

COME 122 - Scholarly Notation

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Lybarger, J. E., Rancer, A. S., & Lin, Y. (2017). Superior-subordinate communication in the workplace: Verbal aggression, nonverbal immediacy, and their joint effects on perceived superior credibility. *Communication Research Reports*, 34(2), 124-133.doi: 0.1080/08824096.2016.1252909

Keywords: Nonverbal Immediate Behaviors, Verbally Aggressive Messages, Relationship between Superior and Subordinate, Workplace, Superior Credibility.

Literature review: Article is about the study between superiors and subordinates which examined the combined effects of superiors verbally aggressive behaviors (ex: name calling/yelling) and nonverbal immediacy behaviors (smiling, nodding, eye contact) on a subordinates perception of the superiors credibility. This is important because the superior's use of verbally aggressive messages and nonverbal immediacy behaviors has significant effects on the subordinate's job performance and satisfaction. Without motivation and trust from superiors, subordinates can feel burned out and as a result, the performance of the entire organization can be negatively affected. (Lybarger, et al., 2017)

The authors defined subordinate's perception of superior credibility based on the concept of source credibility, which is defined as a communicator's attitude toward a source of communication at any specific moment, and they included its three dimensions (competence, character, caring) into the study.(Lybarger, et al., 2017)

The authors offered two hypotheses:

- “H1: Superiors who do not use verbally aggressive messages and who are nonverbally immediate will be perceived with a higher level of competence, character/trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill than: (a) supervisors who use verbally aggressive messages and who are nonverbally immediate; (b) superiors who use verbally aggressive messages and who are not nonverbally immediate; (c) superiors who do not use verbally aggressive messages and who are not nonverbally immediate.” (Lybarger et al., 2017, p. 127)

The first hypothesis is offered because there are studies concluding that the subordinate's perception of superior's credibility can be affected by the superior's use of verbal aggression, and other studies, independent from those mentioned above, pointed out that it can be affected by the superior's use of nonverbal immediacy. These studies together suggest that the less the superiors use verbal aggression, and the more they use nonverbally immediate behaviors, the higher their credibility is perceived by their subordinates. (Lybarger, et al., 2017).

- “H2: Superiors who use verbally aggressive messages and who are nonverbally immediate will be perceived with a lower level of competence, character/trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill than superiors who are not nonverbally immediate and who either use or do not use verbally aggressive messages.” (Lybarger et al., 2017, p. 127).

The second hypothesis is offered because the effect of the superior's nonverbal immediacy behaviors are different for each subordinate as it is based on their worldviews and their relationships with the superior. Therefore, when used simultaneously, the superior use of nonverbally immediate behaviors can increase the effects of their verbally aggressive messages and thus, lower the superior's credibility as perceived by their subordinates. (Lybarger, et al., 2017).

Method: This study has a total of 415 participants from an introductory level communication class at a large Midwestern University, in which 180 were male, 227 were female and eight participants who chose to not report their gender. The age range of the participants is between 18 and 59 years old. Twenty participants chose to not report their age. Among the participants, 312 of them are Caucasians, 52 are African Americans, nine are Asian Americans, seven are Hispanic American, two are Native American and 13 participants identified as not belonging to the groups mentioned above. Twenty participants chose to not report their race. The authors use the quantitative method because they proposed hypotheses, used questionnaires to get the information and used MANOVAs to make sense of the data. The authors were seeking to understand the relationship between verbal aggression and nonverbal immediacy throughout the workplace and used the participants' experiences as part of the research. College students are at an age where they are about to enter into their career field and want their superior(s) to have high levels of credibility. This study allows students to see the correct ways to use verbal aggression and nonverbal immediacy in the workplace. A group of

158 students from an introductory level communication class at a large Midwestern university (who were not a part of the participants) were randomly assigned into groups to watch one of the four video clips including nonverbal immediacy and verbal aggression for a manipulation check. After that, they were asked to rate the amount of perceived nonverbal immediacy and verbal aggression used by the superior. Based on the original concept of source credibility, the findings indicate that superiors can control subordinates' attitudes towards them through their use of verbal aggression and nonverbal immediacy during a conversation. (Lybarger, et al., 2017).

Discussion: The authors found that using nonverbal immediacy and not using verbally aggressive messages leads to a superior's higher credibility, compared to using verbally aggressive messages and nonverbally immediate messages leads to a superior's lower credibility. Hypothesis 1 A&B is supported because the results show the superior who does not use nonverbal aggression and is non verbally immediate will be perceived with higher credibility than those who use verbal aggression with or without nonverbal immediacy, based on the significantly higher mean scores on all three dimensions. Hypothesis 1C is partially supported because there is little difference between their "Competence" mean scores. Similarly, hypothesis 2 is partially supported because there are little differences in their "Caring" mean scores, whether the superiors use neither verbal aggression nor nonverbal immediacy, or use verbal aggression with or without nonverbal immediacy. Meanwhile, in terms of their mean scores on the other dimensions, superiors who use both verbal aggression and non verbal immediacy have lower "Competence" mean scores than those who use nonverbal immediacy with or without verbal aggression. Although for "Character", superiors who use neither nonverbal immediacy nor verbal aggression have higher mean scores, there is very little difference between superiors who use verbal aggression with or without nonverbal immediacy. (Lybarger, et al., 2017).

Evaluation: We found the article very interesting because we compare both of the joint effects of nonverbal immediacy and verbally aggressive messages, unlike comparing just one factor at a time like previous studies. We agree with the finding that nonverbal immediacy is not always needed in order for a person to be considered "credible." One would think nonverbal immediacy would make others feel more comfortable because it is often used as a means to send positive messages to another person. Other superiors may believe they need to use verbal

aggression in the workplace in order to get their point across, but that is not always the case. We believe talking with subordinates one-on-one or in groups while using nonverbal immediacy without verbal aggression can be a helpful way to give feedback, and thus, influence a subordinate's work for the better. Another subject that can be studied with this similar method would be the relationship between children who grew up with strict parents compared to those who grew up with hardly any structure in their households, and compare how their behavioral attitudes are different. Overall, the article was interesting but some parts of it were boring because the information was very repetitive and unclear. While word repetition helps to emphasize the importance of the key terms in this study, "verbal aggression" and "nonverbal immediacy", the frequency of these terms and how the authors worded them actually confused readers and worsened their readability. For example, reading through the abstract where the authors introduced four video segments, readers are confused by the frequency of the words "use" and "nonuse", as well as the key terms "nonverbal immediacy" and "verbal aggression", because readers do not have the clear understanding of those terms, yet. It became unclear in the area where it talked about the measures being taken. The article said the measurement scale was modified but did not say how it was modified, in terms of the changes in items and semantic differential scale. As a result, making it confusing for the reader as to how the authors use the scale to get the results. (Lybarger, et al., 2017).