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The Effect of Clothing Upon Perceptions of Source Credibility

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of clothing upon perceptions of credibility. A male and female model were dressed either formally (in a suit) or informally (in casual slacks). Subjects were 399 undergraduate students from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Each subject viewed one of four photographs (male dressed formally, male dressed informally, female dressed formally, female dressed informally) and read a narrative accompanying each photograph. The narrative described the situational context, which included high-reputed characteristics (education, managerial occupation, and expertise in the topic of communication) for each model. Subjects completed McCroskey and Jenson's 25 bi-polar adjectives to measure five dimensions of credibility (competency, character, sociability, composure and extroversion).

No statistically significant differences were found between the formal and informal dress style of the male model in the five dimensions of credibility. When the female model was compared in formal and informal dress style, she was judged to be more composed ($p < .05$) when dressed informally; no other statistically significant differences were found in the other four dimensions of credibility.

When both models were dressed formally, the male model was viewed as more sociable ($p < .001$) and extroverted

(p < .001).   When they were both dressed informally, the male model was judged to be more competent (p < .05), sociable (p < .001) and extroverted (p < .001).

When the informally-dressed male model was compared to the formally-dressed female model, the male model was seen as more sociable (p < .001) and extroverted (p < .001).

When the formally-dressed male model was compared to the informally-dressed female model, the male model was perceived as having greater competency (p < .05), sociability (p < .001) and extroversion (p < .001).

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INTRODUCTION

Public speakers who are interested in gaining a desired response from an audience work toward enhancing their credibility. Credibility is important because a positive relationship exists between it and persuasion (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Kelman and Hovland, 1953; Anderson and Clevenger, 1963; Choo, 1964; O'Donnell and Kable, 1982; DeBono and Harnish, 1988).

Credibility is defined as "an attitude toward the source that exists in the mind of the receiver at a given time in a given situation" (O'Donnell and Kable, 1982, p. 114). Acquiring credibility may prove challenging to public speakers because it is an "attitude" that exists in the receiver's mind and "not an intrinsic property of a communicator." (O'Keefe, 1990, p. 131).

One way public speakers can enhance their credibility is by improving their physical appearance. White (1982) states that one's physical appearance can get in the way of moving listeners toward closure regarding their position. Because of this, Lucas (1989) warns receivers to suspend judgment and "respond to the message, not the package it comes in" (p. 34). Doing so, however, may prove difficult because physical appearance is the one personal characteristic that is obvious, accessible to others, and telegraphs more information than one would care to reveal (Berscheid and Walster, 1974).

Clothing, one aspect of physical appearance, is obvious, accessible to others, and telegraphs much information to others. Clothing is an important nonverbal characteristic that public speakers should consider because, much like the concept of credibility, receivers develop an "attitude toward the source" based on observable characteristics alone.

One study has linked clothing and credibility. Bassett (1979) asked subjects to view a picture of a male and female college student; however, no other information such as description of the situation or topic of communication was provided.

Communication researchers Cronkhite and Liska's (1980) conceptual notion of credibility is that it is a process. They argue that to ask receivers to rate a "hypothetical source who is described, without describing the topic or the situation and without presenting or at least describing an actual communication, radically violates the concept of communication as a process." (p. 103) They also theorize that receivers will attribute certain unobservable characteristics to others on the basis of observable characteristics. Receivers will then compare those characteristics "to desirable communicators based on the needs/goals which are salient in the specific communication situation." (Cronkhite and Liska, 1980, p. 105)

This thesis will investigate Cronkhite and Liska's (1980) conceptual notion of credibility by exploring the effect clothing (an observable characteristic) has upon perceptions of source credibility.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Source Credibility

O'Donnell and Kable (1982) defined source credibility as "the perception of and attitude toward a source that exists in the mind of the receiver at a given time in a given situation." (p. 114).

Historically, the construct of ethos or source credibility "has long been thought to involve a source's knowledge of the subject that he or she discusses, his or her veracity, and his or her attitude toward the well-being of the receiver." (McCroskey and Young, 1981, p. 24)

McCroskey and Young's (1981) research provides an extensive literature review regarding source credibility. They say that credibility is "a very important element in the communication effort be it persuasion or the generation of understanding." (p. 24)

Aristotle suggested that "ethos," more commonly known as "source credibility," was the most important factor in persuasion. Aristotle believed credibility was comprised of three factors: intelligence, character, and good will. In addition to Aristotle's three factors of credibility, several communication theorists have attempted to add other dimensions to assess the construct of credibility, making it

a multidimensional rather than unidimensional construct. As a result, multiple variables have been used to measure credibility; for example, factors such as expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953); reputation and competence (Haiman, 1949); competence, trustworthiness and dynamism (Berlo and Lemert, 1961); and competence, character, sociability, extroversion and composure (McCroskey and Jenson, 1975). (As cited in McCroskey and Young, 1981)

Researchers have tried to generalize the concept of credibility using the above-given multi-dimensional factors. O'Keefe (1990), however, argues that credibility cannot be generalized because "communicator credibility is not an intrinsic property of a communicator; a message source may be thought highly credible by one perceiver and not at all credible by another." (p. 131)

Cronkhite and Liska (1980) agree that credibility cannot be generalized because they have found that "in the search for generalizable factors of source credibility, factor structure differences among rater populations, among sources rated, and among communication topics/situations were largely ignored." (p. 102)

Delia (1976) argues that "ethos has been, and continues to be, treated by credibility researchers simply as a receiver's formed image of a communication . . . such a conception, which is dictated by traditional measurement

theory, takes the image as a _given_, and in so doing has contributed to our failure to provide a consistent and coherent explanation of ethos in process terms." (p. 366).

Infante, Parker, Clarke, Wilson, and Nathu (1983), however, state that "despite the criticisms of the factor approach, subsequent evidence has supported the validity of the scales" (p. 43). Infante adds that his research in 1980 "did not establish the superiority of the factor approach, only that the scales operationalizing the approach are valid" (Infante et al., 1983, p. 43).

Infante et al. are aware that other approaches to measuring the construct of credibility have been proposed by communication researchers Cronkhite and Liska (1976, 1980) and Delia (1976), and they indicate that "the resolution of which is superior must await the development of measurement procedures for the proposed alternatives" since neither have "operationalized their concepts in spite of what seems like sufficient time to accomplish this" (p. 43).

Delia's (1976) proposes that "ethos be approached as an aspect of the general constructive process of impression formation or person perception . . . Person perception refers to processes by which man comes to know and to think about other persons, their characteristics, qualities and inner states" (Delia, 1976, p. 366). "This constructivist perspective implies directly that our understanding of other

people is always in terms of images or impressions" . . . thus "the individual constructs an _impression_ of the actions, qualities, or attitudes of the other through interpreting aspects of the other's appearance and behavior within particular cognitive dimensions." (Delia, 1976, p. 367)

Impression formation is evident in studies of credibility as receivers judge the acceptability of a source based on reputed characteristics.

Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949) investigated the effect a low credible source would have over attitudes over time. They showed one group of enlisted men a film supporting the allied effort during World War II; a second group was not shown the film. The film was sponsored by the Army, supposedly the low credible source. Message-related attitudes were measured either five days or nine weeks after the film was shown. Results indicated that the greatest change was in the nine-week posttest than in the one given five days after the film was shown. Hovland et al. called this the "sleeper effect" because the film had great persuasive impact with the passage of time, even from a low credible source. (As cited in Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia, 1978)

Haiman (1949) presented three groups with a tape recorded speech attributed to Thomas Parran, Surgeon General of the United States; to Eugene Dennis, Secretary of the Communist Party in America; and to a Northwestern University Sophomore.

Results showed that the Surgeon General was rated more competent and his speech was more effective in changing attitudes than the other two. Strother (1951) conducted a similar study as Haiman's but differed the introductions in the persuasive speaking situation. Strother found significant differences in the persuasiveness of the Surgeon General's message and the Secretary of the Communist Party's message and also noted that those who thought they were listening to Secretary of the Communist Party wrote unfavorable comments concerning the speech techniques employed. Paulson's (1954) study attributed a taped speech to a political science professor and to a student. Results showed that for female listeners there was no significant difference between the two speeches; however, for male listeners opinion change was greater when they thought they were addressed by the professor. (As cited in Andersen and Clevenger, 1963)

Hewgill and Miller (1965) investigated the effect of credibility on fear appeal. Subjects were exposed to a strong threatening and a mild threatening message by either a low- or high-credible source. The highly-credible source was described as a professor of nuclear research, recognized as a national authority on the biological effects of radioactivity while the low-credible source was described as a high school sophomore, whose information was based on a term paper prepared for a social studies class. Results indicated that

subjects had the greatest shift in attitudes when the highly credible source presented the strongly threatening message.

The above studies indicated that the high credibility of the source was a relevant factor in persuasion. A different approach, however, was taken by Aronson and Golden (1962) who investigated the effect an irrelevant characteristic would have on opinion change. They theorized that, if a communicator was considered highly credible, an objectively irrelevant characteristic should have no bearing on the communicator's effectiveness. They defined an irrelevant characteristic as any characteristic that bears no relevance to the topic of communication such as a communicator's height, weight, race, or athletic ability. The relevant factors used in the study were high- and low-occupational status (engineer vs dishwasher) and the irrelevant factor was race (black vs white). Results of the study indicated that relevant factors (occupation) rather than irrelevant factors (race) were decisive in determining opinion change. The greatest change came as a result of high-occupational status, e.g., engineer, rather than race.

Pearson (1982) investigated the influence a communicator's sex would have on credibility. She noted in her literature review that several studies showed that audiences responded more favorably to messages attributed to a male communicator than to a female communicator (Goldberg,

1968) and that male sources received higher competency ratings than female sources in an investigation of persuasive discourse (Miller and Reynolds, 1973). The purpose of Pearson's study was to examine the credibility of men and women without regard to context. Pearson hypothesized that males would have more credibility than females and that males/females would respond differently to the question of having more credibility if they were of the opposite sex. Results indicated that men were perceived as being more competent than women, men felt they would have less credibility if they were women, women felt they would have more credibility if they were men, and both men and women perceived that they would have more credibility with persons of the same sex than with persons of the opposite sex. (As cited in Pearson, 1982)

Other credibility studies have focused on information that was relevant specifically to the content of communication such as communication by a juvenile court judge about juvenile delinquency and communication from J. Robert Oppenheimer abut the feasibility of an atomic submarine (As cited in Aronson and Golden, 1962).

However, the importance of the source to the topic of communication may not always ensure credibility. Wanzenried, Powell, and Franks (1989) used McCroskey and Jenson's (1975) 25 bi-polar adjectives to assess perceptions of competence,

sociability, character, composure and extroversion of political candidates during a televised debate. Results of their study indicate that "although conventional wisdom places great emphasis on candidate's competence, these data suggest that a set of respondents are capable of discriminating among dimensions within the credibility scale . . . the ratings of subjects who viewed the debates showed significant changes in ratings of character, composure and extroversion after the treatment. Such findings do not suggest viewing affected change but significant perceptual changes occurred among viewers over a brief time." (p. 826)

Wanzenried's et al. study would seem to infer that viewer's perceptions of a communicator will be increased or decreased based on what they observe.

Cronkhite and Liska's (1980) conceptual model of credibility suggests that receivers attribute certain characteristics to a speaker based on the basis of observed characteristics which they define as: (1) reputed characteristics (what is known from others and not direct observation); (2) nonverbal characteristics (includes two types: factors that are not under the communicator's control, such as height, blinking, perspiration and those factors that are under a communicator's control, such as physical appearance); (3) verbal characteristics (the use of language appropriate for one speaker and situation and not

another); (4) <u>characteristics of social interaction</u> (ability to speak well under different situations, e.g., one-to-one or public speaking); and (5) <u>self-reported characteristics</u> (age, education, experience).

Cronkhite and Liska (1980) add that a receiver will determine whether the speaker is credible based on the differences between her/his reputation and the speaker's. If the speaker has more reputed characteristics than the receiver, credibility will be high. Key is that the assessment will be based on the receiver's goals and needs and what expectations he/she has of the communicator during that specific communication (As cited in O'Donnell and Kable, 1982, p. 117).

Based on the literature review, it is evident that credibility has been measured by manipulating the reputed and observable characteristics of a communicator.

One of the observable characteristics within Cronkhite and Liska's model is nonverbal. Nonverbal characteristics include factors that are either under or not under the control of a communicator.

Clothing, an aspect of physical appearance, is an observable characteristic that is under the control of a communicator.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Clothing

Clothing might be considered an irrelevant characteristic as it does not bear any relevance to a speaker's topic of communication. However, extensive research on the effects of dress style has shown that generalizations about a person's character, personality, personal and professional success are made based on what is worn.

For example, Douty's (1963) research found that subjects made judgments of others based only on descriptions of dress. Buckley and Roach's (1974) study showed that subjects attributed social and political attitudes by viewing only a photograph. These studies support Connor, Peters, and Nagasawa's (1975) research which established that first impressions are made based on dress style.

Clothing is symbolic. Hickson and Stacks (1985) state that " . . . what we wear tells as much about us to others as anything else, and yet, it is told without our uttering a word." (Hickson and Stacks, 1985, p. 82)

Gordon, Tengler and Infante (1982) summarize the current symbolism of clothing as follows:

1. Clothing is instrumental in the perpetuation of tradition and religious ceremonies.

2. It also is used for self-beautification, real or imagined.

3. Cultural values regarding sexual identity and practice also are fostered through dress codes.

4. In addition, authority and roles are differentiated through dress.

5. Finally, clothing is used in the display of and acquisition of status. (As cited in Malandro, Barker, and Barker, 1989, p. 67)

Clothing has been metaphorically compared to language because it "transmits a message between an addressor and addressee in a particular context according to a particular code through a particular contact" (McCracken and Roth, 1989, p. 13). It has been referred to as a second skin that is used for protection, modesty, adornment, status, an extension of self (Horn, 1968) and also a silent language that produces meaning based on visual symbols alone (Hall, 1959; Lurie, 1981).

Thourlby (1978) indicates that there are 10 areas in which decisions are made about individuals based on clothing:

1. economic level	6. economic background
2. educational level	7. social background
3. trustworthiness	8. educational background
4. social position	9. level of sophistication
5. level of success	10. moral character

"Clothing is a form of nonverbal communication which stimulates judgmental or behavioral responses in others" (Davis, 1984, 325). The following studies show the impact clothing has on nonverbal communication: it affects

interpersonal relationships, attractiveness, compliance behavior, professional success, and credibility.

Fortenberry (1978) conducted a study to see if individuals were likely to approach others when dressed in high-status rather than low-status clothing. Results showed that positive behaviors were observed toward the high-status (dressed up) couple, whereas negative behaviors were exhibited toward the low-status (casually dressed) couple.

Clothing is the first nonverbal cue that is seen during social interaction, and, unlike height, it is one aspect of physical appearance that can be easily altered by an individual to project a positive image. This is evident when one looks at the effect clothing can have on attractiveness.

Hoult (1954) wanted to see if "clothes make the man." He conducted two experiments. In the first one the judges knew the model; in the second they did not. Results showed that clothing did affect the model's attractiveness rating, but only if the models rated were not known by the judges.

Hewitt and German (1987) studied the impact attire had on overall level of physical attractiveness by using photographs of two male models who were dressed in either military uniforms, casual clothes, or suits. Results showed that the military uniform was judged most attractive. Suits, on the other hand, proved to be more attractive than less formal modes of dress, as they had expected.

Buckley's research (1983) affirms that clothing does affect attractiveness and that stereotypes are formed based on clothing alone. Even though judges and subjects differed in evaluating "attractiveness" after viewing a photograph of a stranger, consistency occurred when physical attractiveness was manipulated by dress style. Buckley's (1983) study supported Roach and Eicher's (1965, 1973) theory that standards of physical attractiveness vary from individual to individual when judging attractiveness; however, when judging a stranger based on dress, consistency of evaluations occurred affirming that generalizations will result based on attire alone.

Berscheid and Walster's (1974) extensive research on physical attractiveness indicates that individuals who are perceived as attractive are treated positively and are attributed as having socially desirable traits such as sensitivity, kindness, strength, poise, extroversion, credibility and persuasiveness.

Lennon (1990) hypothetized that attractively dressed individuals would be evaluated more positively than unattractively dressed individuals in terms of competence and sociability. Results showed that models dressed in attractive clothing were perceived to be more competent and more sociable, supporting the notion of clothing attractiveness stereotype, at least in person perception studies using

college females as subjects. She adds that "more pragmatically, the results may imply that individuals who are not physically attractive can still accrue the benefits of being physically attractive by a simple process of wardrobe selection and coordination. It is known that physical attractiveness, a variable over which one has little control, exerts a potent influence in first-impression situations as well as social interactions. These results suggest that clothing attractiveness, a variable over which one has potential control, might exert a similar influence" (Lennon, 1990, p. 309).

Clothing not only affects interpersonal relationships and attractiveness, but also compliance behavior. Lefkowitz, Blake and Mouton (1955) found that pedestrians will violate the instructions given by a traffic signal light when another person violates it ahead of them -- if the original violator was dressed to represent a high-status person. Numerous other studies reflect the impact clothing has on influencing behavior (Bickman, 1974; Bushman, 1984; Schiavo, Sherlock, and Wicklund, 1974; Suefeld, Bochner, and Matas, 1971; Raymond and Unger, 1971; Walker, Harriman, and Costello, 1980; Stead and Zinkhan, 1986).

Clothing can influence behavior especially if the attire worn is a uniform because "throughout history, the uniform, identifies the wearer's status, group membership and

legitimacy" (Bickman, 1974, p. 50). Uniforms reflect occupational roles such as that of police officers, fire fighters, clergy persons, military personnel and physicians, to name a few. Argyle (1975) says that "where two groups wear different clothes this often indicates the existence of different roles, change of dress by a group often indicates a change of role, and where all members of a group dress alike the role is well defined." (p. 332)

In a corporate environment, the business suit has come to be the expected uniform worn by those in power. The status and authority reflected by clothing in business organizations is evident as many adhere to the adage "dress for success."

Molloy (1975) professes that clothing can be tied to success in the business world. He says that suits represent authority, credibility, and likability.

Ericksen and Sirgy's (1985) study supported their hypothesis that achievement-motivated persons are better socialized with organizational norms. One of those norms is appropriate dress. "Business-like clothing style is seen as a perceived instrumentality that leads to (or facilitates) the attainment of success on the job and is a belief that is usually shared by most white-collar working people." (p. 366)

Gray (1982) adds that choosing the right clothes can elicit better responses. "The clothes you wear can enhance or detract from your effectiveness as you go about your job.

They should suit the style of your profession . . . dressing in a dark suit certainly imparts a more authoritative, high-status image." (p. 46).

During the 1970s, much attention was focused on business attire for women. According to Rabolt and Drake (1982) "selection of business dress has been a special problem for women since they have never had a specific business uniform such as the ubiquitous male three-piece suit." (p. 32)

Molloy (1977) suggests that the best outfit for a woman was a skirted suit. "This outfit will give businesswomen a look of authority, which is precisely what they need" (p. 35). According to Hickson and Stacks (1985) the business world has adopted Molloy's description of "correct" attire for women. They add, "now we encounter people who are carbon copies of each other. Significantly, those who are in charge seem to set the 'norm,' even when no written dress code exists" (p. 77).

Several studies reflect the perception that a woman's competence in the business world is based on dress.

Cash's (1985) study reflected the importance of business-like clothing to the personnel evaluations of women in corporate management. Personnel officers viewed a dozen color slides of women and independently rated, ranked and categorized the slides with respect to which ones they perceived as middle-managers and which ones they perceived as

non-managerial office workers. Clothing (tailored blouses with tie collars and tailored jackets with a skirted suit) was one of the factors that influenced managerial status cues. Results indicated that women portraying a managerial appearance were perceived as more ambitious, career-oriented, more assertive and confident, more financially responsible, more intelligent, more likely to be taken seriously, more intrinsically interested in work, less illogical and over-emotional in critical decision making, less helpless and dependent, and less flirtatious.

Forsythe, Drake, and Cox (1984) conducted a study to investigate the effect of clothing on interviewer's perception of selected personal characteristics of women applying for management positions. They hypothesized that a relationship existed between the masculinity of dress (suit) and the personal characteristics attributed to her. Raters viewed four different women wearing varying styles of dress on a videotape. Results indicated that costume 4, the most masculine dress style (a dark navy tailored suit and white blouse), was perceived as too severe indicating she "may have conveyed an image that was perceived as too masculine to be appropriate for women" (p. 119). The woman wearing costume 3 (a beige tailored suit with a blazer jacket and a rust blouse with a narrow bow at the neck) was perceived as being rated highest in the following categories: forceful, self-reliant,

dynamic, aggressive, and decisive. The least desired dress style (costume 1) was a light beige dress.

Another study conducted by Forsythe (1987) investigated the effect dress style had on the hiring decision for a managerial position. Subjects viewed a color videotape of an applicant who wore four different styles of clothing -- from the most feminine (dress) to the most masculine (suit). Results indicated that the effect of masculine clothing on the perception of masculine managerial traits was significant. The applicant was rated highest on the masculine traits, which included perceptions of "leadership ability, competitive, desires responsibility, self-confident, objective, aggressive, forceful, and ambitious." Her findings proved to be consistent with other research which suggests that the more masculine dress style results in more favorable hiring decisions. This study also proved that masculine clothing did not adversely affect the ratings of the applicant with respect to feminine managerial traits. "It seems that women may be perceived to possess feminine managerial traits regardless of the masculinity of clothing, whereas a more masculine costume is necessary to enhance the perception of masculine managerial traits." (p. 533)

Damhorst's (1982) study also affirms a business suit depicts a managerial position; however, female respondents assumed the man had a higher rank than the woman with whom he

was interacting, when both were dressed formally. The men who wore the suits and interacted with the women who were casually dressed were perceived to be more directive, rewarding and punishing than when the woman was formally dressed and the men informally dressed. The men who were casually dressed were perceived to occupy non-managerial roles and to have ranks equivalent to or lower than the women's.

The above studies shows that dress can affect the perception of a woman's competence in a business environment. However, the perception of competence, based on dress style, is not only evident in a corporate environment; even college students are likely to assess the competence of others based on dress style alone.

Bassett (1979) had students view photographs of two white males and two white females (ages 19-21) dressed in either high- or low-status clothing. Results indicated a difference in perception of credibility. Males dressed in high-status clothing (suits) were rated higher in terms of potency (bold, aggressive, powerful) than males dressed in low-status clothing, while there was no difference for the female models. Females dressed in high-status clothing were rated more competent than when dressed in low-status clothing, while there proved to be no difference for the male models. Both males and females in high-status conditions were perceived to

be more competent (qualified, expert) than the individuals in low-status conditions.

An individual's perception of credibility may be associated with the expectations of what is deemed as appropriate attire for certain situations. Solomon (1986) cited a study conducted by two marketing researchers and a professor from Texas Tech University. They simulated excerpts of a 60-second newsbreak showing a professional male and female broadcaster delivering a news report. The clothing worn by the broadcasters was either conservative, casual or trendy. The color of the clothing and the content of the news story were always the same. Results of the study showed that the newscasters, when dressed conservatively, were rated more positively than when dressed in other styles. The researchers attributed the results to viewer's expectations of what they felt newscasters should wear.

In Dillon's (1980) study, the significance of dress is evidenced by the following:

> From the point of view of the wearer, the decision as to what to wear in any culture is based on two kinds of information: first, the nature of the occasion, and second, the wearer's image of his social identity. (p. 125)

Incongruencies, according to Horn (1968), are "likely to create a social disaster for clothing is a means of defining the situation in which social interaction takes place." (p. 121)

Clothing, an observable characteristic, may enhance the effectiveness of a communicator by presenting an image that is appropriate -- one that does not detract from the topic of communication. White (1982) believes that one's appearance should fit the demands of the situation -- the expectations of the audience, the nature of the speaking occasion, the demands of the speaker's purpose and the speaker's life style.

It would seem, based on the literature review, that clothing is symbolic; it produces a silent language that transmits messages based on codes from which meaning is interpreted and derived; it affects attractiveness, compliance behavior, and credibility. In short, clothing communicates much nonverbally.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Research about the construct of credibility indicates that it is an important element in the communication process, whether the goal of the communicator is to inform or persuade. Public speakers desiring to gain a desired response from their audience should be concerned with being perceived as credible. Credibility has been defined as an "attitude toward the source" that exists in the mind of the receiver at a specific time in a specific situation.

Research on the effects of clothing provides evidence that dress style is symbolic and receivers are likely to develop an "attitude toward the source" based on observable characteristics alone. ' Clothing might be considered an irrelevant characteristic because it bears no relevance to the topic of communication; however, research indicates that it is relevant since judgments are made based on what is observed alone. Public speakers desiring to gain a desired response from their audience should be concerned with their physical appearance because those who are perceived as attractive are attributed more positive traits. Clothing has been proven to affect attractiveness, and it is one aspect of physical appearance that is under the control of a speaker.

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of clothing upon perceptions of credibility. This study will be guided by the following research questions:

. Will the male model be rated lower in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed informally (in casual slacks) than when dressed formally (in a suit)?

. Will the female model be rated lower in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed informally (in casual slacks) than when dressed formally (in a suit)?

. Will the male model be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed informally (in casual slacks) than the female model dressed formally (in a suit)?

. Will the male model be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed formally (in a suit) than the female model dressed formally (in a suit)?

. Will the male model be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed formally (in a suit) than the female model dressed informally (in casual slacks)?

. Will the male model be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed informally (in casual slacks) than the female model dressed informally (in casual slacks)?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Subjects were 399 undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, ranging from 18 to 45 years in age.

Models

A male and female who were approximately the same age, height, and weight were used for this study. The models did not wear any jewelry or glasses since such artifacts have been known to affect credibility. (Molloy, 1977; Beattie, 1975)

Both models were given identical reputed characteristics; only clothing was manipulated in terms of formal and informal dress style. Formal dress style for the male consisted of a suit, dress shirt, tie, and dress shoes (See Appendix C); the female wore a skirted suit, blouse, stockings, and heels (See Appendix A). Informal dress style for both models consisted of casual slacks (not jeans or dress pants), polo shirt, and casual shoes (not tennis shoes) (See Appendices B and D). Each model was photographed in a classroom setting to reflect the situational context.

Scales to Measure Source Credibility

The semantic differential scale used in measuring credibility was McCroskey and Jenson's (1975) scale consisting of 25 bi-polar words (See Appendix G). The scale comprises

five dimensions of credibility: competency, character, composure, sociability, and extroversion (See Appendix H).

Each set of bi-polar words was switched to eliminate the possibility of having subjects assign either all high or all low values based on their positions on the scales. A rating of "5" was given to the positive bi-polar word while a rating of "1" reflected the negative bi-polar word. The following reflects the factoring approach used in analyzing the data:

qualified   _5_   _4_   _3_   _2_   _1_   unqualified

unsympathetic   _1_   _2_   _3_   _4_   _5_   sympathetic

This scale has proven to have high internal reliability (McCroskey and Young, 1981). A reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha) produced the following results for this study:

Dimension	Alpha Coefficient
Competency	.84
Character	.66
Sociability	.71
Composure	.61
Extroversion	.82

Statistical Measure

T-tests were used to determine the difference between the formal and informal dress style for the male and female model.

The following is a diagram of the statistical measure used in this study:

<u>Clothing</u>

	<u>Informal</u> b(1)	<u>Formal</u> b(2)
<u>Male</u> a(1)	a(1)/b(1) MI	a(1)/b(2) MF
<u>Female</u> a(2)	a(2)/b(1) FI	a(2)/b(2) FF

<u>Sex</u>

MI = Male Informal   FI = Female Informal
MF = Male Formal   FF = Female Formal

Procedure

This researcher visited 24 undergraduate classes and informed the students that research was being conducted to complete the master's thesis in Communication.

The subjects were provided with a 3x5 black-and-white photograph of either a male or female dressed either formally or informally, and a narrative describing the situational context. The narrative described a process by including as many of the seven elements inherent in any communication situation: source, receiver, message, channel, situation, interference, and feedback (Lucas, 1989). The narrative provided each subject with information regarding the source's occupation (Director of Human Resources), the message (interviewing tips), the situation (classroom), the receivers

(college students), and channel (presentation) (See Appendices E and F). The narrative included all but feedback and interference. Because photographs were used, it was impossible for subjects to provide feedback. Subjects were asked to work independently, thus avoiding any external "noise" that might cause interference with their rating of the model.

RESULTS

Subjects viewed a photograph of a male or female dressed formally or informally and read identical narratives (which included high reputed characteristics such as education, occupation, and experience) for each model. Based on the subject's perception of the data provided (photograph and narrative), they completed McCroskey and Jenson's scale, which measured the construct of credibility along five dimensions: competency, character, sociability, composure, and extroversion.

The following is a breakdown of subjects who viewed each picture:

Male Formal   n = 102   Female Formal   n = 109

Male Informal   n = 81   Female Informal n = 107

T-tests were used to determine differences between the formally dressed and informally dressed models.

Answers to the research questions are as follows:

Research Question #1 -- Will the male model be rated lower in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed informally than when dressed formally?

The informally-dressed male was rated lower in the sociability and composure dimensions, although there was no significance. In the competency dimension, identical means scores resulted indicating the male model was perceived as qualified, expert, reliable, believable, competent, intellectual, valuable, and informed, regardless of dress style. In the dimension of character, the mean score was higher, although not statistically significant.

[TABLE 1]

TABLE 1

**Perceptions of the Male Model Dressed Informally (MI)
Versus Formally (MI)**

Dimensions		X	T Value	p
Competency	MF	34.2	-.02	.988#
	MI	34.2		
Character	MF	14.6	-.47	.641
	MI	14.7		
Sociability	MF	16.7	1.15	.251
	MI	16.3		
Composure	MF	15.3	.50	.621
	MI	15.1		
Extroversion	MF	18.1	.52	.604
	MI	17.8		

#p > .95   MF n = 103   MI n = 79

<u>Research Question #2</u> - **Will the female model be rated lower in the five dimensions of credibility when dressed informally than when dressed formally?**

The female model was rated lower in the dimensions of competency and extroversion when dressed informally, although there was no statistical significance in these dimensions.

The mean scores in the character dimension were identical indicating she was perceived to be kind, unselfish, sympathetic, and virtuous, regardless of dress style.

The female model was rated higher when dressed informally in the sociability dimension; however, there was no statistical significance.

The only statistically significant difference was found in the composure dimension at the $p < .05$ when the female model dressed informally. In this dimension, she was perceived to be more composed, calm, relaxed, and poised when dressed informally. [TABLE 2]

TABLE 2

Perceptions of the Female Model Dressed Informally (FI) Versus Formally (FF)

Dimensions		X	T Value	p
Competency	FF	33.5	1.43	.155
	FI	32.7		
Character	FF	14.5	.06	.953#
	FI	14.5		
Sociability	FF	15.1	-.47	.641
	FI	15.3		
Composure	FF	14.6	-2.37	.019*
	FI	15.5		
Extroversion	FF	15.7	.60	.551
	FI	15.4		

#p > .95   *p < .05   FF n = 109
                              FI n = 107

Research Question #3 -- **Will the male model dressed informally be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when compared to the female model dressed formally?**

The male model was rated higher on all of the five dimensions of credibility dressed informally when compared to the female model dressed formally; however, of the five dimensions, only two proved to be statistically significant for the male model: sociability ($p < .001$) and extroversion ($p < .001$).

Subjects perceived the male model to be more friendly, cheerful, good natured, and sociable (variables comprising the sociability dimension) and aggressive, verbal, extroverted, bold, and talkative (variables comprising the extroversion dimension) when dressed informally. [TABLE 3]

TABLE 3

Perceptions of the Male Model Dressed Informally (MI)
Versus the Female Model Dressed Formally (FF)

Dimensions	X		T Value	p
Competency	MI	34.2	1.21	.229
	FF	33.5		
Character	MI	14.7	.79	.432
	FF	14.5		
Sociability	MI	16.3	3.60	.000***
	FF	15.1		
Composure	MI	15.1	1.27	.204
	FF	14.6		
Extroversion	MI	17.8	4.13	.000***
	FF	15.7		

*** p < .001   MI n = 81
                      FF n = 109

<u>Research Question #4</u> -- Will the male model dressed formally be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when compared to the female model dressed formally?

Subjects rated the male model higher in all of the dimensions of credibility.

Two dimensions were significantly greater for the male model: sociability at (p < .001) and extroversion (p < .001). The formally-dressed male was perceived to be more sociable and extroverted than the formally-dressed female. [TABLE 4]

TABLE 4

**Perceptions of the Male Model Dressed Formally (MF)
Versus the Female Model Dressed Formally (FF)**

Dimensions		X	T Value	p
Competency	MF	34.2	1.23	.221
	FF	33.5		
Character	MF	14.6	.35	.725
	FF	14.5		
Sociability	MF	16.7	4.79	.000***
	FF	15.1		
Composure	MF	15.3	1.74	.083
	FF	14.6		
Extroversion	MF	18.1	4.81	.000***
	FF	15.7		

*** p < .001   MF n = 103
                      FF n = 109

Research Question #5 -- Will the male model dressed **formally be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when compared to the female model dressed informally?**

The male model was rated higher in four of the five dimensions of credibility when dressed formally, but only three dimensions proved statistically significant.

The male model was rated more competent ($p < .01$), sociable ($p < .001$), and extroverted ($p < .001$).

In the composure dimension, the female model was rated higher than the male model, but the difference was not statistically significant. [TABLE 5]

TABLE 5

Perceptions of the Male Model Dressed Formally (MF)

Versus the Female Model Dressed Informally (FI)

Dimensions		X	T Value	p
Competency	MF	34.2	2.46	.015*
	FI	32.7		
Character	MF	14.6	.41	.686
	FI	14.5		
Sociability	MF	16.7	4.17	.000**
	FI	15.3		
Composure	MF	15.3	-.54	.589
	FI	15.5		
Extroversion	MF	18.1	5.25	.000***
	FI	15.4		

*p < .05   ***p < .001   MF n = 103

FF n = 107

Research Question #6 -- **Will the male model dressed informally be rated higher in the five dimensions of credibility when compared to the female model dressed informally?**

Subjects rated the informally-dressed male model higher in four dimensions of credibility (competency, character, sociability, and extroversion). Of these, three dimensions proved significant for the male model. The informally-dressed male model was perceived to be more competent ($p < .05$); sociable ($p < .001$); and extroverted ($p < .001$) than the informally-dressed female.

The informally-dressed female model was rated higher in the composure dimension although the difference was not significant. [TABLE 6]

TABLE 6

Perceptions of the Male Model Dressed Informally (MI)

Versus the Female Model Dressed Informally (FI)

Dimensions		X	T Value	p
Competency	MI	34.2	2.42	.017*
	FI	32.7		
Character	MI	14.7	.83	.408
	FI	14.5		
Sociability	MI	16.3	3.03	.003***
	FI	15.3		
Composure	MI	15.1	−1.07	.285
	FI	15.5		
Extroversion	MI	17.8	4.58	.000***
	FI	15.4		

*p < .05   ***p < .001   MI   n =   81
                             FI   n = 107

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that clothing had an effect upon perceptions of source credibility.

The study shows that formal dress style did positively affect the credibility of the female model in some dimensions when she was compared to the male model. When the formally-dressed female was compared to the informally- and formally-dressed male, no differences occurred in the dimensions of competency, character, and composure.

Differences, however, were evident when the female model was dressed informally. When she was dressed informally, he was perceived to be more competent (p < .05), sociable (p < .001) and extroverted (p < .001), in formal and informal dress style.

This indicates that when she dressed formally, it helped her to be perceived as competent, sociable, and possessing of good character as the male model, regardless whether he was dressed formally or informally. This seems to support several studies that suggest the importance of women wearing suits to project an image of competence to enhance their credibility (Forsythe, 1984, 1987; Molloy, 1977; Cash, 1985; Damhorst, 1982; Gray, 1982).

Although the female's formal dress style helped her to be perceived as credible as the male model in three dimensions (character, competence, and composure), she was not perceived to have <u>greater</u> credibility when she was compared to the informally-dressed male or herself dressed informally.

Her formal attire did not produce any differences in the dimensions of extroversion or competency, either when she was compared to herself dressed informally or to the male model in formal or informal attire. This seems to contradict studies concluding that women dressed in suits will be perceived to be bold and aggressive (Forsythe, et al. 1984; Forsythe, 1987).

The formal dress style of the female model helped her to be rated equally as competent as the male model. This finding would not support Pearson's (1982) study indicating that males were perceived to be more competent than females.
However, when she was dressed informally, it did support Pearson's (1982) because the male was judged to be more competent (p < .05), both in formal and informal dress style, when compared to the informally-dressed female.

Bassett's (1979) study concluded that high-status clothing had a positive effect on judgements in the competency factor for both male and female sources. This study, however, showed that the formal dress style proved statistically significant only for the male model, and only when he was compared to the informally-dressed female. When he was

compared to himself in formal and informal dress style, no differences occurred in any of the five dimensions of credibility. No differences were found in the competency dimension when the female model dressed formally, either when she was compared to herself dressed informally or to the male model dressed formally and informally.

The only statistical significance for the female model occurred in the composure dimension (p < .05). She was perceived to be more composed, calm, relaxed and poised when dressed informally rather than formally. Also, when compared to the formally- or informally-dressed male model, her informal dress style lessened her credibility significantly in the dimensions of competency, extroversion, and sociability.

The female's formal dress style did not prove statistically significant when compared to the male dressed formally and informally. His informal and formal dress style, however, when compared to her formally dressed, proved significant in the dimensions of extroversion (p. < .001) and sociability (p < .001).

Even when the female was compared to herself in formal and informal dress, the formality of dress did not enhance her image of credibility. No significant differences were found in the dimensions of competency and extroversion when she was formally dressed, as would be expected based on studies that

tout the importance of wearing a suit to enhance credibility (Molloy, 1977; Cash, 1985; Gray, 1982; Forsythe, 1984, 1987).

Forsythe (1987) indicated that "a more masculine costume is necessary to enhance the perception of masculine managerial traits" (p. 533). Since the more masculine costume (the suit) did not prove significant on dimensions of competency and extroversion, it could be that the formal dress style "may have conveyed an image that was perceived as too masculine to be appropriate for women" (Forsythe, 1987, p. 119).

Although the formal dress style of the female model did not significantly enhance her image of aggressiveness, competence, boldness, and composure, it did keep her from being perceived as less competent as the male model when he was compared to her in formal and informal attire.

Noteworthy is the fact that a lot of significance was evident for the male model when he was compared to the female model. When both were dressed informally, he was perceived to be more competent (p < .05), sociable (p < .001) and extroverted (p < .001). When he was dressed formally, and compared to her dressed informally, significance occurred in the same dimensions: competency (p < .05), sociability (p < .001), extroversion (p < .001). When he was dressed informally, and compared to the female model dressed formally, he was perceived to be more sociable (p < .001) and

extroverted (p < .001). When they both were dressed formally, he was still perceived to be more sociable (p < .001) and extroverted (p < .001).

The findings of this study indicate that receivers will make judgments of source credibility based on clothing. This is evident because differences were found in several of the dimensions of credibility, even though both models were given identical high-reputed characteristics.

These findings support several studies that indicate clothing is symbolic and judgements of others are made based on dress alone (Bassett, 1979; Douty, 1963; Buckley and Roach, 1974; Roach and Eicher, 1973; Hamid, 1968; Hoult, 1954; Buckley, 1983; Connor, Peters, and Nagasawa, 1975; Lennon, 1990; Molloy, 1977, Cash, 1985; Forsythe, Drake, and Cox, 1984; Forsythe, 1987; Damhorst, 1982; Solomon, 1986).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Because choice of dress style is situational, future research might look at exploring the effect of clothing by varying situations, populations, and even geographic areas.

Casual slacks were used in this study to maintain consistency in informal dress style between the two models. However, the "dress" was another dimension of female clothing that was purposely not considered in this study. As more and more women entered management positions during the 1970s, the dress style commonly worn was the business suit. It may be that the business suit is no longer the chosen uniform for women managers. Further research might explore the effect of the dress upon perceptions of source credibility.

When both models were dressed informally, the male was judged to be more competent, sociable, and extroverted. When he was formally dressed and compared to the female model informally dressed, he was again judged to be more competent, sociable, and extroverted. However, when the female was formally dressed, and compared to the male informally dressed, no differences were evident in the same dimensions that proved significant for the male. Yet, the male was perceived to be

more sociable and extroverted, regardless of dress style, when compared to the female model in either formal or informal attire. Future research might explore some of these findings by looking at sex-role stereotypes.

Subjects were provided with a narrative that included high-reputed characteristics for the male and female model. Future research might explore the impact clothing has on low-reputed characteristics.

The study of clothing is an area for further research. In addition to protection and modesty, it is evident that clothing serves many other purposes.

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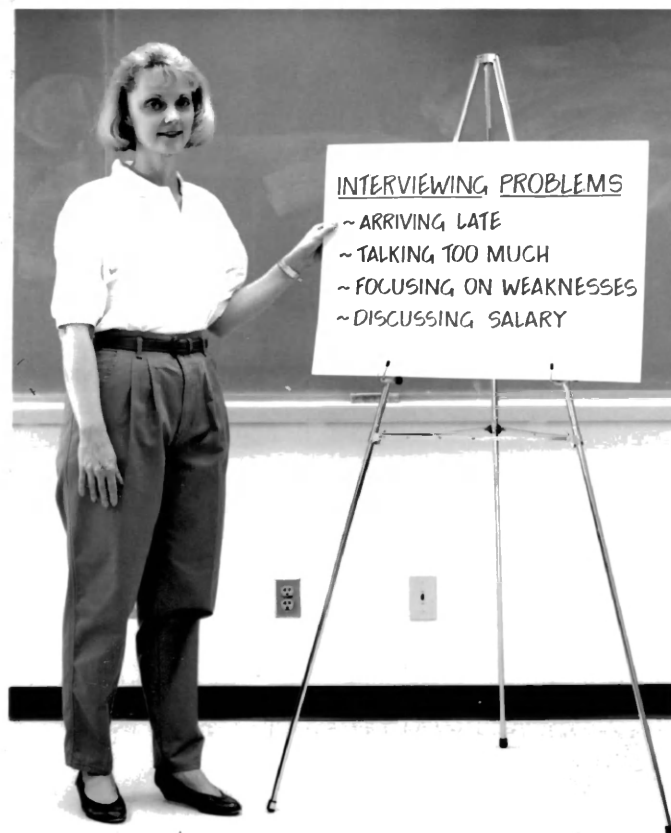Pearson, J. C. (1985). Gender and Communication. Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown Co.

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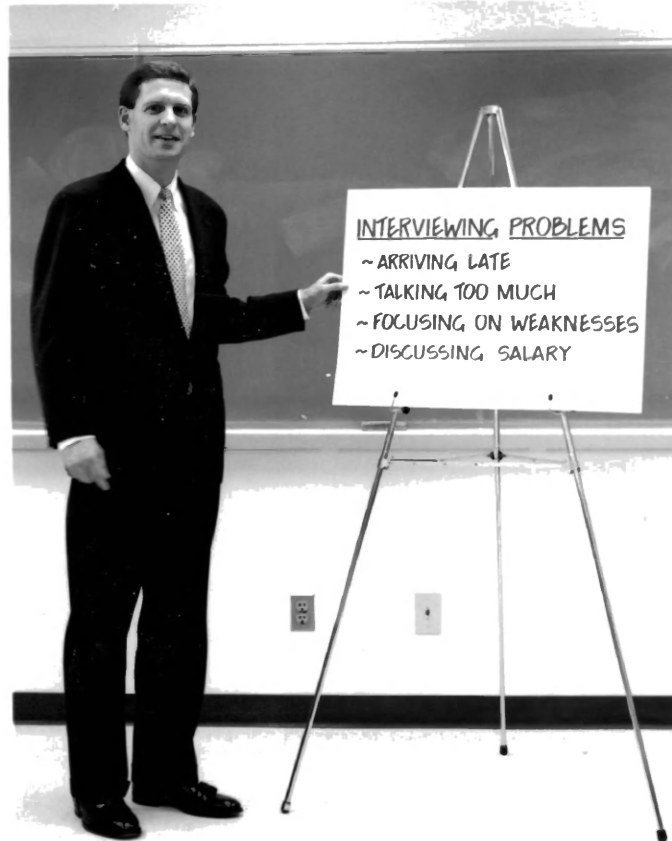   Reports. 64. 825-826.

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APPENDIX A

(Female Model — Formal Dress)

APPENDIX B

(Female Model - Informal Dress)

APPENDIX C

(Male Model - Formal Dress)

APPENDIX D

(Male Model - Informal Dress)

APPENDIX E

(Narrative - Female Model)

Chris Murphy, Director of Human Resources for a major corporate firm, is addressing a group of college students on the topic of interviewing.

Ms. Murphy was asked to be a guest speaker because she has written several articles on interviewing. Her most recent article, "The Art of Interviewing," was published in Personnel Management.

Her interviewing tips include arriving on time, not talking too much, not focusing on weakenesses, and not discussing salary requirements until a job offer is made.

Ms. Murphy has an M.B.A. degree and over 10 years of personnel experience.

APPENDIX F

(Narrative -- Male Model)

Chris Murphy, Director of Human Resources for a major corporate firm, is addressing a group of college students on the topic of interviewing.

Mr. Murphy was asked to be a guest speaker because he has written several articles on interviewing. His most recent article, "The Art of Interviewing," was published in <u>Personnel Management.</u>

His interviewing tips include arriving on time, not talking too much, not focusing on weakenesses, and not discussing salary requirements until a job offer is made.

Mr. Murphy has an M.B.A. degree and over 10 years of personnel experience.

APPENDIX G

McCroskey-Jenson Source Credibility Bi-Polar Adjectives

1.   Qualified   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Unqualified

2.   Unsympathetic ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Sympathetic

3.   Nervous   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Poised

4.   Unbelievable ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Believable

5.   Good-natured ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Irritable

6.   Narrow   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Intellectual

7.   Bold   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Timid

8.   Unfriendly   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Friendly

9.   Informed   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Uninformed

10. Excitable   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Composed

11. Inexpert   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Expert

12. Quiet   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Verbal

13. Valuable   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Worthless

14. Kind   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Cruel

15. Gloomy   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Cheerful

16. Aggressive   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Meek

17. Silent   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Talkative

18. Unreliable   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Reliable

19. Calm   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Anxious

20. Competent   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Incompetent

21. Unselfish   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Selfish

22. Sociable   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Unsociable

23. Virtuous   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Sinful

24. Tense   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Relaxed

25. Introverted   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Extroverted

APPENDIX H

McCroskey-Jenson Source Credibility Bi-Polar Adjectives

Arranged by Dimension

Competency:

unqualified/qualified
inexpert/expert
unreliable/reliable
unbelievable/believable
incompetent/competent
narrow/intellectual
worthless/valuable
uninformed/informed

Character:

cruel/kind
unsympathetic/sympathetic
selfish/unselfish
sinful/virtuous

Sociability:

unfriendly/friendly
gloomy/cheerful
irritable/good natured
unsociable/sociable

Composure:

excitable/composed
anxious/calm
tense/relaxed
nervous/poised

Extroversion:

meek/aggressive
quiet/verbal
introverted/extroverted
timid/bold
silent/talkative