

Exploring Higher Education Classroom Immediacy: Effects of Biological Sex and Teaching Experience

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher immediacy behaviors in the college classroom for differences according to biological sex and teaching experience. This study examined graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who are generally closer in age to students, less experienced in teaching and facework strategies, and in more of an unequal power-relationship with students when compared to instructors and tenured/tenure-track professors. From results of a survey, college students rated GTAs as more nonverbally immediate than instructors and tenured/tenure-track professors, while tenured/tenure-track professors and instructors were rated more verbally immediate than GTAs. From a biological sex perspective, males were perceived to have more verbal immediacy than had females.

Keywords: immediacy, higher education, graduate teaching assistant, impression management theory, facework

Introduction

Mehrabian's pragmatic dictum, "People are drawn towards persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively or do not prefer" (1971, p. 1) frames the symbiotic relationship between student and faculty on today's university campus. College student perceptions of instructors can impact students' learning, and likewise teachers' behaviors

can influence students' perceptions of their college experience (Punyanunt-Carter & Wagner, 2005). The image a graduate teaching assistant, instructor or tenured/tenure-track professor presents can affect the credibility and likeability of how students perceive him or her (Patton, 1999). Consequently, teachers could use *immediacy* behaviors to increase affinity and affective learning which could result in an increase in credibility and likeability. Teacher immediacy is defined as verbal and nonverbal behaviors generating perceptions of psychological closeness with students (Andersen & Andersen, 1979). Teachers using immediacy behaviors correctly could increase academic success, a primary concern of educators. Often a minimally trained graduate assistant is the instructor for a college class with little or no training in immediacy and does not realize the importance of these verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

For the purposes of this research, *graduate teaching assistants* are teachers who instruct classes independently and are graduate students who have little to no experience and/or formal instruction in teaching classes (Roach, 1991). *Instructors* are teachers who teach at a university who have experience and/or degrees in teaching but do not have a doctoral degree in their subject and are not employed as full time professors at the university. *Tenured/tenure-track professors* are teachers who are full-time university employees who usually have a doctoral degree, experience, and research in their field.

Rationale

This study examined the immediacy perceptions that students have of graduate teaching assistants, instructors, and tenured/tenure-track professors in the college classroom. When comparing these groups, this research specifically investigated whether graduate teaching assistants were perceived as exhibiting lower or higher immediacy behaviors when compared to instructors and tenured/tenure-track professors. This research fills a gap in the communication educational literature by specifically targeting students' perceptions of GTAs when compared to other levels of instructors. In the college setting, untrained instructors teach classes, and these amateur instructors are typically GTAs (Branstetter & Handelsman, 2000; Grellhesl, Smith, & Punyanunt-Carter, 2011). Because many GTAs have minimal or no classroom experience and often inadequate training from their departmental programs, it is essential to consider how students perceive GTAs to understand students' perceptual differences between GTAs and trained professors (Muzaka, 2009). Teacher sex is also examined, as findings in previous research show that females and males display different immediacy behaviors which can have an effect on learning (Demetriou, Wilson, & Winterbottom, 2009; Gorham, 1988; Patton, 1999; Santilli & Miller 2011).

A plethora of research investigates *immediacy*, including studies on how immediacy affects: the receiver (King & Witt, 2009; Pogue & Ah Yun 2006; Rocca, 2004; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999); a teacher's success in the classroom (Andersen, Andersen, & Jensen, 1979; Mottet, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006; Sidelinger, 2010), student attendance and involvement (Rocca, 2004; Sidelinger, 2010); student misbehaviors in the classroom (Burroughs, 2007; Goodboy & Meyers, 2009); teacher clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998; Finn & Schrod, 2012); and teacher credibility (Meyers & Bryant, 2004; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998). Conversely, sparse research investigates how teacher sex affects students (Basow, 1990; Boggs & Weimann, 1994; Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Menzel & Carrell, 1999; Punyanunt-Carter & Wagner, 2005). In addition, few studies focus specifically on graduate teaching assistants (Grellhesl, Smith, & Punyanunt-Carter, 2011; Muzaka, 2009; Punyanunt-Carter & Wagner, 2005).

Immediacy

Immediacy was conceptualized by Mehrabian (1966) as behaviors that communicate approachability and closeness and behaviors that enhance a sense of closeness between interactants (see also Mottet & Richmond, 1998). Immediacy behaviors are salient for successful communication and creating positive

interpersonal perceptions in instructional contexts (Andersen, 1979). Goodboy, Weber, and Bolkan (2009) examined immediacy in the instructional context revealing *three learning outcomes*: (1) *affective learning*, (2) *cognitive learning*, and (3) *student motivation*. The first of these outcomes, (1) *affective learning*, involves student's feelings, emotions, and attitudes toward the course, content, and instructor (Goodboy et al., 2009). Pogue and Ah Yun (2006) note research studies that explore the connection between immediacy and affective learning consistently reveal a strong relationship between these two variables. People are more likely to approach people or things they like and avoid people or things that they dislike (Mehrabian, 1971); so if a teacher approaches the classroom with an inherent conviction that students are likeable people, he/she will stand closer, have a more direct body orientation, make direct eye contact, have more face-to-face contact and other immediate behaviors compared to a teacher who generally dislikes students. The teacher's positive immediacy behaviors, in turn, generate positive affect feelings from the students. (2) Characteristics of *cognitive learning*, the second learning outcome (Goodboy et al., 2009), are a student's ability to recall, conceptualize, and analyze information (Titsworth, 2001). King and Witt (2009) perceived learning and nonverbal immediacy are significantly correlated. Kelley and Gorham (1988) proposed that immediacy behaviors are arousing, gaining a student's attention, and as a result, increase cognitive learning. (3) *Student motivation* is the third concept that can positively impact learning outcomes and can be categorized as either a state or trait; with trait motivation being the student's disposition toward learning and state motivation being prompted by educational factors, such as influence from an instructor (Pogue & Ah Yun, 2006). Sidelinger (2010) found positive student perceptions of instructors' nonverbal immediacy promoted student communication in class, which suggests nonverbally immediate instructors effectively motivate students toward positive learning outcomes. In addition, research from Goodboy et al. (2009) indicates that students recall scores are higher when a speaker uses *both verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors*, suggesting students' perceptions of immediacy are related to perceived cognitive and affective learning more so than the actual changes in learning. Subsequently, the immediacy construct yields two strains of research— nonverbal and verbal.

Nonverbal immediacy. Nonverbal behaviors include demonstrating a variety in vocal pitch, loudness, tempo, smiling, eye contact, leaning toward a person, face-to-face body position, decreasing physical barriers, gesturing, and overall relaxed body movements and positions (Mottet, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006). When applied to teaching, immediacy is linked to many beneficial academic outcomes, such as increases in student learning and fondness of the subject (Pogue & Ah Yun, 2006). Teachers who are trained in nonverbal immediacy cues generate more positive student perception of affect toward instruction (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986). The learning outcome of (1) affective learning has consistently shown a positive relationship between teacher immediacy and student affect toward the teacher and/or course (Goodboy & Myers, 2009). A better climate and increased affinity for the teacher leads to less hostile behaviors from students. *Cognitive learning*, (2) the second learning outcome was researched by Pogue and Ah Yun (2006), noted instructors who are perceived as highly credible can increase students' perceptions of their cognitive learning. The third learning outcome, (3) *motivation*, can be influenced by the role immediacy plays in the classroom. Motivated students are more likely to be involved in the learning process, which increases student success.

Verbal immediacy. Mehrabian characterizes verbal immediacy as the "degree of directness and intensity of interaction between communicator and referent in a communicator's linguistic message" (1966, p. 28). Verbal immediacy cues involve (1) *credibility*, (2) *competency*, (3) *clarity*, (4) *content relevance*, (5) *humor*, and (6) *disclosure*. (1) *Credibility* is the combination of intelligence, character, and goodwill; and in the

educational setting, teachers have more influence in the creation of understanding or cognitive learning, if they are perceived by the students as credible (Pogue & Ah Yun, 2006). (2) Instructor *competency* is conveyed through content expertise (McCroskey, 1992), affect for students, and verbal fluency (Myers & Bryant, 2004), contributing to (3) *clarity* and (4) *content relevance*. Clear teaching is likely to facilitate the processing of messages by aiding students to effectively comprehend messages with relatively little struggle. If students perceive their teacher as credible and competent, then the teacher will have more influence on their understanding of the subject matter (Pogue & AhYun, 2006). The relationship between teacher enjoyment and student enjoyment can be mediated by teachers' displayed enthusiasm or (5) *humor* during teaching (Frenzel, Goetz, Lüdtke, Pekrun, & Sutton, 2009). Instructors using verbal humor in the classroom are viewed as more immediate and humor may help the students remember content, thus assisting them in retaining information (Wanzer & Frymeier, 1999). Finally, instructors (6) *self-disclose* about topics such as their education, family and friends, experiences, leisure activities, beliefs and opinions, and personal problems which students cannot get elsewhere and this self-disclosure can be used to promote discussion (Meyers & Knox, 2001).

Verbal immediacy behaviors can also include the following behaviors: using praise, humor and personal pronouns, calling students by name, demonstrating a willingness to converse with students' before/after/outside of class, asking questions to acquire student viewpoint or opinions, and responding to student initiated topics (Jensen, 2002). Similar to nonverbal immediacy, verbal immediacy is linked to increased student motivation, retention (Kelley & Gorham, 1988), and affect. In addition, verbal immediacy results in an increase in students' willingness to participate in class (Menzel & Carrell, 1999), students' attendance (Rocca, 2004), and students' out-of-class communication with instructors as well as lowering communication apprehension (Jensen, 2002). To conclude, using *nonverbal and verbal immediacy in tandem* increases students' perceptions of teacher credibility. Instructors negotiate enough credibility to be able to provide useful feedback of students' work; communicating feedback can potentially create face-threatening interactions (Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). In relation to competence, instructors could reduce face threats through a combination of verbal immediacy cues such as tact, approbation, and solidarity tactics and correspondingly nonverbal immediacy cues such as eye contact, proximity, gestures, and vocal variety (Witt & Wheelless, 2001). Credible teachers are perceived as engaging, and students report greater amounts of self-motivation, as well as affective and cognitive learning, when the instructors are viewed as credible (Meyers & Bryant, 2004). Teaching at the college level traditionally requires content expertise and correct delivery on the part of the instructor; nevertheless, effective teaching could also require personal communication between teacher and student (Frymeier & Houser, 2000). Facework that students experience during feedback from instructors can have a significant impact in the classroom (Kerssen-Griep, Trees, & Hess, 2008). Facework consists of all the communicative strategies that are used to maintain, protect, and restore one's own and others' perceptual identities (Goffman, 1967).

Impression Management: Theoretical Foundation

Impression management states that individuals or organizations must establish and maintain impressions that are congruent with the perceptions they want to convey to their publics (Goffman, 1959). How students feel about their teachers and learning contexts influences how thoroughly students are involved in classroom discussions and adhere to classroom guidelines (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008). Frymier and Houser (2000) explain that to successfully facilitate learning, an instructor must learn to balance content and relational dimensions. This means the teacher needs to relay the information necessary to educate the student, but he or she also needs to connect to students on a relational level. Research indicates that affinity (i.e., student attitude toward a course, content, or teacher) (Bloom, 1976) and clarity (i.e., effectively

transmitting the desired meaning of course content and processes in the minds of students) (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998) can be competing actions. Increased clarity and directness by an instructor can undermine affinity if done without skill just as sole focus on affinity-building can lead to crucial issues remaining unaddressed (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008; Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009).

Politeness theory. Preventative facework was developed in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and consists of positive and negative face. Positive face is the need to feel included, approved of, and appreciated, and negative face is remaining autonomous and unconstrained by others. Individuals are emotionally invested in their faces, and they attempt to reduce incidents in which they could lose face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Socially competent people are able to resolve task and face goals in interaction, preserving others' self-images, and leading to receiving more face support from the interactant. Whether a person loses, maintains, or enhances face is dependent on others and only individuals relevant to particular goals can satisfy these wants. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe acts that are inherently threatening to the negative face needs of the respondent such as orders, requests, reminders, threats and dares (i.e., negative immediacy behaviors).

In the classroom, students and teachers continually negotiate social identities that, in turn, provide the conversational resource participants use to manage those identities (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008). Students respond better to a teacher who they perceive as being skilled in facework strategies than to a teacher not skilled in these strategies. Identity affirming classroom strategies play directly into perceptions of teacher-student relationship and facework might be a key means students use to interpret the relational implications of teachers' messages (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008). Students could threaten the positive face of instructors by suggesting they are incompetent or uncaring of students. Both teachers and students have goals they want to achieve, and the relationship that develops between teachers and students can affect learning through both student and teacher attitudes toward the content (Frymier & Houser, 2000). While student attitude varies based on individuals, a teacher's enjoyment (i.e., a positive immediacy behavior), observable through enthusiastic teaching behavior, has positive effects on student enjoyment in the classroom (Frenzel et al., 2009). Student enjoyment in the classroom, based on attitude and emotions, are important aspects of *learning achievement* in the classroom because emotionally positive classrooms allow teachers to best fulfill teaching responsibilities (Frenzel et al., 2009). However, communication between teachers and students is relational as well as content driven; two skills students found most important for educators in the classroom were referential skills (i.e., explaining things clearly and enabling understanding) and ego (i.e., encouragement and confirmation) (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). Both impression management and an understanding of facework are the foundation of understanding positive immediacy behaviors and how they affect content and relational aspects in the student-teacher relationship.

Sex

Sex of the educator can be a salient factor when discussing a teacher's immediacy in the classroom. Analysis of verbal and nonverbal immediacy uses in the classroom indicated female teachers are seen as more immediate overall than are male teachers (Gorham, 1988). Hall (1978) established females are reliably more accurate than males on several conceptually similar tasks of decoding nonverbal cues, suggesting women are generally more accurate at translating and using nonverbal cues than were males. In addition, females are perceived as more likely than males to provide feedback, ask students how they felt about an assignment, due date or discussion topic, to give praise, and to use nonverbal cues such as touching and smiling (Gorham, 1988). Female teachers are more likely than male teachers to employ emotional tactics, such as showing personal interest in students to re-engage them in learning (Demetriou, Wilson, &

Winterbottom, 2009). Demetriou et al. suggest females are more likely to see students as individuals, whereas males are more inclined to communicate the subject knowledge, hoping this motivates engagement from the student. In instances of excessive use of immediacy, Rester and Edwards (2007) found that students are more likely to infer controlling messages from male teachers, and caring messages from female teachers. Females recall nonverbal behaviors more than males, smile more, engage in more personal eye contact, and are overall more skilled at sending nonverbal messages than males (Santilli & Miller, 2011).

Student evaluations have been shown to be mediated largely by changes in students' perceptions of their instructor's sex-linked traits (Basow, 1990). According to Patton (1999), achieving credibility in the classroom is the instructor's goal because being perceived as a credible instructor produces positive outcomes, not only for the instructor, but also for the student. The stereotypical female teaching qualities have been described as warm, concerned, passive, interested, caring, and non-dominant (Patton, 1999). The higher ratings of female instructors support the sex stereotype that female instructors are empathetic, feminine, and emotionally supportive (Patton, 1999). Female instructors, as well as female students, are more receptive to a teaching methodology that values connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment and collaboration over debate (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000). Female teachers tend to emphasize class discussions and groupwork, seeing their role as more of a facilitator than as a lecturer. This is in sharp contrast to the stereotypical male teaching qualities which have been described as independent, objective, logical, aggressive (Patton, 1999) and stereotypically better lecturers (Treichler & Kramarae, 1983). Expressive teachers who use gestures and vary their nonverbal cues tend to be rated more highly by students than teachers who are relatively nonexpressive, regardless of the content of their lectures (Basow, 1990). Female students with male instructors reported a significantly less favorable overall impression (i.e., less support) of their instructors than females with female professors or males with either male or female professors (Crombie, Pyke, Silverthorn, Jones, & Piccinin, 2003).

Boggs and Weimann (1994) examined sex influences of student responses of graduate teaching assistant communication in the classroom and discovered female graduate teaching assistants were less likely than male graduate teaching assistants to be perceived as effective by students. A female graduate teaching assistant was less likely to be chosen as best graduate teaching assistant and significantly more likely to be chosen as a worst graduate teaching assistant than a male graduate teaching assistant. They also found that good graduate teaching assistants were rated higher in communicative competence than were poor graduate teaching assistants, which suggests good communication skills are related to effective teaching. Females tend to be more concerned with the relational aspect of communication while males tend to be more focused on task-oriented communication (Punyanunt-Carter & Wagner, 2005). After a review of the extant literature, females seem to be perceived as more nonverbally immediate than males, and males seem to be perceived as more verbally immediate than females; therefore the following hypothesis is posited:

H1: Female teachers, whether GTAs, instructors or professors, will be perceived as being more nonverbally immediate than male teachers; while male teachers, whether GTAs, instructors or professors, will be perceived as being more verbally immediate than female teachers.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

A graduate teaching assistant is in a unique position; stuck between the role of a student and an instructor. Using GTAs to teach basic undergraduate courses is common in higher education in the United States, especially at larger institutions (Roach, 1991). While using GTAs as instructors is a valuable service to the institutions and a beneficial experience for GTAs, two common concerns are most graduate students have little to no experience and/or formal instruction in teaching classes, and GTAs have difficulty with

perceived credibility and authority, since many GTAs enter graduate programs soon after completing their undergraduate degrees, resulting in only a small age and maturation difference between the GTA and the students they teach (Roach, 1991). Golish (1999) found students perceived both professors and GTAs to be high in credibility, but professors were perceived as having more legitimate, coercive, and expert power than graduate teaching assistants. Another study collected survey results from GTAs and found a problematic situation that arose in GTA's classes was the feeling of a lack of authority (Muzaka, 2009). The GTAs surveyed commented that they did not feel like they had a real sense of power that is needed to manage a class (Muzaka, 2009).

Hendrix (1995) notes GTAs perceive they have to work harder to establish credibility, and students try to take advantage of them because they are not professors with the status of full-time faculty. This could be because typically GTAs receive little to no training upon entering the classroom as an instructor (Golish, 1999; Roach, 1991). A GTA acts as an instructor, laboratory instructor or serves as a course or laboratory aide or grader without being prepared for these responsibilities or being fully aware of the influence s/he has over undergraduate learning (Nicklow, Marikunte, & Chevalier, 2007). Furthermore, GTAs are entrenched in their own degree program and may be more concerned with self-survival issues than with teaching (Nicklow et al., 2007). A tenured/tenure-track professor's possible years of experience and job-related stress could be related to their self-efficacy, which in turn influences job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), contrasted to a GTA beginning the teaching experience.

Lack of both content expertise and the ability to instruct by GTAs are not the only issues researchers have indicated as problematic. According to a study by Muzaka (2009), students perceived a graduate teaching assistant's knowledge to be too specific and narrow when compared to a tenured/tenure-track professor; and describe "GTAs' expertise is sometimes too specific and specialized" [student 4] and "academic staff would know the subject better, since they are employed full-time to teach it" [student 18] (p. 3). Students felt they could take advantage of GTAs, because GTAs were so close in age (Golish, 1999). Conversely, Punyanunt-Carter and Wagner (2005) note that often times teaching assistants are similar in age to their students and can relate better than professors on several levels. Students perceived GTAs to be more approachable and less intimidating due to their age and recent experience of undergraduate university life, and GTAs can identify better and are more in touch with students and academic demands than professors (Muzaka, 2009), which leads to hypothesis two:

H2: GTAs will be perceived as being more nonverbally immediate than tenured and tenure-track professors and instructors, while tenured and tenure-track professors and instructors will be perceived as being more verbally immediate than GTAs.

Method

Sample and Procedure. The relevant sample consisted of respondents, ages 19-22, undergraduate students enrolled in classes at a large Southern university, who were administered an electronic survey constructed with Qualtrics software. Qualtrics is web-based survey software that allows researchers to create and electronically distribute surveys, collect and store data, and produce reports. The Qualtrics report indicated that 402 responses to the survey were completed. However, after cleaning the data, 91 surveys were removed due to incompleteness, leaving 311 surveys to be analyzed in the data set. Of these, 100 (32.2%) of the participants were male and 211 (67.8%) were female. Of the respondents, 33 (10.6%) were freshmen, 86 (27.6%) sophomores, 115 (37%) juniors, and 77 (24.8%) seniors. Undergraduates were chosen as the population for this study because they are the typical observers of daily classroom behaviors of GTAs and instructors. Upon securing IRB approval, departmental instructors were asked to email a Qualtrics online survey link to students enrolled in classes taught by graduate teaching assistants, instructors, and professors.

The surveys were prefaced with an informed consent form, which briefly defined voluntary disclosure, the purpose of the survey, and any required mandatory information. The survey was voluntary and anonymous for the participants who had the choice to complete the survey, stop taking the survey or contact the researcher and withdraw from the study later. Participation took place outside of the classroom and participants received no incentive or gift for taking the survey (e.g., class bonus points, money).

Measures. Pre-existing tested immediacy scales were used for the quantitative survey tool: The Nonverbal Immediacy Scale (Richmond, McCroskey, & Johnson, 2003) combined with the Verbal Immediacy Behaviors Scale (Gorham, 1988). In these scales, a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1= *never* to 5= *very often* was used to measure instructor immediacy behaviors with a total of 39 statements. Examples of the survey statements from the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale (Richmond et al., 2003) section include: (1) The instructor uses her/his hands and arms to gesture while talking to people; (2) The instructor touches others on the shoulder or arm while talking to them; and (3) The instructor uses a monotone or dull voice while talking to people. Examples of statements from the Verbal Immediacy Behaviors (Gorham, 1988) section include: (1) The instructor uses personal examples or talks about experiences she/he has had outside of class; (2) The instructor asks questions or encourages students to talk; and (3) The instructor gets into discussions based on something a student brings up even when this doesn't seem to be part of his/her lesson plan. The survey included a section of demographic questions, a course number to determine whether the instructor was a GTA or tenured/tenure-track professor, sex of the instructor and participant, and year in school of participant.

The reliability of the original Gorham verbal instrument (1988) was high, with alpha and split-half reliabilities for students' assessments ranging from .83 to .94. The alpha reliabilities for the Richmond et al., nonverbal scale instrument (2003) range from .73 to .89. The raw validity correlations range from .58 to .82. The disattenuated validity correlations ranged from .74 to .95. Validity for the Gorham instrument reveals that all 17 verbal immediacy items loaded on the same single factor as did the 14 nonverbal immediacy items of the Richmond et al. instrument.

Questions have surfaced since the original Gorham scale was developed (Robinson & Richmond, 1995), and later attempts failed at developing a more valid measure of verbal immediacy. This study addressed this deficiency by employing SPSS analysis to complete a both a factor analysis and internal consistency estimates of reliability constructing a more parsimonious scale. The dimensionality of the 17 items from the Gorham measure was analyzed using maximum likelihood factor analysis. Based on the scree plot, three factors were rotated using a Varimax rotation procedure. Two items loaded solely on one of the factors; so they were eliminated from the measure (see Green & Salkind, 2011): "The instructor addresses student by name" and "The instructor addresses me (i.e., the student taking the survey) by name." In addition, two internal consistency estimates of reliability were computed for the scale: a split-half coefficient expressed as a Spearman-Brown corrected correlation for unequal length and coefficient alpha. Values for coefficient alpha and the split-half coefficient were the same, .84, each indicating satisfactory reliability. All the correlations were greater than .30 except for two items: "The instructor calls on students to answer questions even if they have not volunteered" ($r = .25$) and "The instructor is addressed by his/her first name" ($r = .25$). Based on these results, these two items plus the two items that solely loaded on one of the factors were eliminated from the Gorham scale, leaving 13 valid constructs to be evaluated with the revised Gorham scale.

Results

The sample population for this study included 311 students enrolled in a public university in the southeastern United States. The students were asked to answer demographic questions along with rating the immediacy instrument statements on a survey. Of the surveys completed and included in the analysis, 137 (44.1%) evaluated graduate teaching assistants, 98 (31.5%) evaluated instructors, and 76 (24.4%) assessed professors that were tenured/tenure-track. Of the teachers analyzed, 117 (37.6%) were male and 194 (62.4%) were female, with 14 (10.2%) of the GTAs being male and 123 (89.8%) being female; 81 (82.7%) instructors being male and 17 (17.3%) being female; and 22 (29%) professors being male and 54 (71%) being female. 298 (95.8%) of the surveys evaluated a teacher in the communication department, four from English (.01%), and nine (.03%) from public administration. All of the male GTAs analyzed were from the public administration department. A 2 (character sex) x 3 (character teaching level) multivariate analysis of variance was performed on 39 dependent variables (immediacy statements) to evaluate the relationship between the sex and teaching level of the subjects and nonverbal/verbal immediacy. SPSS software was used to conduct the analysis.

The first hypothesis states:

H1: Female teachers, whether GTAs, instructors or professors, will be perceived as being more nonverbally immediate than male teachers; while male teachers, whether GTAs, instructors or tenured/tenure-track professors, will be perceived as being more verbally immediate than female teachers.

Of the 26 variables on the nonverbal scale, six were found to be significant. These were: (1) The instructor has a relaxed body position when he/she talks to people, $F(1,309) = 11.03, p < .01, \eta^2 = .91$. (2) The instructor avoids eye contact while talking to people, $F(1,309) = 5.15, p < .05, \eta^2 = .62$. (3) The instructor has a tense body position while talking to people, $F(1,309) = 8.30, p < .01, \eta^2 = .82$. (4) The instructor sits close or stands close to people while talking with them, $F(1,309) = 6.74, p < .01, \eta^2 = .74$. (5) The instructor moves closer to people when he/she talks to them, $F(1,309) = 8.23, p < .01, \eta^2 = .82$. and (6) The instructor smiles when he/she talks to people, $F(1,309) = 6.12, p < .05, \eta^2 = .70$. The means and standard deviations for nonverbal immediacy by teacher sex are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Group Means and Standard Deviations for Nonverbal Immediacy by Teacher Gender

Nonverbal Measures	Female		Male	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Uses hands and arms to gesture	3.55	0.84	3.61	0.90
Touches on arm/shoulder while talking	1.46	0.68	1.33	0.76
Monotone or dull voice	1.99	0.91	1.92	0.85
Looks over/away while talking	1.67	0.77	1.63	0.75
Moves away when others are talking	1.76	0.94	1.72	0.92

Has a relaxed body position*	4.03	0.88	4.34	0.70
Frowns while talking to people	1.70	0.84	1.56	0.59
Avoids eye contact*	1.54	0.76	1.35	0.56
Has a tense body position*	1.76	0.76	1.51	0.68
Sits close or stands close*	2.76	0.97	2.46	1.01
Voice is monotonous or dull	1.87	0.89	1.81	1.00
Uses a variety of vocal expressions	3.62	0.87	3.66	0.95
Gestures when talking	3.64	0.76	3.69	0.94
Is animated when talking	3.61	0.91	3.64	0.98
Has a bland facial expression	2.03	0.84	2.22	0.83
Moves closer to people when talking*	2.78	0.83	2.48	0.95
Looks directly at people	4.32	0.74	4.28	0.71
Is stiff when talking to people	1.85	0.75	1.74	0.66
Has a lot of vocal variety	3.62	0.96	3.53	1.00
Avoids gesturing	2.12	0.78	2.11	0.86
Leans toward people when talking	2.73	0.86	2.68	0.99
Maintains eye contact when talking	4.31	0.68	4.26	0.71
Tries to not sit/stand close	2.77	0.91	2.87	1.00
Leans away when talking	1.93	0.79	1.91	0.80
Smiles when talking*	4.08	0.84	3.84	0.78
Avoids touching	3.56	1.05	3.76	1.09

Note: *Mean for females differs significantly from mean for males at $p < .05$.

Total Respondents: 311

Of the 17 variables on the verbal scale, eight were found to be significant: (1) The instructor uses personal examples or talks about experiences she/he has had outside of class, $F(1,309) = 28.70, p < .01, \eta^2 = 1.00$. (2) The instructor asks questions or encourages students to talk, $F(1,309) = 4.78, p < .05, \eta^2 = .59$. (3) The instructor gets into discussions based on something a student brings up even when this doesn't seem to be a part of his/her lesson plan, $F(1,309) = 5.50, p < .05, \eta^2 = .65$. (4) The instructor uses humor in class, $F(1,309) = 19.78, p < .01, \eta^2 = .99$. (5) The instructor provides feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, oral discussions, etc, $F(1,309) = 5.69, p < .05, \eta^2 = .66$. (6) The instructor asks how students feel about an assignment, due date or discussion topic, $F(1,309) = 13.84, p < .01, \eta^2 = .96$. (7) The instructor asks questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions, $F(1,309) = 5.57, p < .05, \eta^2 = .65$. (8) The instructor will have discussions about things unrelated to class with individual students or with the class as a whole, $F(1,309) = 11.51, p < .01, \eta^2 = .92$. The means and standard deviations for verbal immediacy by teacher sex are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Group Means and Standard Deviations for Verbal Immediacy by Teacher Gender

Verbal Measures	Female		Male	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Uses personal examples*	3.45	1.04	4.07	0.91
Asks questions/encourages talking*	4.22	0.83	4.42	0.74
Discusses irrelevant student thoughts*	2.92	0.96	3.20	1.07
Uses humor*	3.54	0.90	4.02	0.91
Converses before/after class	3.32	0.90	3.42	0.99
Has conversed with me before/after	2.40	1.16	2.37	1.06
Refers to class as 'our/we'	4.20	0.82	4.30	0.81
Provides individual feedback*	4.21	0.92	3.96	0.90
Asks how student feels about work*	3.08	1.06	3.55	1.09
Invites students to call/meet	3.37	1.04	3.38	1.22
Asks questions soliciting opinions*	3.13	1.02	3.43	1.14
Praises students	3.66	1.01	3.57	1.02
Discusses unrelated materials*	2.44	0.91	2.82	1.05

Note: *Mean for females differs significantly from mean for males at $p < .05$.

Total Respondents: 311

Hypothesis one was partially supported. Males displayed more verbal immediacy than did females, but females did not display more nonverbal immediacy than did males. For nonverbal immediacy, male educators were more likely than female educators to have a relaxed body position when talking to students and maintain good eye contact; while female educators were more likely than male educators to sit or stand close, move closer to students, and smile when talking to students. For verbal immediacy, male educators were more likely than female educators to use personal examples, encourage students to talk, discuss something random a student brings up, use humor in class, ask how students feel about an assignment, ask questions that solicit viewpoints, and discuss things unrelated to class with individual students, while female educators were more likely than males to provide feedback on individual work.

The second hypothesis states:

H2: GTAs will be perceived as being more nonverbally immediate than tenured and tenure-track professors and instructors, while instructors and tenured and tenure-track professors will be perceived as being more verbally immediate than GTAs.

Of the 39 variables on the verbal and nonverbal scales combined, 23 were found to be significant. There were: (1) The instructor touches others on the shoulder or arm while talking to them, $F(2,308) = 6.07$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .88$. (2) The instructor uses a monotone or dull voice while talking to people, $F(2,308) = 4.79$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .79$. (3) The instructor looks over or away from others while talking to them, $F(2,308) = 3.96$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .71$. (4) The instructor has a relaxed body position when he/she talks to people, $F(2,308) = 3.79$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .69$. (5) The instructor frowns while talking to people, $F(2,308) = 5.53$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .85$. (6) The instructor avoids eye contact while talking to people, $F(2,308) = 11.84$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .99$. (7) The instructor has a tense body position while talking to people, $F(2,308) = 7.45$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .94$. (8) The instructor sits close or stands close to people while talking with them, $F(2,308) = 6.54$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .91$. (9) The instructor looks directly at people while talking to them, $F(2,308) = 5.19$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .83$. (10) The instructor maintains eye contact with people when he/she talks to them, $F(2,308) = 5.76$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .87$. (11) The instructor leans away from people when he/she talks to them, $F(2,308) = 3.06$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .59$. (12) The instructor uses personal examples or talks about experiences she/he has had outside of class, $F(2,308) = 11.35$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .99$. (13) The instructor asks questions or encourages students to talk, $F(2,308) = 4.09$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .723$. (14) The instructor gets into discussions based on something a student brings up even when this doesn't seem to be a part of his/her lesson plan, $F(2,308) = 8.03$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .96$. (15) The instructor uses humor in class, $F(2,308) = 8.33$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .96$. (16) The instructor converses with students before, after or outside of class $F(2,308) = 3.21$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .61$. (17) The instructor has initiated conversations with me before, after, or outside of class, $F(2,308) = 8.87$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .97$. (18) The instructor provides feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, oral discussions, etc, $F(2,308) = 5.77$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .87$. (19) The instructor asks how students feel about an assignment, due date or discussion topic, $F(2,308) = 14.25$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .99$. (20) The instructor invites students to telephone or meet with him/her outside of class if they have questions, $F(2,308) = 5.66$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .86$. (21) The instructor asks questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions, $F(2,308) = 5.54$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .85$. (22) The instructor praises students' work, actions or comments, $F(2,308) = 3.20$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .610$. (23) The instructor will have discussions about things unrelated to class with individual students with the class as a whole, $F(2,308) = 10.38$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .99$. The means and standard deviations for verbal immediacy by teacher level are presented in Table 3; a post hoc test was conducted.

Table 3
Group Means and Standard Deviations for Nonverbal and Verbal Immediacy by Teacher Level

Measures	GTAs		Instructors			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Uses hands and arms to gesture	3.57	0.83	3.63	0.85	3.49	0.97
Touches arm/shoulder while talking*	1.33	0.67	1.33	0.62	1.67	0.86
Monotone or dull voice*	1.92	0.91	1.83	0.81	2.22	0.87
Looks over/away while talking*	1.59	0.77	1.58	0.76	1.87	0.74
Moves away when others are talking	1.71	0.98	1.68	0.88	1.89	0.90
Has a relaxed body position *	4.14	0.89	4.31	0.77	3.96	0.76
Frowns while talking to people*	1.64	0.84	1.50	0.65	1.88	0.69
Avoids eye contact*	1.36	0.61	1.36	0.61	1.80	0.85
Has a tense body position*	1.71	0.79	1.45	0.66	1.87	0.68
Sits close or stands close*	2.61	0.98	2.44	1.00	2.97	0.92
Voice is monotonous or dull	1.82	0.92	1.73	0.96	2.03	0.91
Uses a variety of vocal expressions	3.58	0.88	3.69	0.90	3.67	0.93
Gestures when talking	3.66	0.77	3.63	0.89	3.71	0.86
Is animated when talking	3.58	0.97	3.70	0.90	3.58	0.91
Has a bland facial expression	2.07	0.92	2.10	0.81	2.14	0.74
Moves closer when talking*	2.74	0.85	2.39	0.92	2.89	0.81
Looks directly at people*	4.44	0.64	4.28	0.73	4.11	0.81
Is stiff when talking to people	1.79	0.74	1.74	0.66	1.92	0.73

Leans toward people when talking	2.66	0.92	2.61	0.96	2.91	0.79
Maintains eye contact when talking*	4.41	0.60	4.28	0.67	4.08	0.81
Tries to not sit/stand close	2.80	0.94	2.91	1.07	2.68	0.77
Leans away when talking*	1.82	0.79	1.95	0.77	2.09	0.80
Smiles when talking	4.12	0.83	3.93	0.78	3.86	0.84
Avoids touching	3.72	1.06	3.72	1.20	3.37	1.05
Uses personal examples*	3.37	1.11	3.95	0.90	3.38	0.91
Asks questions/encourages talking*	4.36	0.75	4.38	0.73	4.07	0.94
Discusses irrelevant student thoughts*	2.77	0.97	3.22	1.09	3.22	0.87
Uses humor*	3.56	0.93	4.03	0.84	3.62	0.95
Converses before/after class*	3.20	0.91	3.47	0.98	3.47	0.89
Initiates talking before/after*	2.18	1.07	2.34	1.11	2.84	1.12
Refers to class as 'our/we'	4.22	0.84	4.30	0.79	4.18	0.81
Provides individual feedback*	4.31	0.83	4.01	0.91	3.91	1.02
Asks how student feels about work*	2.96	1.04	3.70	1.03	3.22	1.10
Invites students to call/meet*	3.19	1.07	3.36	1.22	3.72	1.02
Asks questions soliciting opinions*	3.02	1.03	3.42	1.18	3.36	1.02
Praises students*	3.52	1.04	3.56	1.09	3.88	0.83
Discusses unrelated materials*	2.30	0.87	2.81	1.09	2.79	0.88

Note: *Mean differs significantly by teacher level at $p < .05$. Total Respondents: 311

Hypothesis two was supported. For verbal and nonverbal immediacy, *tenure-track and tenured professors* were more likely than both *instructors* and *GTAs* to touch a student on the shoulder while talking, have a monotone voice, look away while talking, frown when talking, avoid eye contact, sit or stand close to student, and move closer when talking. In addition, *tenured/tenure-track professors* were more likely than

instructors to have a tense body position, and move closer while talking; and *tenured/tenure-track professors* were more likely than *GTAs* to lean away when talking, initiate talking before or after class, invite students to meet after class, praise students, and discuss unrelated materials in the classroom. *Instructors* were more likely than both *tenured/tenure-track professors* and *GTAs* to use personal examples in the classroom, ask how students feel about specific work tasks, and use humor. *Instructors* were more likely than *tenured/tenure-track professors* to ask questions and encourage talking. In addition, *instructors* were more likely than *GTAs* to discuss irrelevant student thoughts, initiate talking before or after class, ask questions soliciting opinions, and discuss unrelated material. Finally, *GTAs* were more likely than both *tenured/tenure-track professors* and *instructors* to provide individual feedback. *GTAs* were more likely than *tenured/tenure-track professors* to look directly at students, maintain eye contact when talking, ask questions, and encourage talking. In addition, *GTAs* were more likely than *instructors* to have a tense body position, and move closer when talking.

Discussion

The results of this study concluded male teachers are perceived as more verbally immediate than female teachers, but female teachers are not necessarily perceived as more nonverbally immediate than male teachers. In addition, *GTAs* are perceived as more nonverbally immediate than both *instructors* and *tenured/tenure-track professors*, while both *instructors* and *tenured/tenure-track professors* are perceived as more verbally immediate than *GTAs*; these results partially support hypothesis one and support hypothesis two.

Sex and immediacy. This study's results are disparate from research by Demetriou et al. (2009), which examined teachers' interactions with students and found that female teachers were more likely to employ emotional tactics, such as showing personal interest in students to re-engage them in learning than were male teachers. Their research suggested that female teachers were more likely to see students as individuals, whereas male teachers were more inclined to communicate the subject knowledge and hope this will stimulate the student enough to engage him or her. In addition, in the present study, 14 (10.2%) of the *GTAs* were male and 123 (89.8%) were female, revealing a disproportion between the sexes. Hall, Coats, and LeBeau (2005) found in an unequal power relationship, such as the teacher-to-student relationship, the superior used more nonverbal immediacy behaviors, such as facial expressions, more body openness, and smaller interpersonal distances than subordinates. In their study, perceivers believed that the greater the power distance between two people, the more nonverbal immediacy would be present by behaviors that are used by the superior (Hall et. al, 2005). In the present study, the majority of females evaluated were graduate teaching assistants (63%). Although previous studies examining sex and immediacy have concluded that females are generally more immediate than males, particularly with nonverbal immediacy (Gorham, 1988; Patton, 1999; Punyanunt-Carter & Wagner, 2005; Santilli & Miller, 2011) the findings from this present study differed from those studies, possibly because females, especially the *GTAs* which were the majority evaluated, were not considered as experienced, and therefore were perceived as less powerful. On the other hand, male teachers were found to be more verbally immediate than female teachers, for example, encouraging students to talk, using personal examples, and discussing things unrelated to class with individual students more than female teachers, similar to the male teacher stereotype of males being better lecturers (Treichler & Kramarae, 1983).

Teaching level and immediacy. In this study, *GTAs* were likely to be more nonverbally immediate while *tenured/tenure-track professors* and *instructors* were likely to be more verbally immediate. Noting

that the relationship between a teacher and student is affected the power distribution; it could be that since GTAs are not established professors, they use more nonverbal immediacy behaviors to create the sense of power distance between themselves and students when compared to instructors and tenured/tenure-track professors. GTAs might be more nonverbally immediate because they are perceived as employing nonverbal facework strategies that resonate with students; however, with lack of experience in teaching, the verbal strategies employed in class are not as immediate as tenured/tenure-track professors and instructors who have had experience with how to talk to students. If perceived power is linked to perceived facework and immediacy, instructors may be perceived as verbally immediate then GTAs and more nonverbally immediate than tenured/tenure-track professors because they may be closer in age to students than a tenured/tenure-track professor, but also more powerful than a graduate teaching assistant. A GTA may not have to learn how to establish relational dimensions associated with nonverbal immediacy, but may have to learn verbal immediacy skills in the context of teaching to balance the perception that GTAs are not as credible as instructors and tenured/tenure-track professors. Tenured/tenure-track professors and instructors have more likely had classroom experience, so they may have power because they know how to interact with students' face identities in the classroom setting. Golish (1999) found students perceived both professors and GTAs to be high in credibility, but professors were perceived as having more legitimate, coercive, and expert power than graduate teaching assistants.

Kerssen-Griep et al. (2008) discovered the facework students' experience from instructors has a significant impact on both nonverbal and verbal immediacy relational perceptions in a classroom, particularly when the instructor mitigated face threats. Facework may be a major contributor to the relational success of many classroom messages, and students who experience skilled positive face support during feedback from their instructor believe they are in a better learning environment. Like impression management, immediacy affects content and relational aspects in the student-teacher relationship. Frymier and Houser (2000) note that teacher feedback from interaction in the classroom can also contain potential face threats and since GTAs have little experience and little training, it is likely that they would be unable to facilitate interactions in the classroom as well as a more experienced professor.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the uneven ratio of males and females in the three teaching categories. A majority of the females were graduate teaching assistants, with very few male graduate teaching assistants being evaluated. Another limitation of this study may be that the nearly all of the instructors rated by students were in the communication department. Because immediacy is a communicative concept, it is possible that communication teachers may be consciously employing these behaviors. Many departments were contacted to participate in the study, such as English, history, psychology, and public administration, but few complied.

Future Research

Research in this area could consider examining perceived power or credibility associated with the various levels of teachers, surveying teachers to examine what kind of training in education they may have received. Since GTAs are instructors in the college classroom, examining perceived facework strategies from the GTA point of view to see if they are comfortable with interacting with students in a manner that may create negative face, such as using commands and suggestions, would be beneficial. Finally, the verbal immediacy scale included verbal immediacy behaviors that measure such things as using praise, humor, and personal pronouns, asking questions to acquire student viewpoint or opinions, and responding to student

initiated topics; however, it did not include measures directly observing credibility, competency, and clarity. Using a scale that specifically measures credibility and competency of subject matter could be beneficial.

Conclusion

The literature review demonstrates instructor's positive immediacy behaviors result in numerous beneficial outcomes for the student. Graduate teaching assistants are untrained foreigners in a teaching environment, and yet are expected to flawlessly perform their didactic duties. This power position can be intimidating especially with having to exert control in an unfamiliar setting. GTAs are essentially still students and are not considered experts in their field of study, so they do not have the established credibility that an instructor or professor might have. With even some awareness and teaching of nonverbal and verbal immediacy behaviors, GTAs may not only become better teachers, but may also be perceived as such by students. This could diminish unwanted face threats toward students from the teacher, while at the same time making the GTA more credible and comfortable in the college classroom. This study offers one other kernel of interest, namely, that the tenured/tenure track professor was perceived as quite negatively nonverbally immediate (e.g., tense body position, monotone voice, looks away while talking, avoids eye contact). Perhaps tenured/tenure track professors would benefit from learning how to become more nonverbally immediate, even as GTAs would benefit from learning how to become more verbally immediate.

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