

**Literature Review**  
**Ask Principal Donna™**  
**7/02/07**

**Student Perceptions of the Influence of Race on Professor Credibility**

**Step 1: Citation**

Hendrix, K. G. (July 1998). Student Perceptions of the Influence of Race on Professor Credibility. *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 28 No. 6, 738—763.

**Step 2: Purpose and General Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the teacher credibility research that, according to Hendrix (1998), had "...overlooked the classroom experiences of teachers and professors of color." Because teacher effectiveness in the classroom is highly influenced by the teacher's credibility and self esteem, Hendrix studied these factors from the viewpoint of students in the classes of a cross section of male professors. Hendrix (1998) studied, "...student and professor perceptions regarding how a) credibility is communicated in the classroom and b) how race influences student perceptions of professor credibility."

**Step 3: Fit and Specific Rationale**

Existing research on teacher credibility has spanned a period of 80 years from 1915 to 1996. According to Brophy (1979), "Two factors influence a teachers ability to affect the self-concepts of students: (a) credibility and (b) self-esteem." This existing research has never been done with teachers of color, hence the author has taken the research a step further in focusing on the credibility of teachers of color in their own eyes and those of their students. Numbers of studies have been conducted on credibility of teachers, omitting teachers of color, however, and these studies have identified the five dimensions of the credibility construct, McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb (1974), as character, sociability, composure, extroversion, and competence. Of the 99 studies that can be identified on credibility of teachers, Hendrix found only 5 that explored ways in which teachers established, maintained or lost credibility (Beatty & Behnke, 1980; Beatty & Zahn, 1990; Frymier & Thompson, 1992; McCroskey et al., 1974; McGlone & Anderson, 1973).

Since no studies had been done on teachers of color, the author chose to study a mix of White and Black professors in a post-secondary institution that was predominantly White. The classes chosen were undergraduate classes. The percentage of Black faculty and students was low in comparison to the demographics of the area.

**Step 4: Participants**

The author, Katherine Grace Hendrix, is a Black female whose research is focused on the experiences of professors of color in predominantly White undergraduate institutions. She is an assistant professor and basic communication director at University of Memphis. She earned her Ph.D. from University of Washington.

Hendrix has a stake in how Black professors are perceived and will positively affect the future for professors and teachers of color in general with her work. Six professors were selected for the study, 3 White and 3 Black, with comparable years of

experience at the college level. 28 students volunteered to undergo a one hour interview over 2 phases of the project. Various categories were determined from which volunteers were selected from a pool. These categories included class standing, race and major. All students of color were accepted due to the small number who volunteered, thereby guaranteeing a diverse pool.

### **Step 5: Context**

The study took place at a predominantly White post-secondary institution in the Pacific Northwest. The proportions of Black students and faculty to White was exceedingly small. In fact, only 1.5% of the faculty out of 3,986 were Black. White faculty represented 89.6%. Black students at the university were 3.2% as compared to 76.3% White.

### **Step 6: Steps in Sequence**

1. In class observations
2. Henrix addressed the classes to introduce the study and to invite participants to come forward. Anonymity was guaranteed.
3. Open-ended survey during class time
4. Student interviews
5. Data was analyzed and charted
6. Results were determined and analyzed

### **Step 7: Data**

#### Phase I:

1. Observations took place on a daily basis during the 1<sup>st</sup> week of the quarter
2. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> weeks, observations of 1 class period took place

#### Phase II:

3. Week 3, Henrix addressed the classes to introduce the study and to invite participants to come forward. Anonymity was guaranteed.
4. During 7 weeks in a 10 week quarter, the communicative behavior of 4 professors and their interaction with students were noted
5. Students filled out an open-ended survey during class time
6. During weeks 6 & 7, one hour interviews took place with each student and the researcher to assess the credibility of their professors
  - a. Prior to the interview, the student was allowed to sit alone for some time in the researcher's office to become familiar with the interviewer and to relate in some way that would allow some disclosure of the interviewer to propagate greater comfort and trust on the part of the interviewee toward the interviewer
7. Data was analyzed
  - a. Took handwritten notes on participant responses while also audio recording the interviews
  - b. This data was cross checked against the information provided on the Professor Credibility Survey & researchers notes
  - c. Matrices were constructed to visually display this data

- i. Stage 1: Construction of a checklist matrix that allowed quick comparisons between the male/female and White/non-White students within one particular professor's class
  - ii. Stage 2: Matrix grew class by class to allow a cross-class comparison
  - iii. Stage 3: Data from the 6 professors was added and became a roll ordered matrix as well as a check-list
  - iv. Stage 4: Matrix became a checklist by role over time as the visual display could be viewed as Phase 1, Phase 2 etc.
8. Results were determined and analyzed

### **Step 8: Analysis**

Data analysis was arrived at through notes taken during class observations, results of the open-ended surveys, and interviews with students and professors. The author developed a matrix to chart the data and as it developed, it became cross-class data. Care was taken to cross reference survey data with notes and audio-tapes of interviews to assure accurate data. A visual charting of the data through a role over time display was used to present the data. The matrix became a checklist by role over time.

### **Step 9: Results**

Students defined credibility in two ways according to Hendrix' study (1998), (a) being knowledgeable or (b) being knowledgeable and a good teacher. Experiential knowledge was especially important to the students. The ability of a teacher to translate their knowledge into statements and explanations easily understood by students was an important criteria. In regards to credibility, student interviews identified that more stringent standards were applied to professors depending on race and subject matter. A belief persisted that Black professors had to work harder than White professors to earn their educational and professional status. Race alone would also not guarantee a professor's credibility. More credibility was assigned to Black professors who taught ethnic classes. White professors could only provide a marginalized view in such classes. In other cases, their were varied responses. Believability and approachability were important in establishing credibility. The differing world-view brought by Black professors was welcomed by students.

### **Step 10: Conclusions**

Competence is the primary factor in determining credibility among students with respect to their professors. Still, Black professors are more likely to be questioned depending, in part, on the subject matter they taught, according to Hendrix (1998). It is concluded that the classroom experiences of Black teachers does not exactly parallel that of White teachers. This seemed unfair since they were still expected to motivate and teach similar classes. Hendrix concludes that it is imperative that more research be done on this subject.

### **Step 11: Cautions**

1. Absence of interviews over time made it impossible to camouflage the study

2. Since students were not being compensated, commitment was minimized
3. Question of tolerance of racial differences and exposure to Blacks in one's community may vary in different geographical areas
4. The positive orientation of White student interviewees might have been atypical of many Whites in the classroom
5. The lack of White confederates may have created a contrived reality

**Step 12: Discussion**

I found it an interesting topic as I have enjoyed the few Black professors that I have had, including Angela Davis. Not only were they good teachers, they were inspiring to say the least. Bias is rampant in our society and in society's around the world. Studies such as these, that bring such bias to light can only contribute to raised-consciousness around such issues and hopefully will lead to the dispelling of racism. Identifying the culprits is a first step in changing ourselves. Being from Seattle, Washington, I am familiar with the demographics of the area. Having a very close friend who is African American and a top-notch educator, I have attended many seminars and trainings on racism, Teachers of Color and their Allies, and Diversity Training. Studies such as these will assist us in identifying bias and educating our colleges to provide support to teachers of color by making their paths equitable and fair. Women experience similar, although not identical, experiences in the workplace.