and teacher’s perceptions of credibility, as well as identifying whether or not both party’s perceptions align.

Request for Participation: I am inviting you to participate in a study on perceptions of teacher credibility. It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them. You may withdraw your data by not submitting your completed online survey. Once you submit your survey responses, the researcher will not know which survey or test is yours, as it will be done anonymously. Information (data) will be given to the teachers from survey results in aggregate form only. There is no way for teachers or the researcher to know which students completed the survey.

Exclusions: You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study, and have had one of the five participating teachers as instructors for at least two different courses.

Description of Research Method: Once all participating professors have signed the appropriate consent form, this study involves completing a short survey. The survey will ask you to answer some demographic information, such as age, class rank, and gender. The majority of the survey will ask you to rate a teacher’s credibility level by asking you to recall specific behaviors that either enhance or detract from one’s credibility. The survey will take about 15-20 minutes to finish.

Privacy: All of the student information collected will be anonymous. Name, student number, or any information that could be used to identify students will not be recorded.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.
Explanation of Benefits: You will benefit from participating in this study by getting firsthand experience in communication research. Additionally, you will have an opportunity to improve program and class effectiveness by sharing your thoughts.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Nicole Freeman. She can be reached at nfreeman@ucmo.edu or at (660) 543-8646. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4621.

If you would like to participate, please proceed with the online survey.

I have read this letter and agree to participate.

Signature: ____________________________________________
Date: _________________________________________________

Reviewed 10/2010 JP
APPENDIX D
Interview Questions for Teachers

This is a list of questions that will be used during instructor interviews, if needed or related, appropriate follow-up questions will be added during each interview.

What is your official title / position?

How many years have you been teaching?

Please describe elements of your classroom presence / teaching style that make you a credible source.

Please describe the ways in which you show that you are competent in the subject matter. (examples: lectures clear, understandable, power points / handouts free of error, etc.)

Can you think of any behaviors you may have that may detract from your subject matter competence? (examples: difficult to follow / understand, unsure of content, errors in power points / handouts, etc.) If so, please explain.

What about your character contributes to your teacher credibility? (examples: trustworthy, personable, dynamic, friendly, etc.)
Can you think of any character traits you have that may detract from your teacher credibility? (examples: crude, offensive, belittling, etc.) If so, please explain.

Please describe any classroom behaviors you have that may enhance your credibility and show that you care about your students and wellbeing. (examples: using students names, being respectful, answering questions, etc.)

Can you think of any classroom behaviors you have that may not communicate caring about students and wellbeing, thus effecting credibility? (examples: rude to students, doesn’t know names, unorganized, unapproachable, etc.) If so, please explain.

Please describe any behaviors you employ outside of the classroom (e-mail, office hours, etc.) that may enhance your credibility.

Can you think of any behaviors you may employ outside of the classroom (e-mail, office hours, etc.) that could detract from your credibility? If so, please explain.

Do you employ any self-monitoring / reflection techniques regarding teaching practices and behaviors that influence the effectiveness of your teaching? If so, what do you do?

If you notice negative trends represented from student evaluations, do you do anything to correct those behaviors? If so, what?
Overall, how credible do you think your students perceive you to be? (one being not credible, seven being highly credible)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

In comparison to all the professors in the Communication Department, how would you rank your credibility? (one being not credible, seven being highly credible)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

In comparison to all the professors at the University of Central Missouri, how would you rank your credibility? (one being not credible, seven being highly credible)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Follow-Up (Post-Analysis) Interview Questions for Teachers

What is your reaction to this information?

Are there themes present in your students’ answers that you did not expect? Are you surprised by any of their answers?

Were your students’ answers what you expected? Are their answers close to your thoughts regarding your own teaching practices?

Do you plan to use this information in the future in an effort to improve credibility? How?

Do you feel that the use of open-ended question provided you with more usable feedback than you would have received from seeing results from a quantitative survey only?

Do you feel like the results you have been given show more than you receive on typical, end of the semester evaluations?
APPENDIX E
Student Survey

Academic Class: Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student
Gender: M F Student Type: Traditional Non-Traditional
Ethnicity: Caucasian (White) African American Latino Asian Other
Major / Minor: ___________________________ Age: ____________

Please indicate which one of the following Professors you are referring to:
*Note: Names were removed to protect participating professor's anonymity.

A B C D E

How many times have you taken a class taught by this professor: ____________

Did you know anything about this professor before you took your first class from him/her? If so, please explain what you knew / had heard.

What was your initial impression of this professor’s credibility level? (one being not credible, seven being highly credible)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please answer the following questions based upon your thoughts of this professor now, after you have had him / her multiple times as a professor.
Does this professor clearly show that he / she is competent in the subject matter?
Always     Almost Always     Sometimes     Almost Never     Never

Please describe the elements of this professor’s classroom presence / teaching style that makes him / her a credible source.

Please describe the ways in which this professor has shown that he / she is competent in the subject matter.

Are there any actions or behaviors of this professor that detract from his / her subject matter competence? If so, please describe.

Is there something about who this person is that contributes to his / her teacher credibility? If so, please describe.

Is there something about who this person is that detracts from his / her teacher credibility?

Does this professor show that he / she cares about students and student wellbeing in class?
Always     Almost Always     Sometimes     Almost Never     Never

Please describe this professor’s classroom behaviors that have enhanced his / her credibility and show that he / she cares about the students and wellbeing.
Do any of this professor’s classroom behaviors that detract from his / her credibility and do not communicate caring about students and wellbeing? If so, please describe.

Please describe any interactions you have had outside of the classroom with this professor that have enhanced his / her credibility.

Have you had any interactions outside of the classroom with this professor that have detracted from his / her credibility? If so, please describe.

In comparison to all the professors you have had in the Communication Department, how would you rank this person’s credibility? (one being not credible, seven being highly credible)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

In comparison to all the professors you have had at the University of Central Missouri, how would you rank this person’s credibility? (one being not credible, seven being highly credible)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
APPENDIX F
Measurement Scales Used As Foundation To Study

Source Credibility Scale based on research done by McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb, 1974.

1. Expert  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Inexpert
2. Unreliable  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Reliable
3. Meek  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Aggressive
4. Verbal  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Quiet
5. Bold  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Timid
6. Silent  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Talkative
7. Unselfish  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Selfish
8. Kind  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Cruel
9. Poised  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Nervous
10. Tense  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Relaxed
11. Anxious  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Calm
12. Unsociable  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Sociable
13. Cheerful  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  Gloomy
14. Irritable  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Good-natured
Teacher Credibility Scale based on research done by McCroskey and Teven, 1999.

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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Has my interests at heart</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>Doesn't have my interests at heart</td>
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