ABSTRACT
              Education and communication researchers have not
explored sufficiently teacher credibility or the classroom
communicaticn and experiences of teachers and professors of color, in
particular, teachers and professors belonging to subordinate minority
groups. As a result, there are gaps in the literature due to its
incomplete status. Qualitative case studies of six professors, three
Black and three White, are used to examine the relationship of race
and student perceptions of credibility. The findings from interviews
with 28 undergraduate students, enrolled in one of 6 courses,
indicate that the classroom presents particular challenges for Black
professors teaching at a predominantly White post-secondary
institution. The findings from these student participants suggest
that: (1) the Black professors are held to more stringent credibility
standards than White professors; (2) that the challenges to
credibility are exacerbated when Black professors teach subject
matter that cannot be directly connected with their race; (3) that
students possess favorable/fair attitudes toward Black professors
once they have successfully established their credibility; and (4)
that Black professors are perceived to have worked harder than White
professors to earn their educational and professional status.
(Contains 3 notes and 35 references; survey forms and questions are
attached.) (Author/TB)

Student Perceptions of the Influence of Race on
Professor Credibility

Katherine Grace Hendrix, Ph.D.
University of Memphis
Dept. of Communication Arts
Memphis, Tennessee   38152
      (901)-678-2565

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

Abstract

Education and communication researchers have not
explored sufficiently teacher credibility or the classroom
communication and experiences of teachers and professors of
color - in particular, teachers and professors belonging to
subordinate minority groups. As a result, there are gaps in
the literature due to its incomplete status.

Qualitative case studies of six professors (three Black,
three white) are used to examine the relationship of race and
student perceptions of credibility. The findings from
interviews with twenty-eight undergraduate students, enrolled
in one of six courses, indicate the classroom presents
particular challenges for Black professors teaching at a
predominantly white post-secondary institution. The findings
from these student participants indicate that: 1) Black
professors are held to more stringent credibility standards
than white professors, 2) the challenges to credibility are
exacerbated when Black professors teach subject matter which
cannot be directly connected with their race, 3) students
possess favorable/fair attitudes towards Black professors
once they have successfully established their credibility,
and 4) Black professors are perceived to have worked harder
than their white professors in order to earn their
educational and professional status.

Introduction

Two of the major cognitive goals of an academic
environment are: 1) the acquisition of knowledge, and 2) the
ability to transfer knowledge learned in one context to new
situations. Teacher communication can be viewed as the
interface between knowing and teaching. Teachers serve as
catalysts motivating students to achieve the cognitive and
self-esteem goals associated with an academic environment
and, according to Brophy (1979), teacher behavior can result
in positive classroom outcomes.

According to Bassett and Smythe (1979) two factors
influence a teacher's ability to affect the self-concepts of
students: 1) credibility, and 2) self-esteem. Whereas self-
esteem is personal and internal, "credibility does not reside
in the teacher but rather in the minds of students" (p. 179).
The credibility construct, when applied to teachers, has been
defined by McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb (1974) as
consisting of five dimensions: character, sociability,
composure, extroversion, and competence.

The communication discipline has devoted much attention
to identifying speaker characteristics associated with
credibility. These studies, however, have typically focused
on public speaking or public figures with whom the audience
possessed limited, if any, direct contact. Of 95 studies with
the term "credibility" in the title, only five examined ways
in which teachers established, maintained, and lost
credibility, or the effect of teacher credibility on learning

4

(Beatty & Behnke, 1980; Beatty & Zahn, 1990; Frymier &
Thompson, 1992; McCroskey, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1974; and
McGlone & Anderson, 1973). None of the five teacher
credibility studies employed a qualitative method despite the
complexity of the classroom as evidenced by educational
research within Shulman's (1986) classroom ecology paradigm
(see Endnote 1).

In addition to the absence of research exploring teacher
credibility, education and communication researchers have
overlooked the classroom experiences of teachers and
professors of color. In particular, the experience of being a
member of a subordinate minority (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986)
functioning as a professional within a predominantly white
educational environment has escaped the interest of the white
social scientist (Foster, 1990; Weinberg, 1977). Yet Black
teachers and professors do exist (see Endnote 2).

Black teachers have contributed to the education of
children and adolescents in the United States for two
centuries. With the onset of desegregation, most Black
teachers and principals were dismissed or demoted at the same
time Black students were being enrolled in previously all-
white schools (Coffin, 1980; Smith & Smith, 1973). An
additional dimension of desegregation occurred in the 1970s in
the Northern and Western areas of the United States and
continues today. According to Banks (1986), parents in the
Northern cities were often as violently opposed to desegre-
gation as their Southern counterparts. White flight to the
suburbs was another means of avoiding desegregation under the

guise of desiring neighborhood schools. At present, public schools in the United States are becoming increasingly non-white and poor, and 2) are segregating a disproportionate number of white students from the rest of the student body by assigning them to academically gifted courses.

At the collegiate level, prior to 1900, teaching positions for Blacks were confined to land grant colleges rather than privately supported institutions. Only two Blacks, besides Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, held teaching positions within predominantly white colleges prior to 1900 (Moss, 1958). According to the the United States Equal Opportunity Commission Report (Guess, 1989), 90% of the full-time faculty are white, whereas only 4.1% are Black. The number of Black professors has not increased over the past two decades.

Given the: 1) restricted interactions between Black teacher/professors and white students, 2) negative tenor of race relations within the United States (Guess, 1989; Frisby, 1994), and 3) continued expression of alienation by Black faculty (Cook, 1990; Lopez, 1991), it is logical to speculate that a classroom of predominantly white students may present particular challenges to building credibility and acceptance (and, thus, student learning and self-esteem) for the Black teacher and professor. This is particularly true when one considers the recipient ego-involvement research of Tucker (1971) and Wheeless (1974a, 1974b). According to these researchers, perceived source competence is the most consistent predictor of the selective exposure of receivers. If the basic competence of Black professors is questioned more

than that of white professors, a question naturally arises
regarding parallel behavior on the part of highly prejudiced
receivers. In other words, if highly ego-involved receivers
are less likely to change attitudes and assign positive
credibility ratings, can similar behavior be expected from
highly prejudiced receivers?

Black teachers and professors are expected to motivate
and cultivate student learning and self-esteem while also
instilling a sense of appropriate and inappropriate behavior
yet the classroom experiences of these educators have not been
carefully analoged. In view of the gaps in the extant
literature regarding the: 1) way teachers establish, maintain,
and lose credibility, 2) classroom experience of Black
teachers and professors, and 3) extensive reliance on
quantitative research methods to identify and assess the
impact of credibility, this researcher investi-
gated the credibility (i.e., verbal cues, nonverbal cues, and
perceptions) of Black and white professors teaching at a
predominantly white post-secondary institution. Because
teacher credibility resides in the minds of students, the
focus of this study is on student perceptions of professor
credibility. The research question addressed is:

> RQ: When the professor's race is not the same
>   as the majority of the students' in the
>   class, what verbal and nonverbal communica-
>   tion do the students' view as leading to
>   student perceptions of credibility?

This paper discusses the research methods used to investi-
gate the aforenoted research question as well as: 1) reports

7

and discusses the results, and 2) provides concluding remarks regarding the subject area.

Research Methods

Research Site

Non-participant observation occurred in six under-graduate courses at a large four year research institution in the Northwest reflecting a predominantly white student enrollment. The university was selected as the site of the investigation because the percentage of Black faculty and Black student enrollment was consistently small - certainly, less than the percentage found in the general metropolitan population. The Fall 1993 student enrollment at this research institution was as follows: Native American Indian 1.1%, Black 3.2%, Hispanic 3.3%, Asian 16.1%, and White 76.3%. Thus, out of a student body of 34,000, only 3.2% (1,088) of the students were Black. Yet, according to the 1990 federal census records, 10.1% of the metropolitan area's residents were Black. Black faculty represented 1.5% (60) of the 3,986 faculty whereas white faculty represented 89.6% (3573).

Professor Participants

The participants in this study represented a "purposeful rather than random" sample (Miles & Huberman, p. 36). Six professors (two in phase one, four in phase two) were selected using the following criteria: 1) race, 2) gender, 3) age, 4) teaching experience, and 5) departmental affiliation. The goal was to obtain the

participation of male dyads reflecting professors who worked in the same division and possessed comparable years of teaching experience at the collegiate level. However, three of the professors would be Black and three, white. The criteria were developed to keep constant those variables which might otherwise account for differences (Nisbett & Ross, 1980) in perceived credibility (e.g., gender).

The three dyads represented the social sciences **(Professors Bryan and Wyatt)**; performing arts **(Professors Mearns and Kindred)**; and, an undergraduate professional program **(Professors Samuel and Stone)**. Professors Samuel and Stone - taught within a structured undergraduate professional program. The program admitted approximately 50 competitively-selected undergraduate students each year into a structured series of courses taught over a two year period. The professional program prepared students for immediate entrance into the job market and students moved through the curriculum sequence as a "class." The remaining professors taught undergraduate courses with enrollments ranging from 100 - 400.

Student Participants

A total of twenty-eight students enrolled in one of six courses under observation participated in this study. Data were gathered from nine students in phase one and nineteen students in phase two.

In phase one, on the third week of the quarter a "Professor Credibility Survey" (see Form 1) was disseminated in the classes taught by Professors Bryan and Wyatt. Student

volunteers (those providing identifying information allowing for follow-up contact) were separated by class standing (i.e., sophomore, junior, etc.), race, and major (in the same field as the professor or in another field). Student interviewees were then randomly selected from a volunteer pool within each category. In the second phase of data collection, the selection procedures were adapted due to the limited number of students who volunteered to make themselves available for in-person interviews (see Endnote 3). Student participants selected from the pool of volunteers can be summarized as follows:

Professor Bryan -
Allan	White Male	Freshman
Carrie	Native American Female	Senior
Jay	Pacific Islander Male	Freshman
Marie	White Female	Junior
Steve	Black Male	Senior

Professor Wyatt -
Antoinnette	Black Female	Sophomore
Bill	White Male	Junior
Mark	Black Male	Junior
Patricia	White Female	Junior

Professor Kindred -
Martin	White Male	Freshman
John	White Male	Sophomore
Walter	White Male	Junior
Pete	Black Male	Junior
Kandy	White Female	Freshman
Brenda	White Female	Junior
Darlene	White Female	Senior

Professor Mearns -
Carl	White Male	Freshman
Gary	White Male	Sophomore
Brent	White Male	Senior
Frances	Black Female	Freshman
Sabrina	White Female	Junior
Robin	White Female	Junior
Cantrel	White Female	Senior

Professor Samuel -
Anthony	White Male	Senior
Harriet	Asian Female	Senior

Professor Stone -

Nathan	White Male	Fifth Year
Kramer	White Male	Senior
Dorothy	White Female	Senior

Data Collection Procedures

Three different methods were utilized to address the research questions: 1) non-participant observation (Spradley, 1979; 1980), 2) semi-structured interviews (Ginsburg, Jacobs, & Lopez, in press) of students and professors,and 3) open-ended questionnaires. Findings were triangulated across these three methods (Erickson, 1986; Mathison, 1988).

Non-participant observation schedule In phase one, observations occurred on a daily basis during the first week of the quarter. Observations of one class period were also made during the second, third, fifth, seventh, and tenth weeks of the quarter. In the study's second phase, the communicative behavior of four professors and their interac- tion with students were noted during seven weeks in a ten week quarter. Two of the four professors taught at exactly the same time; therefore, daily observation was not feasible. The schedule was:

Weeks 1, 2, and 3	Daily observations every other class period
Weeks 4 or 5	Observation of two consecutive class periods
Weeks 6, 8, 10	One observation

Such observations served to: 1) generate questions for the student and professor participants, 2) validate between what professors (and students) said they did in class versus what communication the researcher witnessed, and 3)

11

provide the researcher with firsthand knowledge of the

professors'(and, in some cases, some of the students')

communicative behavior. The researcher was generally known

only to the professors during the initial weeks of in-class

observation. During the the third week of the quarter, when

each class was addressed by the researcher (in order to

solicit student interviewees), the researcher's status was

disclosed.

Semi-structured student interviews. Student inter- views

occurred several weeks after the distribution of an open-ended

survey during classtime (see Form 1). Student interviews

assessing the credibility of their professors were critical

because the students were the target audience for the

professors' efforts.

One interview was conducted with each of the twenty-

eight student participants. Most interviews occurred during

Weeks 6 and 7 in the quarter and typically lasted close to 60

minutes (see Appendix 1). Interviews were generally conducted

in the researcher's office. When a student arrived, the

person was greeted and left alone for several minutes to

review the Student Consent Form. The time alone was also

designed to give each student a glimpse of the researcher by

seeing her space within the office, family photos, books, etc.

as well as those of her officemates.

Professor credibility survey. The term "credibility" was

first used during Week 3 when the researcher addressed each

professor's class in order to explain the research pro- ject,

distribute the Professor Credibility Survey document to each

student, and to persuade students to provide identifying information which would allow for follow-up appointments and interviews. In each case, the professor left the room.

Once at the front of the room, the researcher introduced herself and explained her objective of investigating how professors communicate to build, maintain, and even lose credibility. The researcher then explained that her triangulated design called for input from the herself, professors, and students. An overlay of page one of the survey was placed on the overhead and three options were discussed: 1) do not complete the survey, 2) complete only the demographic and open-ended questions while leaving Section B (name and phone number) blank, and 3) complete all sections of the survey including identifying information.

Data Analysis

In-class observations. Handwritten field notes were taken during each observation and the class session was also audio-recorded using a microcassette recorder. Over the course of the quarter, the researcher observed each professor's non-verbal communicative strategies including proximity, eye-contact, facial expression, clothing, and voice tone. Verbal strategies such as sharing personal stories, asking questions, use of humor, statements regarding classroom philosophy, etc. were also noted and coded (as well as the structure of the entire class period - including the day's lesson) to create a communicative profile.

The handwritten notes from each observation also accounted for the researcher's location, the physical loca-

tion of items (and some people) in the classroom, and student
responses to each professor's communicative behavior. For
instance, did students avail themselves of time allotted for
questions? The analysis of classroom communication served as
one source of questions for the student and professor inter-
views and assisted in understanding particular examples
provided by students during their interviews.

Student interviews. Most of the student interviews were
conducted in the researcher's office. Students were asked to
comment upon their responses on the Professor
Credibility Survey as well as additional questions. In the
case of students and professors, the researcher listened to
the participant responses and took handwritten notes while
also audio-recording the interview. When analyzing the data
from student interviews, the audio- recording was played while
handwriting the student comments verbatim. The verbatim
transcript was cross-checked against the written information,
provided by the student, on the Professor Credibility Survey
and the researcher's handwritten notes taken during the actual
interview.

Each interview's transcription was reread with margi- nal
and reflective researcher comments jotted in the left margin
along with location of the comment on the audio-tape. Key
phrases or words within the transcript were occasionally
circled or underlined. Marginal comments included noted areas
of similarity with other respondents - including professors.
Matrices were then constructed to visually display the
student's responses to a particular set of key questions and

the researcher's general impression of each interview. During the process of visually gridding participant responses, interviews were re-read or listened to in order to ensure that key points and depth were not lost during the process of reducing the data to fit in the matrix.

In sum, professor and student interviews were transcribed from audiotapes with the characteristics associated with credibility and the influence of race given particular attention. Who (gender, race, class) perceived what (Hymes, 1972) was transferred from narrative form into matrices in order to examine possible relationships.

Professor credibility survey. The researcher balanced the potential for providing socially desirable answers by contrasting the survey and interview responses of the interviewees with those provided by "volunteers" and "non-volunteers" enrolled in the same course. Every student survey was read and coded then re-read and coded again at another time in the quarter. Key words, themes, and perceived components of credibility associated with each survey question were noted across gender and race. Tallies of responses (e.g., yes, no, probably) were also compiled depending upon the nature of the survey question to which students responded.

Results

Race and Credibility

RQ: When the professor's race is not the same as the majority of the students' in the class, what verbal and nonverbal communication do the students' view as leading to student perceptions of credibility?

This research question called for student-generated criteria for assessing credibility when the professor's race differed from that of the majority of the students enrolled in the course. The nature of the institutional enrollment patterns focused this question on students of the Black professors. However, all interviewees were asked how they would assess the credibility of a Black professor.

When providing answers to the RQ, the student interviewees provided answers which can be categorized as follows: 1) applying more stringent credibility standards to Black professors, 2) the combination of professor race and subject matter as a criterion for assessing professor credibility, 3) the presence of favorable/fair attitudes towards Black professors once credibility had been established, and 4) the belief that Black professors worked harder to earn their educational and professional status than white professors.

Applying more stringent credibility criteria to Black professors. The majority of the student interviewees (19) indicated that race alone would not automatically establish a professor's credibility in the classroom. Unlike Patricia who believed, if anything, she would rate Black professors higher on credibility scales because she hadn't had the exposure, most of these student interviewees indicated they would typically use the same standards when assessing the credibility of both Black and white professors and usually repeated the same criteria they had listed on the Professor Credibility Survey in response to question

two - What does it mean to say a professor is credible?" For

instance, **Carl** mentioned he based his assessment on the

individual's educational background (as listed in the college

catalog), classroom "presence," and knowledge while **Dorothy**

said credibility assessment depended on "how they set it up.

How I get a feel for what I need to do."   However, one of

the students, **Cantrel,** did note "I think the white male has

an advantage over everybody else just because of our bias in

the culture. For me, I'm more sensitive to whether it's a

man or a woman..."

Although students stated they would not automatically

favor one race over another some of their discourse revealed

that Black professors had to work harder to establish their

credibility. **Carrie** and **Mark** (both people of color) were

very cognizant that the qualifications of Black professors

were often questioned by white students enrolled in their

courses. During their interviews, both students spoke of

overheard comments and conversations in class as well as open

challenges to the authority of Black professors during class

lectures. And Professor Bryan's student, **Allan,** noted that

he tried to "embrace differences" yet he also mentioned that

given his homogeneous upbring, the physical appearance of his

professors did have an impact. Allan was unable to clearly

delineate whether the impact was a bias in favor of his

professors of color or a bias in favor of those professors

his same race.

In addition to scrutiny from white students, three Black

interviewees noted their own critical review of Black

17

professors. Even though **Antoinnette** was Black, she revealed that she constantly fought the negative stereotypes (e.g., Blacks can't do math) she had learned from American society when making judgments about her Black professors. A second student, **Pete** said Black professors would not begin with an automatic advantage and, in fact, would be judged harder than his white professors. Pete indicated he had greater expectations of his Black professors and, as a result, would be more stringent in his evaluation of their capabilities and ability to meet his needs as a student. **Steve** expected both Black and white professors to be knowledgeable, however, he gave the judgments he made about the capabilities of Black professors greater weight. This decision was based upon the "tougher" time he perceived Black professors to have experienced while earning higher degrees in a Anglicized educational environment.

Thus, ironically, negative stereotypes about the intelligence and academic preparation of Black professors co-existed with a positive belief (predominantly with the students of color) that Blacks must be quite accomplished individuals to be employed as professors as they must work harder than whites to acheive professor status.

The combination of professor race and subject matter as a criterion for assessing credibility. **Antoinnette** spoke of, even as a Black person, struggling with not assigning negative stereotypes to Black professors teaching courses without an ethnic/racial component in them. The tendency to find credence in the comments of Black professors speaking

about Blacks or subjects typically connected with Blacks (e.g., crime) was also reflected in the comments of seven other students.

Student interviewees admitted they assigned more credibility to Blacks teaching "ethnic" courses or believed other students - in particular, whites - would do so. For example, three of **Professor Mearns'** students (**Cantrel,Gary,** and **Frances**) believed other students would perceive him differently if he were teaching a course with "classical" content only. As Cantrel talked, she stated the belief that for herself (and others),

> the more removed from cultural identity,
> the more you have to figure out the
> fit...[like fitting] a square peg into a
> round hole

Thus, Professor Mearns would have a more difficult time establishing his credibility if his Blackness could not be somehow linked with subject and attributed as providing him with a unique understanding of the subject.

Two other students indicated they personally would assign more credibility to a Black professor teaching English (**Brent**) or Ethnic Studies courses (**Sabrina**). Brent explained he would judge all of his professors based on how "they handle themself in front of the class...whether they are well-versed in the subject matter and how they articulate [their points]." However, he went on to say a Black professor who was able to teach standard English, given the distinctions between Black dialects and standard English, would be given "an extra plus."

Sabrina indicated a white person teaching an ethnic studies course could be viewed as credible if s/he met her criteria of believability, truth, and experience. However, even a white person with experience living with particular minorities could only present a marginalized view - "they can only get so close" - versus obtaining the perspective of an actual member of the community. Sabrina went on to say, "I'd want a minority perspective...[but] I don't think I'd typify any other subject like that."

Finally, one of the Black student interviewees - **Pete** - introduced his expectations regarding white professors. Pete indicated he expected "more liberalism" from his professors depending upon their disciplinary area. Thus, he did not speak of assigning more credibility to professors of color teaching race-related courses, rather, he spoke of a different system of dividing curriculum. Pete believed professors teaching courses in the social sciences would likely be more liberal and well-rounded in their world outlook than those in the hard sciences or disciplinary areas such as math.

Favorable/Fair attitudes towards Black professors once credibility has been established. Students indicated a desire to be exposed to Black professors based on positive experiences with Black professors, the desire to rectify limited or no exposure to Blacks in the past, previous exposure to Blacks in general, and the desire to increase their comfort level (as Black students) at a predominantly white institution.

Gary said he usually would give anyone a "fair shake"
based on their personality and knowlege and would begin to
form judgments about a professor's credibility after the
first week. Gary indicated Professor Mearns was his first
Black professor and had "set a precedent" in his mind as he
was definitely credible and a good teacher. The first
exposure to a Black professor setting a precedent - a
standard of expected performance - was also reflected in
Walter's comments. Walter had been exposed to three Black
professors during this community college education and noted
that he realized, as we talked, that his criteria for
assessing credibility were drawn from experiences with his
Black female drama teacher. His criteria for judging
credibility included: 1) believability (reliability of the
lecture material, clear explanations, and an ability to
answer questions) and 2) pproachability ("humanity").

As noted earlier, **Cantrel** indicated she had worked with
Blacks and Asians but she had not experienced Blacks within
her close inner-circle of friends. Cantrel openly admitted
that she was concerned that her daughter did not mingle with
people of color because she did not see her mother doing so.
Allan, Marie, and **Patricia** (all white students like Cantrel)
indicated a desire for exposure to a less homogeneous
environment. One way of achieving this was to expose oneself
to Black professors. **Professor Bryan** recognized the
importance of his presence for the benefit of white students
as well as students of color.

A number of the student interviewees - **Gary, Brent, Robin, Martin, Walter,** and **Kramer** - had previous exposure to Blacks. The implication from the interviews is that they possess less bias against Blacks in general due to having Black friends and role models. **Brent** said his "Black friends [gave] a more understandable, straightforward answer [than his white friends]" when he has problems and, thus, he expected the same will be true of his Black professors in the way they handle their classes - they would be more easily understood. **Robin** said, "White professors I don't really think much of...they're common..." She went on to say she also understood that among Black people, including professors, "there are wonderful ones (pause), crappy ones (pause)...they're just people like everybody else." In other words, Robin believed she was capable of making fair assessments because undue negative or positive stereotypes were not applied to Blacks as she had been exposed to a range of personalities. The same was true of her counterparts Gary, Brent, Martin, Walter, and Kramer.

Martin, Anthony, Kramer, and **Robin** all indicated they would welcome a Black professor as they believed he would present a different world view. Both Black student interviewees, **Pete** and **Frances,** indicated being in the presence of Black professors increased their comfort level. These students represent 3.2% of the student body and stand out in obvious contrast to the number white students enrolled at this research institution. The comfort level of Black students in a predominantly white environment (and for new

22

Black professors in the same environment) were areas of acknowledged concern on the part of all three Black professor participants - **Professors Bryan, Mearns,** and **Samuel.**

The belief that Black professors work harder to earn their academic positions. In phase one, all five of the students of color believed Black professors had to work harder to earn their academic degrees and to become employed at predominantly white educational institutions. Black professors were believed to deserve more respect because they experienced a "tougher" time earning their position and must "work twice as hard." **Jay,** a freshman of Pacific Islander descent, said he did not give professors of any particular race an automatic advantage. However, he acknowledged that his professors are judged "not just by sight" but, rather, by "what [they've] been through," Jay indicated he perceived "colored" persons, like Professor Bryan, as being more aggressive in his studies in order to reach the same status as their white counterparts.

Pete agreed with his counterparts and, as a result, indicated he was usually very impressed when he met Black professors - especially given Pete's more stringent expectations of them. Two white students - **Brent** and **Robin** - also noted their belief that Black professors face many more academic and work place challenges than white professors. Robin, interestingly, combined race and age as a criterion for a professor's credibility. She believed older Black professors and older female professors to have "really been

ahead" of their time to become successful prior to the
passage of fairly recent anti-discriminatory legislation.

Discussion

The findings associated with the research question
are summarized here along with a discussion of: 1) phenomena
reflected in recurring patterns of the data, 2) study
limitations, and 3) reflections from an "outsider within."

Summary

Most of these students did not personally believe any
professor had an automatic advantage in establishing
credibility based on race yet they simultaneously discussed
a different and, even more stringent, set of criteria for
evaluating the credibility of their Black professors. When
doing so, one of the students articulated her belief that
there was a "cultural" or "societal" norm which would
automatically favor the white, male professor before he even
spoke.

Several of the students acknowledged that it may be more
difficult for Black professors to establish their credibility
in subject areas which were not linked to their race - e.g.,
Ethnic Studies vs. Electrical Engineering. Several noted
even though they would use the same criteria for a Black and
white professor teaching math and science, they believed
their white counterparts would use more rigorous standards
before assessing a Black professor as being credible.

Students typically seemed interested in Black professors
because they were accustomed to Blacks (used to friends, role

models, or Black teachers/professors) or because they were tired of a homogeneous, white upbringing and desired exposure to differing world views.

Finally, students (especially students of color) acknowledged their belief that Black professors must work harder to achieve academically and perform successfully as professionals within Anglicized educational systems.

Overall, these student interviewees wanted their professors, Black or white, to be knowledgeable, experienced in their subject area, effective users of teaching techniques, and skilled demonstrators/deliverers of their subject matter content. Yet students, in general, desired more evidence of the exact nature of the academic and experiential credentials of their Black professors.

Recurring Phenomena

<u>Researcher status and influence</u>. Common experiences between the researcher and student interviewees were noted - specifically, being persons of color and/or women (see Appendix 2) - which made the interview process enjoyable and comfortable. The researcher's race and gender attracted most of the students to volunteer for the interview as well as the opportunity to share their thoughts regarding appropriate teaching pedagogy. Two white males (one in phase one, one in phase two) can best be described as "curious" rather than attracted to any of the researcher's characteristics or the research topic. One possible explanation of this phenomenon may be related to the perceived credibility of the researcher.

Few students of color volunteered (in phase two) to
provide identifying information for follow-up interviews when
participants were solicited during the fall term. The timing
within the academic year may have influenced the willingness
of students of color to volunteer -- for instance, incoming
freshman and transfer students possibly
being preoccupied with learning their new academic
environment and professor expectations.

Student self-protection of identity. None of the
student participants sat near, waved at, or approached the
researcher before, during, or after the class. A student
interviewee would occasionally smile, however, it was a
ritualistic salutory greeting which they executed with others
entering the class as well. When the researcher and the
interviewee completed an interview and walked to a course
designated for observation together, it was common for
students to sit in a different location rather than sitting
next to or in the same row as the researcher. Students
protected their identity as study partici- pants from their
classmates and professors and, nonverbally, communicated they
expected the researcher to do so as well.

Study Limitations

The absence of interviews over time. Extra credit could
not be offered to student participants as no other extra
credit was offered by these professors; therefore,
making it impossible to camouflage the activity. Given that
students were not being compensated for their time, their
time commitment to the study was minimized. The researcher

balanced the potential for providing socially desirable

answers by contrasting the survey and interview responses of

the interviewees with those provided by "volunteers" and

"non-volunteers" enrolled in the same class.

The nature of the data collection site. This research

was conducted in a geographic area in the United States where

10.1% of the population in the metropolitan area was Black

whereas only 1.5% of the faculty and 3.2% of

the student body were Black. The tolerance of racial

differences and exposure to Blacks in one's community may

vary in other geographic areas.

Reflections from an "Outsider Within"

The researcher approached this study from the particular

vantage point of what Collins (1991) refers to as the

"outsider within." The researcher is a Black female

investigating cases in a predominantly white educational

institution. Before concluding, a few reflections are noted

here to provide a glimpse into the psyche of an "outsider

within."

> 1. Most of the twenty-eight student interviewees
>   were positively disposed towards the six
>   professors in this study. The students viewed
>   their professors as knowledgeable and, in most
>   cases, as good teachers. However, it is impor-
>   tant not to overlook the: a) continued self-
>   concerns of these Black professors even after
>   years of teaching, and b) recognition by the
>   student interviewees that other white students
>   do not readily accept Black professors and view
>   them as credible. These student interviewees
>   likely reflect a minority perspective rather
>   than that of the majority --thus, it is critical
>   to acknowledge and give credence to the Black
>   professors' beliefs that generally white
>   students (and some Black students) assess them
>   according to a more stringent standard. The
>   positive orientation of white student

interviewees in this research is likely
atypical of many whites in the classroom.

2. White confederates were not used to assist in
    the interview process. In my view, the use of
    white confederates denies: a) the commonplace
    of underlying racial tension in everyday
    interaction within the United States
    "settlement," (Lofland & Lofland, 1984), b)
    creates a second order, contrived reality, c)
    eliminates an opportunity for Black researchers
    to refine "disciplined subjectivity" in such a
    communicative event, and d) diminishes the
    importance of the reality associated with
    Black/white encounters. According to Allen,
    Heckel, & Garcia (1980), "...the journey
    outside the fishbowl for neophyte black
    researchers will be fraught with obstacles and
    pitfalls, for it is they who must chart an
    insightful course for those who will follow"
    (p.770).

3. Most of the student interviewees were attracted
    not only to the research topic (classroom
    communication and professor credibility), but to
    the researcher as well. Students came to
    participate in the study and to: a) commiserate
    with another woman they admired somewhat for her
    level of academic accomplishment, b) commiserate
    with another person of color within the oasis of
    her office, and c) seek advice about how to
    approach a Black classmate and/or make Black
    friends on campus. When the interview progressed
    to a discussion about the credibility of Black
    professors, some white students also chose to
    discuss their ideas about race relations, in
    general, noting that they appreciated the
    opportunity to talk out loud with someone. They
    apparently viewed the researcher as a "safe"
    person and her office as a non-threatening
    environment.

As a researcher, I was cognizant of the need to

balance my roles and their corresponding responsibilities.

It was necessary to anticipate what roles I would perform

(researcher, person of color, confidant, advisor, etc.), what

behavior each role entailed, and how the roles could be

executed without sacrificing the integrity of the research.

A parallel can easily be drawn between the multiple roles of

this Black female researching in a predominantly white academic environment and the three Black male professors teaching within the same environment -- even though the professors were male, we all functioned as "outsiders within" performing our requisite tasks and recognizing additional responsibilties and obligations as well.

Conclusion

Although many classroom studies have been conducted over the past 40 years assessing teachers' effectiveness in the classroom, few have investigated how teachers establish and maintain their credibility. In addition, education and communication literature is incomplete as the classroom perspective and pedagogical knowledge of Black professors and teachers has often been overlooked. Black teachers have been educating children and adolescents for over 200 years in the United States, yet their classroom experiences have been chronicled only to a limited degree. According to Rose (1966), universities reflect the ills of society rather than serving as agents for change. Therefore, it is likely that the classroom experiences of Black teachers and professors do not completely parallel those of their white counter- parts, yet they are expected to motivate and teach students as well as meet promotional requirements - (e.g., tenure).

Given the pivotal role of teachers and professors within the educational system and the disparate student perceptions and expectations of professors based upon race, as reflected in the findings of this study, it is imperative

that additional research be conducted. We must add to our body of knowledge by incorporating the educational experiences of teachers and professors of color and the perspectives and experiences of students. Such knowledge may increase the: 1) successful classroom and career experiences for professors of color, and 2) cognitive, behavioral, and affective development of students.

Endnotes

1.   The credibility literature review spans the 80 year
        period from 1915-1994. These journals were reviewed
        Association for Communication Administration Bulletin,
        Central States Speech Journal, _Communication Educa-_
        tion, _Communication Monographs,_ _Communication_
        Quarterly, _Critical Studies in Mass Communication,_
        Human Communication Research, _Journal of_
        Communication, _Philosophy and Rhetoric,_ _Southern_
        Communication Journal, _Quarterly Journal of Speech,_
        and the _Western Journal of SpeechCommunication._

2.   "Black" is being used as a formal name designating
        nationality parallel to the term "African-American."
        The term "Black" is capitalized in recognition that,
        due to slavery, most Blacks cannot identify a speci-
        fic tribe or nationality associated with an "old
        country" whereas it is more likely that whites can
        associate themselves with a particular nationality
        and/or ethnicity.

3.   In phase one, 84 surveys were completed in Professor
        Bryan's class and of these 20 contained identifying
        information to allow contact for interviews. 219
        completed surveys were returned in Professor Wyatt's
        class. Of the 219, 53 contained identifying informa-
        tion allowing contact for interviews.

        An adaptation of the selection procedure noted on
        page seven became necessary due to the limited number
        of students who volunteered to make themselves avail-
        able for in-person interviews. In the large group
        instruction courses taught by Professors Mearns and
        Kindred, the response to the credibility survey was
        79% and 45% respectively. However, only 16% (25)
        of the total respondents identified themselves in
        manner allowing selection for interviews in Mearns'
        course and 22% (17) in Kindred's.   In the case of
        Professors Samuel and Stone, who taught courses
        with enrollments approximating 48 and 40, there was
        a 88% (42) and 60% (23) total return respectively.
        However, only 7% (3) of the total respondents iden-
        tified themselves in a manner allowing for interviews
        in Samuel's course and 13% (3) in Stone's.

        Given the low percentages of students willing to
        participate in a one hour interview, the original
        selection procedures were adapted. All six students
        enrolled in the courses taught by Professors Samuel
        and Stone were automatically selected for interviews.
        It is also important to note that, given the
        structured program, most students enrolled in the
        courses taught by these two professors were juniors,
        seniors and, to a lesser degree, fifth-year students.

In **Professor Kindred's** course, three white males were selected from the freshman, sophomore, and junior respondents volunteering for interviews as well as the only two Black males willing to volunteer for an interview. Of the two Black males, only one actually scheduled an interview. Three white females were also selected, representing three of the four class levels - freshman, junior, and senior.

In the case of **Professor Mearns,** three white males and one Asian (the only person of color to provide identifying information allowing follow-up for an interview) were selected along with three white females and the only Black female to provide identifying information. Ultimately, the student of Asian descent did not show for his interview.

References

Allen, S.S., Heckel, R.V., & Garcia, S.J. (1980). The Black researcher: A view from inside the goldfish bowl. American Psychologist, 35(8), 767-771.

Banks, J.A. (1986). Race, ethnicity, and schooling in the United States. In J.A. Banks, & J. Lynch (Eds), Multicultural education in western societies (pp. 30-50). New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Bassett, R.E., & Smythe, M. (1979). Communication and instruction. New York: Harper and Row.

Beatty, M.J., & Behnke, R.R. (1980). Teacher credibility as a function of verbal content and paralinguistic cues. Communication Quarterly, 9(1), 55-59.

Beatty, M.J., & Zahn, C.J. (1990). Are student ratings of communication instructors due to "easy" grading practices?: An analysis of teacher credibility and student reported performance levels. Communication Education, 39, 275-282.

Brophy, J.E. (1979). Teacher behavior and its effects. Journal of Educational Psychology, 71, 733-750.

Coffin, G. (1980). The Black principal - the vanishing American. Professional Psychology, 11(5), 39-44.

Collins, P.H. (1991). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. In M.M. Fonow and J.A. Cook (Eds.), Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research (pp. 35-59). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Cook, D.A. (1990). Alienation of Black college students on white campuses: University-centered and student-centered interventions. Educational Considerations, 18, 19-22.

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching (pp. 119-161). New York: Macmillan.

Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J.U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of 'acting white'." The Urban Review, 18(3), 176-206.

Foster, M. (1990). The politics of race: Through the eyes of African-American teachers. Journal of Education, 172(3), 123-141.

Frisby, M.K. (1994, March). Weathering the storm: Ron Brown's nightmarish year at the Commerce Department. Emerge, pp. 46-50.

Frymier, A.B., & Thompson, C.A. (1992). Perceived affinity-

seeking in relation to perceived teacher credibility. <u>Communication Education</u>, <u>41</u>(4), 388-399.

Ginsburg, H.P., Jacobs, S.F., & Lopez, L.S. (in press). Assessing mathematical thinking and learning potential.

Guess, J.M. (1989). Race: The challenge of the 90s. <u>Crisis</u>, <u>96</u>, 28-30, 32-33.

Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J.J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (Eds.), <u>Directions in sociolinguistics: Ethnography of communication</u> (pp. 35-71). New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Lofland, J., & Lofland, L.H. (1984). <u>Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis.</u> Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lopez, T.R. (1991). <u>Some African-American and Hispanic voices from the University of Toledo: A monograph</u>. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 328153)

Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? <u>Educational Research,</u> <u>17</u>, 5-12.

McCroskey, J.C., Holdridge, W., & Toomb, J.K. (1974). An instrument for measuring the source credibility of basic speech communication instructors. <u>The Speech Teacher</u>, <u>23</u>, 26-33.

McGlone, E.L., & Anderson, L.J. (1973). The dimensions of teacher credibility. <u>The Speech Teacher</u>, <u>22</u>, 196-200.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1984). <u>Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods</u>. Newbury Park: Sage.

Moss, J.A. (1958). Negro teachers in predominantly white colleges. <u>Journal of Negro Education</u>, <u>27</u>(4), 451-462.

Nisbett, R., & Ross, L. (1980). <u>Human inference: Strategies and shortcomings of social judgment</u>. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rose, H.M. (1966). An appraisal of the Negro educator's situation in the academic marketplace. <u>Journal of Negro Education</u>, <u>35</u>(1), 18-26.

Shulman, L.S. (1986). Paradigms and research programs in the study of teaching: A contemporary perspective. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), <u>Handbook of Research on Teaching</u> (pp. 3-36), New York: Macmillan.

Smith, J.W., & Smith, B.M. (1973). For black educators: Integration brings the axe. <u>The Urban Review</u>, <u>6</u>(3), 7-12.

Spradley, J.P. (1979). <u>The ethnographic interview</u>. New

York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Spradley, J.P. (1980). Participant observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Tucker, R.K. (1971). Reliability of semantic differential scales: The role of factor analysis. Western Speech, 35, 185-190.

Walters, R. (1990). White racial nationalism in the United States. Urban League Review, 13, 141-164.

Weinberg, M. (1977). A chance to learn: The history of race and education in the United States. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wheeless, L.R. (1974a). The relationship of attitude and credibility to comprehensive and selective exposure. Western Speech, 33(2), 88-97.

Wheeless, L.R. (1974b). The effect of attitude, credibility, and homophily on selective exposure to information. Speech Monographs, 41(4), 329-338.

FORM 1

Professor Credibility Survey

Section A _____

Gender (circle one)   **Male**   **Female**

Major: _____

Year in School (circle one)   **Freshman**   **Sophomore**   **Junior**   **Senior**   **Other**

Race/Ethnicity (circle one)   **Black/African American**   **Pacific Islander**   **Hispanic American**

                              White/Anglo American   **American Indian** **Asian American**

                              International Student (specify country) _____

If you are willing to participate in a one hour interview with me regarding your impressions of this

class and Professor _____, please complete BOTH Sections B and C.

Your name will NOT be used in my final report and Dr. —— will NOT know you spoke with me.

If you are NOT interested in the one hour interview leave Section B blank & complete Section C.

Section B _____

Name   _____

Phone Number   _____

Convenient Times to Call   _____

Section C _____

Is Professor —— credible? Please discuss why or why not.

Section C (continued) _____

What does it mean to say a professor is credible?

What other words are the same as or similar to "credible"?

What was your first impression of Professor — on the very first day of class? Why?

Thank you for assisting me with this research project.   October 1993

APPENDIX 1

Student Interview Questions

<u>Review and sign the student consent form. Get approval to audiotape.</u>

<u>Review survey questions. Any changes from Week 3?</u>

1. Is Professor _____ credible? Please discuss why or why not?
2. What does it mean to say a professor is credible?
3. What verbal and nonverbals cues does Professor _____ use to communicate credibility?
4. What other words are the same as or similar to "credible?"
5. What was your first impression of Professor _____ on the very first day of class?

<u>Additional Questions</u>:

1. What is your major at ------------ university??
2. Have you attended other postsecondary institutions?
3. Have you enrolled in _____ courses before?
4. Why are you taking _____?
5. What do you know about your _____ professor?
6. What traits do you believe good teachers possess? Is the same true of professors at the collegiate level?
7. Tell me about the verbal and nonverbal communication of the best professor/teacher you've had and the worst.
8. When there isn't anyone around to hand you a survey, do you normally make judgments about professors' credibility on the first day of classes?
9. Have you ever had any Black professors?
10. If you walk into two different classrooms and the professor in one class is Black and the other white, what standards do you use to judge their credibility? Does one have an automatic advantage over the other?
11. Do you think if another interviewer, a white interviewer were asking you these questions that your answers would be the same?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Debriefing begins...

Interviewer/Interviewee Empathy Demonstrated in the Talk

Interviewer and **Carrie**:

K: <u>Now</u> are they teaching>>...what subjects?
     Native American Studies or are they across
     disciplines?

C: Ummm they teach ummm a American Indian
     Studies (K: um hum). Which is a (unintelli-
     gible) North Western Indians whatever. And I
     had a dance class. It was a Indian dance
     class. (K: um hum) I had the carving class.
     (laughs)

K: Now< what was the last one?

C: Carving (pause) class.

K: Carving!

C: Carving. Yeah, Native American carving.

K: Um hum. Are you artistically inclined?
     This doesn't...this question isn't even on
     the sheet but I'm just curious.

C: No. (voice rises) l'm not>>. I just (laughs)
     wanted...(we both burst into laughter). I
     know how to <u>dance</u>, though (laughs).

Later in the interview:
K: I've got one more question for you. If you
     had a ...We're both people of color and what
     I' curious about is>>> (she makes affirming
     facial expressions and we both laugh) if you
     had a (I say, "Yeah"... "I'll be finished in
     just a sec.") ummm interviewer
     asking you these same questions about Dr.

Perhaps my lack   and about race>, but the interviewer was
of comfort is   white, do you think that would have affected ?
revealed by the   your answer
length of time
it takes to
ask the question   [I must learn to be succinct.]

C: Yeah. (laughs) I think it would have. Cause the
     person would have said, "Well, what about race?"
     And I would have said (voice rises with an agitated
     tone), "Well, <u>what about</u> race?" (K: Um hum.
     hum - emphathetic sound) I'd say, "Well, why do
     you wanna know?" I think I'd be kinda

(unintelligible). I think I'd just sit there
and answer and not say nothin...Act like I'm
dumb. (K: um hum) I wouldn't give em much
(laughs) I don't know. (K: um hum - empathetic
tone) Act dumb. (K: um hum) I wouldn't give em much
information. (K: Okay) What are you trying to
probe around for? (she is still posing questions
for the white interviewer)

K: So you trust me.

C: Yeah. I trust you. (laughs) You're not someone
that often would take us down. NO! (K: We
both laugh and I say, "It would be kinda hard. It
would take awhile.")