

THE EFFECTS  
OF NONVERBAL  
COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS  
ON FIRST IMPRESSIONS  
OF RESIDENT ASSISTANTS

by

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## Abstract

For resident assistants working within a residence hall on a college campus, first impressions determine the year ahead of them. The first floor meeting with residents early in the fall is the time when important impressions of the resident assistant's personality and leadership abilities are formed. A negative impression may cause a loss of control on the floor, either through lack of trust or lack of respect and authority of the resident assistant by floor members. Interestingly, few resident assistants are aware of their ability to manage the impressions they make on their residents.

This study focused on two styles of nonverbal communication, a formal and a casual style. The behaviors included in each style were vocalics, body position, dress and method of presentation. The purpose of the investigation was to determine if either style would be rated more favorably in terms of first impressions. It also sought to discover if one style would encourage residents to discuss problems of a more personal nature than the other style with their resident assistants.

A post-test only design was employed. A 5-minute video tape was constructed for each communication style. Subjects viewed one of the tapes and rated the speaker with a 7 point bi-polar adjectival scale, a Likert-like scale,

and a topics inventory check list. A factor analysis, a two-way analysis of variance, and crosstabulations were used to analyze the data.

Consistent with past research, the casual speaker was rated significantly more friendly and personal than the formal speaker regardless of the sex of the subjects. In addition, female subjects perceived the casual speaker to be significantly more flexible than the males, and the males perceived the same speaker to be significantly more ineffective as a leader than the females.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that a casual communication style invokes perceptions of friendliness more than the formal style and that female resident assistants in charge of floors where males reside may need to communicate in a formal style only if they are to be perceived as an effective leader.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Judgments of others are so common in human social interaction that it is easy to underestimate their impact. Many times first impressions determine employment selection, peer group membership, or even the degree of respect and authority given to a person by others. For resident assistants working within a residence hall on a college campus, residents' first impressions of them may determine the year ahead. As Blimling and Miltenberger (1981, p. 87) state, "The first impression you [resident hall assistants] make upon your new residents will have a lingering effect; it will either lay the foundation for future contacts or create barriers to them."

The first organized floor meeting with residents early in the fall is the time when important first impressions of the resident assistant's personality and leadership ability are formed. Floor members' negative impressions of the resident assistant may cause a loss of control of the floor, either through lack of trust or lack of respect and authority for the assistant. Interestingly, few resident assistants are aware of their ability to manage the impressions they make on their residents.

Impressions evolve through persons' interpretations of verbal and nonverbal behavior. When inconsistent information

is expressed between verbal statements and nonverbal behavior, people tend to judge the nonverbal behavior as being more accurate (Walker, 1977). Argyle, Salter, Nicholson, Williams, and Burgess (1970) found that nonverbal expressions of superiority/inferiority were far more powerful than verbal expressions of the same. The nonverbal superior expression was judged by subjects as more unpleasant no matter which verbal message (superior, neutral, inferior) was used.

Because nonverbal behavior can be seen as more influential than verbal behavior, it requires an adequate set of skills on the part of the behaving individual. Cook (1977) noted that an individual who does not have the skill to signal friendliness will not be approached. Through a variety of nonverbal behaviors, people can manage their own behaviors as well as the behaviors of others. Consequently, it is nonverbal behavior that is the focus of much of the impression management research. Although some nonverbal behaviors are unconscious, the majority can be manipulated or controlled to manage the impression being formed by others.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of nonverbal behavior on attitudes and status relationships (Mehrabian, 1969). Many studies, however, only focus on the effects of one behavior, i.e., posture, facial gestures, etc. Few studies have examined a "set" of nonverbal behaviors which interact to form an overall impression of a person. Most people display nonverbal behaviors in a piecemeal fashion,

which can result in an inconsistent, and sometimes unintended, impression. If people are to manage the impressions others form of them, they need to convey consistent messages through a set of behaviors which convey similar meaning. For example, if people want to create an impression of authority, they need to display only those behaviors which are interpreted as dominant, i.e., head held high, firm hand shake, etc. If they also display behaviors that indicate submissiveness, i.e., avoiding eye contact, weak voice, etc., the intended impression may be misinterpreted.

Residents' first impressions of resident assistants are crucial since these impressions may facilitate or hamper resident assistants in the performance of their duties. Because so little of the previous research focuses on global impressions, it seems clear that what is needed in this area is a shift toward integrating nonverbal behaviors and examining the overall impressions they evoke.

This type of research would be of benefit to anyone who seeks to create an impression on others instead of just making an impression on them. A first step in this shift would be to combine behaviors that have been found to convey similar meanings and describe their combined effects on the global initial impressions formed by others. A study of this type would not only integrate nonverbal communication and impression management research to a fuller extent, but it would also provide useful information on how to create

an intended impression on others.

### Purpose of the Study

Previous research has been conducted on nonverbal communication and impression management, with both areas yielding results suggesting various techniques or single behaviors which promote particular attitudes about people (Douty, 1963; Stillman and Hensley, 1980). What past research has not yielded is the manner in which these two areas of study may be combined to examine specific styles of communication, emerging through the use of a set of nonverbal communication behaviors, which evoke particular impressions about people.

The purpose of the present investigation was two fold. The first task was to establish two distinct styles of communication, formal and casual, by combining various nonverbal communication behaviors that convey similar meanings. The behaviors chosen for both styles included vocalics, body position, dress, and method of presentation. A formal presentation had a resident hall assistant dressed up (dress pants and blazer), standing tall and erect, speaking with a wide range of pitch and inflection and loud volume, and conducting the meeting from a written agenda. In contrast, a casual meeting was conducted from notecards, with the presenter dressed down (jeans and a sweater), sitting cross-legged on the floor and speaking in a conversational tone

of voice. The vocal pitch and inflection were minimal. Little scientific research has examined these behaviors, but the prescriptive literature concerning nonverbal communication supported the meaning similarities of each group of behaviors.

The second task was to compare the subjects' impressions formed from each style of presentation to determine if significant differences are present in the types of impressions formed and to ascertain if either style elicits a more favorable impression. The fundamental objective of the study was to provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of nonverbal communication on impression formation.

The design of the study was experimental, employing volunteer student subjects, randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions. The independent variables consisted of the two styles of communication, formal and casual, as expressed through the use of a combination of nonverbal behaviors. The dependent variables were: (1) Perceived Friendliness, (2) Perceived Trustworthiness, (3) Perceived Competence, (4) Perceived Flexibility, (5) Perceived Leadership Ability of Resident Assistant, (6) Perceived Confidence as Resident Assistant, (7) Willingness to Live on Floor, (8) Willingness to Have Resident Assistant in Charge, (9) Perceived Concern for Residents, and (10) Willingness to Discuss Personal Problems with Resident Assistant. The first four variables described perceptions of the source, while the other six

described perceptions of the source as a resident assistant. The variables were measured by Likert-like scales and 7 point bi-polar adjectival scales. Through the use of a Personal/Impersonal Topic Inventory, the study also measured the extent to which the two styles of communication affected discussion topics between the resident assistant and her residents.

This investigation differed from previous research in that it examined sets of nonverbal behaviors and their effect on impression formation. Past research has only focused on the effects of one or two behaviors simultaneously. The present study used combinations of nonverbal communication behaviors, which are similar in the meanings they have been found to produce, to form styles of communication. Instead of focusing on the effects of particular nonverbal communication behavior, the effects of particular nonverbal communication styles were noted.

Also unlike past research, this study focused on a specific incidence of impression formation and sought to discover the additional knowledge needed to master the situation. While it was designed for one small group, resident assistants on college campuses, it was not limited greatly in generalizability, for the primary focus of the experiment was to determine effects of the communication styles on impression formation. Thus the study served the practical needs of one group while providing information that may be applied to a wider range of meeting situations.

This report is divided into five sections. Chapter II is entitled Review of Literature and discusses impression management and communication styles in general and then how they relate to the study. Previous research that supports the hypotheses in this investigation are also presented.

Chapter III of this study is entitled Methods and Procedures. In this chapter, the method used for sample selection and the subjects are identified, and the design and procedures of the study are explained. The independent and dependent variables are identified and all variables are operationally defined. Reliabilities are also reported for each variable.

The results of the study are discussed in Chapter IV. The statistics reported are the sample size and the means, degree of freedom, and the sum of squares for variables that showed a significant difference between the two styles of communication. A two-way analysis of variance is used to analyze the data between the two styles of communication. Also noted is a cross-tabulation of the topics chosen from the Personal/Impersonal Topic Inventory by sex and style of presentation.

Chapter V, the Discussion, includes an interpretation of the results, the limitations the study may have, and the implications of the research with regard to impression management and college student personnel. The research questions and the hypotheses posed in Chapter II are

discussed and significant differences, if any, found between the styles of communication are interpreted in relation to leadership training.



## Chapter 2

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Erving Goffman's metaphor of life as theater assumes that people in real social life behave as actors on a stage. Through the use of appropriate verbal and nonverbal communicative acts, individuals attempt to create particular impressions on their audience. Self presentation is a process of impression management. People influence the definition of the situation by projecting a certain impression (Goffman, 1959).

Another way of viewing impression management is through roles. Just as actors on a stage portray a role, individuals in everyday life portray a variety of roles, each one carrying with it expectations that are used by observers of the role to form an impression of a person. Resident assistants in a college environment are expected to assume four roles simultaneously. Each of the roles carries expectations that elicit certain impressions formed by others, namely, the residents in the hall. The four roles they are to assume include: counselor, role model, student, and teacher (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981). Resident assistants act as counselors for floor members who are having personal or academic problems; act as a role model for students to become involved in the hall, behave properly, and maintain a high academic standard; act as a student when they are attending classes and completing homework; and act as a teacher when they give out information

on policies or programs on the floor. As each role is enacted, the resident assistants engage in various verbal and nonverbal communicative acts that present an image which they feel will lead to positive impressions from others. For resident assistants, the impressions that are formed at the beginning of the year lay the groundwork for future interactions with the residents.

#### Impression Formation Research

One quick glance is sufficient to form an impression of another person. A multitude of studies have been conducted in an effort to describe how these impressions are formed and maintained. Asch's classic impression formation studies (1946) provide substantial evidence that people form unified, or global, impressions of others and that certain characteristics play a central role in the formation of an impression. By reversing the order of a list of words which were positive on one end and negative on the other end of the list, Asch found that subjects formed surprisingly different impressions of a hypothetically described person. When subjects heard the positive words first, they were more likely to discount the negative traits and pass them off as insignificant character flaws. When the negative characteristics were listed first, however, the subjects wrote a much more negative impression of the individual. This phenomena was termed "the order of presentation effect."

In another experiment, Asch (1946) gave subjects an identical set of adjectives with the exception of the words "warm" or "cold." He then asked them to write a brief summary about the individual described and found that subjects formed significantly different impressions from the word lists. Persons describing the individual from the list of words that included the warm trait wrote a much more favorable impression than the persons using the word list that included the cold trait. Asch concluded that certain central traits exist that may determine an impression, regardless of other characteristics known about the person. While these studies were insightful for understanding the formation of impressions, they concentrated solely on written or verbal descriptions of people.

Harold Kelley (1950) elaborated on Asch's warm/cold characteristics in person descriptions and tested the effect they elicited when they were part of an introduction of a stranger. He introduced a substitute instructor before the instructor entered his classroom of students. In his introduction, Kelley gave a personal description of the instructor including the words "very warm" or "rather cold." After the instructor gave a 20-minute lecture, the students were asked to rate him on a number of variables. Consistent with Asch, Kelley found that the very warm instructor was rated as "More considerate of others, more informal, more sociable, more popular, better natured, more humorous, and more humane than

when introduced as rather cold (Kelley, p. 435). Also consistent with Asch's study, however, was the fact that the intended impression was created prior to the initial interaction. Subjects most likely inferred the personality of the instructor from Kelley's description of him before he entered the room. The impression the subjects formed may have resulted from the central traits used for the description, but it also could have resulted from the student's expectations and past experiences in similar situations.

A person's expectations and past experiences play a significant role in the impressions they form of others. Wright (1965) has argued that "into each interaction individuals take their own particular expectancies and personality theories." He says, "It is therefore naive to assume 'affective neutrality,' or that values etc. are cast aside and begun afresh for each new acquaintance" (As quoted in Duck, p. 40). One drawback in relying on past experiences or personal expectations when forming impressions of others is that they may elicit an unwarranted negative impression. Freedman and Steinbruner (1964) and Briscoe, Woodyard and Shaw (1967) noted that once a negative impression is formed, it is much more difficult to change, even after new positive information is presented.

Over 40 years have past since Asch first began his impression formation research. In that time, the issue has been studied from numerous perspectives and a variety of

situations. The methodology of the research, however, has remained limited to one of two types--written or verbal descriptions of people or, in more recent years, photographs of individuals.

Much of the research implies that persons have no control over the impression they are making on others. Also noted, however, is the importance of a positive first impression to future interactions. This study seeks to determine if a set of nonverbal behaviors elicits a positive first impression of a resident assistant from her floor members. Instead of using pictures or written descriptions of people to determine which variables are perceived as more important, the present investigation used video taped excerpts from a first of the year floor meeting to discover if a specific nonverbal communication style is perceived more favorably than another.

#### Impression Management and Styles of Communication in General

Impression management is based on the manner in which a person communicates, both verbally and nonverbally. In some cases, a communication style may reveal an individual's personality. "The introvert develops a more distant aloof style, whereas the extrovert uses expansive postures and gestures" (Dellinger & Deane, 1980, p. 68). Cherunik, Way, Ames and Hutto (1981) investigated the communication styles of males possessing high or low Machiavellian personality traits. When raters judged presentations by each group, those individuals

who possessed high Machiavellian traits were rated higher on those particular traits than persons exhibiting low Machiavellianism. The researchers concluded that the "practitioners of interpersonal strategies like Machiavellianism can communicate elaborate self serving impressions to others"(p. 398).

Frequently people interpret a communication style differently than it was intended and consequently form an impression not intended by the speaker. "At a business meeting, women who talk a lot, raise their voice, or interrupt are apt to be seen as pushy" (Dellinger & Deane, p. 67), although they may be intending to present themselves as intelligent and assertive. In an investigation conducted on the communication style of playing dumb, men were found to be more likely to engage in this style even though women are stereotyped as using it more frequently. It was noted that this style is related to poor mental health, alienation, low self esteem and unhappiness (Gove, Hughes, & Geerken, 1980). While persons may use this style humorously in an effort to receive attention, it is occasionally interpreted negatively, and the presenter is perceived as being emotionally troubled.

Self presentation need not always be direct. There are various ways to manage an impression without directly presenting information about oneself. Two indirect techniques of presentation are basking and blasting. These techniques are characterized by the presentation of positive (basking) or negative (blasting) information about something with which a person

is merely associated. Cialdini and Richardson (1980) studied these two techniques by focusing on the ways college students present information after either winning or losing a sporting event. If their school won the event, students would convey a basking style and present themselves as positively associated with the school (i.e., "Yeah, that's my team that won"). If the event was lost by the school, students would blast the other school (i.e., "They pay a lot of money to recruit some of those players. No wonder they win"). The students in the first case presented an image of winners through association with the school, and in the second case, presented the image of the deserving underdog through disassociation with the other school.

Although a broad range of studies exist on impression management through styles of communication and self presentation, no research found that was conducted on resident assistants has specifically focused on either issue. One study, by Morgan (1975), touches the issue of impression formation, but an indirect technique of information presentation was used to manage the impressions formed by residents.

As students moved into their residence hall, some of them were hand delivered an information sheet about their resident assistant that portrayed them in a positive light (i.e., Your resident assistant is highly trained and mature). A control group received no information about their resident assistant. When both groups rated their resident assistants on a variety

of characteristics, the experimental group rated their resident assistant much more favorably. This finding suggests that the students had formed a higher overall impression of their resident assistant on the basis of the positive pre-information they received. The investigators also found a significant relationship between the pre-information and the behavior of the residents. The experimental group became involved in more activities over the course of the semester than the control group.

Morgan's findings strongly suggest that first impressions can affect subsequent behavior, especially residents' impressions of resident assistants. The basis of Morgan's study, however, is the information the residents received about their resident assistant prior to an initial introduction. Research focusing on the impressions made at the first face-to-face interaction between a resident assistant and floor residents has remained undone. Previous literature on resident assistants and other student personnel consists mainly of the selection of the personnel, their personality characteristics, team building techniques and their effects, and leadership training for residence hall staffs. Much of the research involving leadership centers on the emergence of a leader in a group. It is assumed that appointed leaders understand their role and their abilities to manage this role.

One problem with past research in the area of self presentation is that it has only identified various types of presen-



tations and discovered their significance on impressions formed by others. Researchers have failed to ask an important question-- Is it possible for persons to intentionally manage a communication style to create the impression they want to create? This study sought to answer the question by creating styles of communication through the use of nonverbal communication behaviors and determining the overall impressions that were formed by others of the presenter of the style. Resident assistants in a college environment were used as the focus of the study because of the powerful influence of their first impression on the residents for which they are responsible.

#### Communication Styles Specific to the Present Study

Past research on impression formation and impression management indicates the significance of self presentation on peoples' perceptions of others. Even before people speak, they are presenting an image for others to interpret by the clothes they wear. "Clothes may be worn well or in a slovenly way, they may be dramatic or drab; in these ways they reflect the personality of the wearer" (Argyle, 1969, p. 99). Douty (1963) found that when the clothing of photographed women was varied, the first impressions of the women, with regard to personal traits and social status, were significantly altered. Just an ornament added to the hair may produce changes in the way people are perceived by others. Waitresses received substantially higher tips from customers when they wore a flower in their hair than when no ornament was worn (Stillman

& Hensley, 1980).

In a study conducted by Rollman (1980) on the effects of teachers' style of dress on impression formation, interesting findings resulted. The investigators showed college students photographs of teachers dressed in three types of attire: formal, moderate, and casual. The students then rated the teachers on ten traits teachers would be expected to possess such as knowledgeable, organized, or well prepared for class. Rollman found that the style of dress significantly affected the students' perceptions of the teachers. No one style was more favorable, however, the formally dressed teacher was rated as most organized while the informally dressed one was seen as most friendly and flexible.

The results of this study reveal the extent to which persons can control the impressions they make on others nonverbally by the clothes they choose to wear. Since one of the roles of a resident assistant is that of teacher and this title carries certain expectations, the manner in which they dress, especially at the first floor meeting, may be a highly significant factor in the impression they make on the residents. The present study included dress as one in a set of nonverbal communication behaviors expressed to create a certain impression.

Few researchers deny the powerful impact that nonverbal communication has on impression formation and impression management. Mehrabian has conducted a multitude of studies on nonverbal communication behaviors and has concluded that

three dimensions account for the bulk of their use: evaluation, potency or status, and responsiveness. Through a variety of experimental studies, behaviors such as "the physical proximity to an addressee, more eye contact with him, a forward lean toward the addressee rather than a backward lean away from him, and an orientation of the torso toward rather than away from the addressee have all been found to communicate a more positive attitude toward the addressee" (Mehrabian, p. 250).

Pearce and Conklin's investigation on source credibility (1971) stressed the significance of paralinguistic vocal cues on speaker perceptions. They hypothesized that audiences perceive different personality, demographic and credibility characteristics if the same speaker uses different styles of vocalic cues. The differences between the delivery patterns used for the study were characterized by degree rather than kind. Conversational delivery was seen as having a relatively small range of inflections, a greater consistency of rate and pitch, less volume, and generally lower pitch levels than dynamic delivery. The researchers found that when a speaker used a conversational delivery style, he was described by subjects as more trustworthy, honest, people oriented and sociable. In a dynamic style, he was perceived as more toughminded, task oriented, self assured and assertive. While neither style is perceived as negative, each style conveys a vastly different impression of the speaker. The delivery style used at the first floor meeting by resident assistants

could have a tremendous impact on how their residents perceive their leadership ability, as well as their empathy and concern for residents. The present study borrowed Pearce and Conklin's vocalic styles to be used as one in a set of nonverbal communication behaviors expressed to create a certain impression.

Limited research data is available on the perceptions of speaker's body position or method of presentation. Prescriptive literature on seating arrangements for the communication of status is available. One common perception is noted by Dellinger and Deane (1981). "Whenever people meet regularly they will arrange themselves according to status with the highest status person at the 'head' and others arranged in descending order 'below' the head of the table." Mehrabian (1969) noted that status is inferred by height, which is why speakers stand up to lecture (which projects authority) and then sit down for the question and answer period (which projects informality and equality). The status relationship between resident assistants and their residents may be a significant factor in the development in floor cohesiveness and the willingness of residents to seek out their resident assistant during the semester.

Based on Mehrabian's findings, resident assistants who stand at their first floor meeting would be perceived as more authoritative while the presentation conducted in a sitting position would signify a higher degree of equality. Body position and method of presentation were used in the present

investigation to complete the set of nonverbal communication behaviors expressed to create a certain impression.

### Summary of Hypotheses

Based on minimal past research in the areas of impression management, impression formation, and nonverbal communication behaviors, several hypotheses were formed for the present study. Rollman (1980) found that teachers in formal attire were perceived as more organized, while casually dressed teachers were viewed as more friendly and more flexible. Because dress was used as one of the nonverbal behaviors depicting a communication style and casual and formal dress were the two types presented, the following hypotheses were drawn for the study:

- H<sub>1</sub> The speaker of the formal style of communication will be rated as more organized than the presenter of the casual style of communication.
- H<sub>2</sub> The speaker of the casual style will be rated as more friendly than the presenter of the formal style.
- H<sub>3</sub> The speaker of the casual style will be rated as more flexible than the presenter of the formal style.

Pearce and Conklin (1971) examined the effects of vocalic aspects of style on perceived credibility. They operationally defined two delivery patterns (Bowers, 1965) by degree rather than kind: conversational delivery consisted of a relatively

smaller range of inflections, a greater consistency of range and pitch, less volume, and generally lower pitch levels than did dynamic delivery. Their results indicated that a speaker employing conversational style of delivery was perceived as more trustworthy and more favorably evaluated than when he used a dynamic style. Although the present study used vocalics as only one of four behaviors creating a communication style, Hypothesis 4 was based on Pearce and Conklin's results:

H<sub>4</sub> The speaker of the casual communication style will be rated as more trustworthy than the speaker of the formal style.

With regard to speaker style and competence ratings, Pearce and Conklin found no differences between a dynamic and a conversational style of communication. However in a later study by Smith, Brown, Strong, and Rencher (1975), speaker competence ratings increased and decreased linearly with the rate of delivery. Johnson, Conklin, and Pearce's study (1979) also found that the speaker using a dynamic delivery was rated higher in competence than a speaker presenting a conversational style of communication. The following hypothesis was drawn from these results:

H<sub>5</sub> The speaker of the formal communication style will receive higher competence ratings than the speaker of the casual style.

Zirkle and Hudson (1975) found that "counselor oriented" resident assistants fared much better on impression ratings

than "administrator oriented" resident assistants. Specifically, in the counselor oriented environment, students discussed more personal topics with the resident assistants, saw them as more of a friend, and preferred to have them again as their resident assistants. These findings indicate that a more favorable attitude would exist toward a person oriented resident assistant. The casual presentation depicted a more personal communication style than the formal presentation by the seating position (sitting on the floor versus standing), and the method of presentation (notecards versus a written agenda). Also, Pearce and Conklin found that a conversational style of delivery was perceived as more person oriented and sociable. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H<sub>6</sub> The casual presentation will be rated as more personal than the formal presentation.
- H<sub>7</sub> Topics chosen to discuss with the resident assistant who presents the casual style of communication will be of a more personal nature than the topics chosen for the resident assistant presenting a formal style of communication.

Research conducted on nonverbal communication has yielded significant differences in meaning between a multitude of nonverbal communication behaviors. Impression management research has shown that the manner in which persons present themselves is a major indicator of the impression they will

make on others. The limited data available on communication styles composed of nonverbal communication behaviors suggests that because certain behaviors carry a particular meaning, their use in self presentations contribute to the formation of an overall impression of an individual. This relationship, which has been indicated but not thoroughly tested, is the basis for the research questions concerning styles of communication and impression formation posed in this study.

- RQ<sub>1</sub> Is there a significant difference in the impression rating scores of the source as resident assistant using a formal or a casual nonverbal communication style?
- RQ<sub>2</sub> Is there a significant difference in the willingness of a resident to approach the resident assistant to discuss a particular topic based on the presentation style used by the resident assistant?

### Attraction Research

One aspect of impression formation that is difficult to control is attraction. Each person has individual ideas of the characteristics that are socially and physically attractive in another. Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (1955) offers an explanation for this phenomena. His theory asserts that people fit their experiences into clear understandable segments in their mind. These segments are called constructs, and over time, they grow more elaborate as a result of new experiences. Using this theory as a baseline



in attraction research, the focus of attraction is not on the person being perceived but on the person doing the perceiving, which means that attractiveness, whether it be physical or social, is definitely located in the eye of the onlooker. From constructs formed by past experiences, people formulate assumptions and expectations for future experiences in which behaviors and characteristics congruent with these expectations are attributed to others.

Persons perceived to be physically attractive are attributed many characteristics that may or may not be true. Dion, Bersheid, and Walster (1972) found that "physically attractive individuals were generally believed to lead better lives, to be more interesting people, and to do more exciting things altogether" (Duck, p. 99). One reason for this assumption may be the media. Television commercials endlessly provide physically attractive people with flowers, dates, beautiful clothes, and lives full of excitement. As a consequence of television assumptions, physically attractive individuals become more socially attractive because of the characteristics attributed to them.

Researchers have offered a variety of explanations for attraction to another individual. Lischeron and LaGaipa (1970) noted that early social attraction depends on an evaluation of the interaction style used by a person. According to the Personal Construct Theory, individuals compare the behavior of others to their own constructs and the more similar they

are, the more attraction will occur. Argyle (1972) noted that a way a message was said accounted for three times as much of the variance in the impression formed as did the content. But then a year later, Stang (1973) found that the quantity of the message contributed to attraction of another. The abundance of explanations on attraction confirm the fact that attraction to another person is complex, subjective, and highly interrelated to the impressions formed of another.

Steven Duck proposed a Theory of Acquaintance that provides a general explanation for many of the research findings on attraction and impression formation. The theory states that in an initial interaction, or even before it occurs, attraction is based on the external or physical characteristics of the members in the interaction. Duck says, "In real life interaction individuals are normally able to make some general indirect judgment about another person before they have any direct access to that person's actual cognitive apparatus (e.g., they can assess race, height, hair color, etc. from considerable distance without any interaction taking place)" (Duck, p. 136). This idea is consistent with the research on physical attraction. As the relationship continues, he believes that the personalities of the two people become the prominent measure of attraction, which correlates with the Personal Construct Theory and Lischeron and LaGaipa's results. In essence, the more similar the peoples' personalities, which includes constructs, beliefs, and attitudes

the greater attraction between them.

In any study concerned with impression formation, attraction becomes a factor. Following Duck's Theory of Acquaintance with regard to the first floor meeting of resident assistants, attraction is based on both physical and personality characteristics. Both of these stages of judgment need to be considered because some residents begin judging the resident assistant's personality during the meeting, while others on the floor may have met the resident assistant so briefly that they will still be assessing her externally as the meeting takes place.

Although interpersonal attraction was not the main thrust of the present study, it needed to be controlled for because of its influence on first impressions. By using one actress for both communication styles, interpersonal attraction bias posed no threat to the study.

Chapter III  
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The methodology employed in this study was designed to examine differences between two styles of nonverbal communication behavior "sets." The experiment used a post-test only design and depicted an initial formal floor meeting in a residence hall conducted by a resident assistant. Seven hypotheses and two research questions were addressed through a Likert-like scale, a bi-polar adjectival scale, and a topics inventory scale. This chapter will provide a detailed description of the procedures used to conduct the investigation.

Independent Variables:

The independent variables were the two styles of communication, formal and casual. Each style was represented by a combination of nonverbal communication behaviors that were designed to convey consistent meaning. The four behaviors manipulated for each style were: (1) Dress, (2) Body Position, (3) Vocalics, and (4) Method of Presentation, i.e., written agenda versus no formally written agenda. The manipulated behaviors were defined as follows:

Dress

Style 1- Clothing was business-like and neat (button-down shirt, dress pants, and blazer, with careful attention to color coordination of outfit).

Style 2- Clothing was sporty and informal (jeans and a sweater, uncoordinated in color scheme).

### Body Position

Style 1- Posture was standing erect, tall with minimal body lean. Hands were at side or holding papers. Legs were uncrossed with feet firmly on the ground.

Style 2- Posture was relaxed, seated on the floor, with body leaning on another object or another part of the body for support, (example: elbow on knee with hand on chin or hands behind back on floor for support). Legs were crossed Indian style.

### Vocalics

Style 1 Inflection- Words and sentences were spoken with wide variation in pitch and tone of voice.

Style 2 Inflection- Words and sentences were spoken with minimal variation in pitch and tone of voice.

Style 1 Volume- Voice was loud, but not shouting.

Style 2 Volume- Voice was soft yet clearly understandable.

Method of Presentation

Style 1- The presenter used a written agenda as an outline for the meeting.

Style 2- The presenter used notecards for reference during the meeting.

Validation Check:

The verbal content of the video tapes of the communication styles depicted a typical residence hall floor meeting held at the beginning of the year. The experimenter developed the presentation on the basis of past experience living in a residence hall. The verbal content of the tapes included an overview to residence hall living, an introduction to the hall staff members, the importance of hall I.D. cards, and the need to lock room doors.

Prior to the employment of the tapes in the study, a validation check was conducted to ensure that the films were seen as significantly different in style yet equally satisfactory in presentations. A stimulus validation test using a 7 point bi-polar adjectival scale was constructed to determine perceptions of (1) the presentation itself as to style (casual--formal) and as to fluency (satisfactory--unsatisfactory), (2) the speaker (friendly--unfriendly), (sincere--insincere), (warm--cold), (tense--relaxed), and (3) each nonverbal communication behavior: body position (formal--casual), variation in voice inflection (high--low),

method of presentation (casual--formal), dress (formal--casual), and level of volume (loud--soft). Eight trained speech professionals (graduate students in a Midwestern university communication studies department) viewed both styles of presentation and were asked to record their responses at the end of each tape. This procedure permitted the observers to judge each style independently. The presentation style of the tapes was varied, creating a counter-balanced design to control for possible ordering effects. For the purpose of combining the appropriate measurement sheets, the presentations were arbitrarily labeled Style 1 (formal) and Style 2 (casual).

Both styles were seen as significantly different, with the formal style being viewed as more formal ( $\bar{M} = 1.63$ ) and the casual style being judged as more casual ( $\bar{M} = 5.88$ , see Table 1). Additionally, both styles were seen as equally satisfactory in method of presentation, speaker friendliness, speaker sincerity, and speaker warmth. The vocalic variables, variation in pitch and the rate of inflection did not meet the .05 significance level, however, this did not invalidate differences in the two styles. The three other behaviors, dress, body position, and method of presentation met the .05 level of significance in the direction expected.

Table 1  
Validity Ratings of Stimulus Materials

## T-Tests

Variable	Groups	N		T	Sig. Level
1. Style of Presentation	Formal	8	1.63	-8.91	.00*
	Casual	8	5.88		
2. Method of Presentation**	Formal	8	3.13	1.90	.10
	Casual	8	1.50		
3. Speaker Friendliness	Formal	8	3.00	2.02	.07
	Casual	8	1.63		
4. Speaker Sincerity	Formal	8	4.88	-2.02	.07
	Casual	8	6.38		
5. Speaker Warmth	Formal	8	3.75	2.14	.06
	Casual	8	2.00		
6. Speaker Relaxation	Formal	8	3.63	-2.40	.04*
	Casual	8	5.38		
7. Dress	Formal	8	1.63	-14.12	.00*
	Casual	8	6.80		
8. Rate of Inflection	Formal	8	5.88	1.54	.15
	Casual	8	4.88		
9. Body Position	Formal	8	1.25	-18.41	.00*
	Casual	8	6.75		
10. Variation in Pitch	Formal	8	2.30	-2.16	.06
	Casual	8	3.80		
11. Method of Presentation**	Formal	8	6.30	6.87	.00*
	Casual	8	2.30		

\* Denotes differences between styles at  $p < .05$  level of significance for 7 degrees of freedom.

\*\*The first question concerned how satisfactory each presentation was, while the second question dealt with how formal or casual each presentation was viewed.



Dependent Variables:

Perception of Source: The first four dependent variables were measured by a semantic differential constructed of 19 seven point bi-polar adjectival scales designed to tap four dimensions of perceptions of the source. These variables were: (1) Friendliness: Friendly--Unfriendly, Clean--Dirty, Flexible--Inflexible, Kind--Cruel, Open--Closed, Energetic--Tired, Sincere--Insincere, Enthusiastic--Unenthusiastic and Personal--Impersonal; (2) Competence: Competent--Incompetent, Decisive--Indecisive, Active--Passive, Skilled--Unskilled and Confident--Unconfident; (3) Trustworthiness: Safe--Unsafe and Honest--Dishonest; and (4) Flexibility: Warm--Cold and Rigid--Pliable. From a varimax rotation, four independent dimensions emerged with a Eigenvalue higher than one (See Table 2). The four dimensions analyzed were used to create weighted summed factor scores so that all items were included in the dependent measures (Cronkite and Liska, 1976).

Table 2  
Factor Analysis of Dependent Variables  
Varimax Rotation

Variable	Factor 1 Friendly	Factor 2 Competent	Factor 3 Trustworthy	Factor 4 Flexible
Friendly-Unfriendly	.79105	.05390	.27619	.02403
Clean-Dirty	.52619	.13231	.30916	-.40217
Organized-Unorganized	.02683	.11847	.12273	.18503

Table 2 Con't.

Variable	Factor 1 Friendly	Factor 2 Competent	Factor 3 Trustworthy	Factor 4 Flexible
Flexible- nflexible	.72519	.14010	.03381	.19487
Warm-Cool	.08184	-.00666	.15355	.63248
Competent-Incompetent	.14729	.62200	-.10522	.19910
Pliable-Rigid	.38730	.06112	-.06030	.71577
Safe-Unsafe	.16743	.25375	.79962	.10093
Decisive-Indecisive	.05509	.64974	.32200	.03748
Kind-Cruel	.69833	.01475	.39644	.29399
Active-Passive	.13166	.56374	-.03962	-.02732
Confident-Unconfident	.17462	.68737	.45252	-.03069
Open-Closed	.62542	.20682	.20188	.46451
Honest-Dishonest	.46359	.15211	.62448	.01078
Energetic-Tired	.69326	.42976	-.02595	-.09775
Sincere-Insincere	.71736	.41418	-.00041	.12394
Enthusiastic- Unenthusiastic	.81230	.19508	.14733	.00875
Personal-Impersonal	.78009	-.06176	.16235	.26488
Skilled-Unskilled	.11683	.68136	.13058	.07311
Eigenvalue	7.15083	2.34200	1.31600	1.27552

In an internal reliability check of the four dimensions, all but Flexibility met sufficient levels of reliability. Alpha Levels ranged from .61 to .79 (See Table 3).

Table 3  
Reliabilities

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Perceptions of Source</u>	<u>Alpha Level</u>
Friendliness		.73
Trustworthiness		.79
Competence		.75
Flexibility		.61
<u>Perceptions of Source as Resident Assistant</u>		
Perceived leadership ability of resident assistant		.45
Perceived confidence as resident assistant		.79
Willingness to live on floor		.70
Willingness to have resident assistant in charge of floor		.74
Perceived concern of resident assistant		.54
Willingness to discuss personal problems with resident assistant		.80

Perception of Source as Resident Assistant: The second group of dependent variables concerned the perceptions of source as a resident assistant. The perceptions were measured by six Likert-like scales concerning job related characteristics common to resident assistants. Four of the six measures met sufficient levels of internal reliability. Alpha Levels ranged from .70 to .80. Perceived leadership ability (.45) and perceived concern of residents (.54) failed to meet sufficient levels of reliability (see Table 3).

Perception of Future Interaction with Resident Assistant:  
The last dependent variable concerned the manner in which subjects managed their impressions of self in anticipation of future interaction with the resident assistant. In order to determine anticipated future interaction effects of the two types of communication styles presented, subjects were asked to complete a Personal/Impersonal Topic Scale comprised of 16 common topics for residents to discuss with their resident assistant. The topics ranged from highly impersonal (explanation of a hall policy, directions to a certain location) to highly personal (personal illness, an unexpected end to a relationship with a person of the opposite sex).

Intervening Variables:

The sex of the respondent was an intervening variable in the study. While there was no manipulation of sex, differences in perceptions between males and females as subjects were noted.

Subjects:

The subjects were students at a large Midwestern university who were enrolled in an introductory communication course and who had in the past or were currently residing in a university residence hall. The students volunteered to participate in the study and received class credit for their participation. They were randomly assigned to one of two treatments. There were 33 males and 65 females that participated in the study with ages ranging from 18-24. The actress who portrayed the resident

assistant and conducted the presentation was a female graduate student. 51 subjects were assigned to the formal presentation and 47 were assigned to the casual presentation.

Procedures:

A five minute video tape simulating a first floor meeting presentation was constructed for each of the two communication styles. One tape incorporated the nonverbal behaviors that conveyed a formal image while the other one included nonverbal behaviors defined as casual. An actress portraying a resident assistant memorized a script and was trained in the formal and casual styles of presentation.

Undergraduate students enrolled in a basic communication class and who had in the past or were currently living in a residence hall were the subjects of the study. This requirement was necessary in order to gauge how actual residence hall persons might respond to the two resident assistant communication styles.

The subjects were self-selected and were randomly assigned to one of the two treatment conditions. The subjects were given the following verbal instructions:

"Imagine that you are at your first floor meeting in your residence hall. Your R.A. is going to be on video tape but imagine, if you will, that she is here in person. You are to watch a five-minute video tape and then complete a few forms concerning impressions"

Immediately following the presentation of the video tape, questionnaires were distributed to the subjects who required five to ten minutes to record their responses, although no time limit was imposed. After the questionnaires were collected, the subjects were debriefed.

## Chapter IV

## RESULTS

The dependent variables were analyzed by a 2 x 2 analysis of variance design. Between group factors were the two styles of communication (formal versus casual) and sex (male versus female). Results are reported for perception of the source, perception of the source as resident assistant, and perception of future interactions.

Perception of Source

The first hypothesis predicted that the formal speaker would be rated as more organized than the casual speaker. The variable organization, however, did not load on any of the four factors in the factor analysis. Thus the hypothesis was not supported by the data.

Hypothesis two predicted that significant differences would emerge between the two styles of communication for the variable friendliness. The hypothesis was supported by the data. The two-way analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect due to style ( $F=5.435$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The casual style of communication was perceived as significantly more friendly than the formal style, which was the expectation of the original prediction. No significant main effects existed between the sexes on the dimension of friendliness (See Table 4).

Table 4  
Two-way Analysis of Variance  
Friendliness by Style and Sex

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	264.740	2	2.817	0.065
Style	255.453	1	5.435	0.022*
Sex	6.702	1	0.143	0.707
2-Way Interactions	34.837	1	0.741	0.391
Sty    Sex	34.837	1	0.741	0.391
Explained	299.577	3	2.125	0.102
Residual	4464.779	95		
Total	4764.357	98		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 42.62$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 42.00$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 44.15$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 46.05$

The flexibility dimension supported hypothesis three, which stated that the casual style would be rated as more flexible than the formal style. Significant main effects were present for both style ( $F = 4.597, p < .05$ ) and sex ( $F = 4.960, p < .05$ ), however, no interaction effects occurred. Both sexes perceived the casual style significantly more flexible than the formal style, but the females ( $\bar{M} = 22.41$ ) rated the casual style significantly higher in scores than the males ( $\bar{M} = 20.71$ , see Table 5).



Table 5  
Two-way Analysis of Variance  
Flexibility by Style and Sex

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	78.885	2	4.919	0.009
Style	36.859	1	4.597	0.035*
Sex	39.771	1	4.960	0.028*
2-Way Interaction	2.484	1	0.310	0.579
Sty    Sex	2.484	1	0.310	0.579
Explained	81.368	3	3.382	0.021
Residual	761.765	95		
Total	843.133	98		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 19.93$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 20.97$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 20.71$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 22.41$

Past research has suggested that the casual speaker would be perceived as more trustworthy than the formal speaker and that the formal speaker would be viewed as more competent than the casual speaker. In this investigation, hypotheses four and five, which indicated the same results, were not supported by the data. No differences due to style or sex were found in the trustworthiness or competence dimension (See Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6  
Two-way Analysis of Variance  
Trustworthiness by Style and Sex

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	26.682	2	0.860	0.427
Style	11.007	1	0.709	0.402
Sex	14.920	1	0.961	0.329
2-Way Interactions	25.622	1	1.651	0.202
Style    Sex	25.622	1	1.651	0.202
Explained	52.304	3	1.124	0.344
Residual	1474.189	95		
Total	1526.493	98		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 33.01$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 32.83$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 32.23$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 34.22$

Table 7  
Two-way Analysis of Variance  
Competence by Style and Sex

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	59.713	2	1.574	0.212
Style	3.254	1	0.172	0.680
Sex	55.640	1	2.934	0.090
2-Way Interactions	30.464	1	1.606	0.208
Style    Sex	30.464	1	1.606	0.208
Explained	90.177	3	1.585	0.198
Residual	1801.519	95		
Total	1891.696	98		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 36.64$	Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 35.42$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 37.13$	Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 38.28$

With regard to hypothesis six, the casual style of communication was perceived as significantly more personal than the formal style, as expected. The variable personal--impersonal loaded on the friendliness factor in the four factor analysis. The results of the two-way analysis of variance revealed significantly higher scores for the casual presentation than for the formal presentation (See Table 4). No differences emerged between the sexes.

No data supported hypothesis seven. Using a cross-tabulation procedure to calculate the differences between the topics selected by the subjects and the style of presentation, no significant differences were found on any of the 16 topics. The three most frequently selected topics by both presentation styles were (1) explanation of a hall policy, (2) directions to a certain location, and (3) advice on a class to take. All three topics were selected to represent highly impersonal topics by the experimenter (See Tables 8-23).

The second research question addressed in the study concerned the differences in the willingness of the resident to approach the resident assistant about a particular topic based on the floor meeting presentation style. There were no significant differences in the topics chosen by the two groups on any of the 16 topics.

Table 8

## Crosstabulations

Style by Problem with an Instructor

	Formal	Casual
Check	27	29
No Check	24	18

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.45058	1	0.5021
0.76658	1	0.3813

Table 9

## Crosstabulations

Style by Explanation of a Hall Policy

	Formal	Casual
Check	48	41
No Check	3	6

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.68682	1	0.4072
1.38961	1	0.2385

Table 10

## Crosstabulations

Style by Conflict with a Roommate

	Formal	Casual
Check	37	37
No Check	14	10

Table 10 Con't.

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.22562	1	0.6348
0.50424	1	0.4776

Table 11

## Crosstabulations

Style by Seeking Help in Managing Time

	<u>Formal</u>	<u>Casual</u>
Check	17	11
No Check	34	36

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.74512	1	0.3880
1.18156	1	0.2770

Table 12

## Crosstabulations

Style by Difficulty on a Class Assignment

	<u>Formal</u>	<u>Casual</u>
Check	16	17
No Check	35	30

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.08303	1	0.7732
0.25207	1	0.6156

Table 13

## Crosstabulations

An Unexpected End in a Romantic Relationship  
with a Person of the Opposite Sex

	Formal	Casual
Check	2	5
No Check	49	42

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.80511	1	0.3696
1.66368	1	0.1971

Table 14

## Crosstabulations

Difficulties adjusting to the School Year

	Formal	Casual
Check	23	24
No Check	28	23

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.15071	1	0.6979
0.34879	1	0.5548

Table 15

## Crosstabulations

Disciplinary Problems in the Hall

	Formal	Casual
Check	36	37
No Check	15	10

Table 15 Con't.

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.47753	1	0.4895
0.85185	1	0.3560

Table 16

## Crosstabulations

## A Personal Illness

	<u>Formal</u>	<u>Casual</u>
Check	10	12
No Check	41	35

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.21149	1	0.6456
0.49306	1	0.4826

Table 17

## Crosstabulations

## Asking for a Personal Favor

	<u>Formal</u>	<u>Casual</u>
Check	13	15
No Check	38	32

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.22997	1	0.6315
0.49470	1	0.4818

Table 18

## Crosstabulations

## Financial Problems

	Formal	Casual
Check	3	6
No Check	48	41

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.68682	1	0.4072
1.38961	1	0.2385

Table 19

## Crosstabulations

## A Party You Attended Last Weekend

	Formal	Casual
Check	14	16
No Check	37	31

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.23811	1	0.6256
0.50031	1	0.4794

Table 20

## Crosstabulations

## A Weight Problem

	Formal	Casual
Check	5	6
No Check	46	41



Table 20 Con't

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.02068	1	0.8857
0.21536	1	0.6426

Table 21

## Crosstabulations

## Directions to a Certain Location

	<u>Formal</u>	<u>Casual</u>
Check	47	40
No Check	4	7

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.61519	1	0.4328
1.22017	1	0.2693

Table 22

## Crosstabulations

## Dating Problems

	<u>Formal</u>	<u>Casual</u>
Check	2	6
No Check	49	41

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
1.50869	1	0.2193
2.55210	1	0.1101

Table 23

## Crosstabulations

## Advice on a Class to Take

	Formal	Casual
Check	44	37
No Check	7	10

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Significance</u>
0.51734	1	0.4720
0.97271	1	0.3240

Perception of Source as Resident Assistant

The first research question concerned significant differences in perceptions between the two styles of communication for the source as a resident assistant. The variable willingness to have resident assistant in charge of floor showed significant differences in the sexes but not in the communication styles. Female subjects were more willing to have the resident assistant in charge of the floor regardless of the communication style than the male subjects (See Table 24).

Table 24

## Two-way Analysis of Variance

Would Deeply Regret having Resident Assistant  
in Charge of Floor

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	19.111	2	5.951	0.004
Style	0.405	1	0.252	0.617
Sex	18.487	1	11.512	0.001*
2-Way Interaction	2.360	1	1.469	0.228
Sty      Sex	2.360	1	1.469	0.228
Explained	21.471	3	4.457	0.006
Residual	150.948	94		
Total	172.418	97		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 4.83$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 6.02$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 5.40$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 5.97$

With regard to the variable leadership ability, the two-way analysis of variance showed a significant interaction effect between sex and style of presentation. When rating the resident assistant on perceived leadership ability, male subjects perceived the casual style ( $\bar{M} = 4.73$ ) as significantly more ineffective than males or females viewing the formal style ( $\bar{M} = 5.90$ ). Interestingly, females perceived no difference between the two styles with regard to leadership ability.

No differences were noted for the variables willingness to live on floor, perceived concern of residents by resident assistant, willingness to discuss personal problems, and perceived confidence as resident assistant (See Tables 25-29).

Table 25  
Two-way Analysis of Variance  
Resident Assistant is an Ineffective Leader

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	12.247	2	3.634	0.030
Style	2.963	1	1.758	0.188
Sex	9.651	1	5.727	0.019*
2-Way Interactions	6.952	1	4.125	0.045*
Sty Sex	6.952	1	4.125	0.045*
Explained	19.199	3	3.798	0.013
Residual	158.403	94		
Total	177.602	97		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 5.83^b$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 5.97^b$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 4.73^a$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 6.00^b$

a,b represents Student Newman-Keuls' Multiple Range Test at .05 level of significance.

Table 26

## Two-way Analysis of Variance

Would Live on Floor with Resident Assistant

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	4.782	2	1.341	0.267
Style	3.098	1	1.737	0.191
Sex	1.523	1	0.854	0.358
2-Way				
Interactions	0.073	1	0.041	0.840
Sty Sex	0.073	1	0.041	0.084
Explained	4.855	3	0.908	0.441
Residual	167.645	94		
Total	172.500	97		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 3.83$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 4.15$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 4.27$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 4.47$

Table 27

## Two-way Analysis of Variance

Perceived Concern of Residents by Resident Assistant

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	4.782	2	1.341	0.267
Style	3.098	1	1.737	0.191
Sex	1.523	1	0.854	0.358
2-Way Interactions	0.040	1	0.025	0.874
Sty Sex	0.040	1	0.025	0.874
Explained	5.899	3	1.250	0.296
Residual	147.866	94		
Total	153.765	97		

Table 27 Con't.

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 5.56$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 6.03$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 5.53$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 6.09$

Table 28

## Two-way Analysis of Variance

Willingness to Talk to Resident Assistant  
About Personal Problems

Source	S.S.	df	F	Significance
Main Effects	5.188	2	0.916	0.404
Style	3.702	1	1.307	0.256
Sex	1.322	1	0.467	0.496
2-Way Interactions	0.299	1	0.106	0.746
Sty      Sex	0.299	1	0.106	0.746
Explained	5.487	3	0.646	0.588
Residual	266.278	94		
Total	271.765	97		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 3.83$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 3.97$
Male	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 4.07$
Female	Casual Style	$\bar{M} = 4.44$

Table 29  
Two-way Analysis of Variance  
Perceived Confidence as Resident Assistant

Source	S.S.	df	f	Significance
Main Effects	2.568	2	1.331	0.269
Style	0.116	1	0.120	0.730
Sex	2.411	1	2.499	0.117
2-Way Interactions	0.683	1	0.707	0.402
Sty    Sex	0.683	1	0.707	0.402
Explained	3.251	3	1.123	0.344
Residual	90.708	94		
Total	93.959	97		

Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 5.83$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 5.67$
Male	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 6.00$
Female	Formal Style	$\bar{M} = 6.19$

## Chapter V

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this investigation was to determine if the nonverbal style of presentation used by a resident assistant at the first formal floor meeting in a residence hall would have a significant effect on the impressions formed by the residents of the floor. The results provide several conclusions regarding impression formation and impression management for resident assistants on college campuses. Some results agree with previous findings, while others differ from past research in the area. This chapter will discuss these conclusions, as well as address the limitations of the study and areas for future research.

Perception of Source

The results of this study supported the findings of a number of previous investigations. For instance, the friendliness dimension of the impression rating scale received significantly more favorable ratings from both sexes in the casual presentation than in the formal presentation. Rollman (1980) noted the same responses from subjects when casually dressed teachers were compared to those in formal attire. Johnson, Conklin, and Pearce (1979) also found a casual communication style, which they termed conversational, to be rated significantly more favorable than a formal communication style, which they termed dynamic.



For the bi-polar scale personal--impersonal, past research findings were also replicated. The casual speaker was viewed as significantly more personal than the formal speaker regardless of the sex of the subject, which is consistent with Zirkle and Hudson's findings (1975). They concluded that counselor oriented resident assistants were seen as more of a friend and more willing to discuss personal topics with the floor members than the administrator oriented resident assistants.

Replicating the findings of past research using a different population, persons living or working in a residence hall, emphasizes the fact that people can manage how they are perceived by others from their verbal and nonverbal communication. This study indicates that resident assistants who want to be perceived as more friendly and more personal should demonstrate a casual style of communication rather than a formal style, regardless of the sex of floor members. For some resident assistants, this style may come naturally, but for others, a casual style may need to be learned by using particular body movements and vocalics that have been found to convey casual meanings.

While many results supported past research, inconsistent results did occur for the trustworthy and competent variables. No differences in impression rating scores were found between the styles for the trustworthy and competent dimensions. In 1979, Johnson, Conklin, and Pearce noted that a formal speaker

was rated more competent and the casual speaker was rated more trustworthy. The difference in findings may be due to the nature of the investigations. Unlike the previous study, the present one involved descriptive aspects, such as the setting of the experiment and the content of the films. Also, the subjects were aware of the role of the speaker, a resident assistant, and this awareness may have inadvertently biased the subjects' impressions. To be selected as a resident assistant, persons are expected to be trustworthy and competent, so even though the subjects perceived the characteristics to be present, they viewed no one set of communication behaviors stronger or weaker in magnitude than the other.

The flexibility dimension indicated an interaction between the sex of the subject. While both sexes perceived the casual style as more friendly, the females also perceived it to be more flexible. The males perceived no difference between the two styles of communication. Rollman (1980) found that all subjects perceived the casual style to be more flexible than the formal style. This inconsistency may have resulted from the measurement item. In a reliability check for the flexibility dimension, the rating did not meet the .70 level, thus making the results unreliable for comparison. The low reliability rating may have occurred because of the scale rigid--pliable, which may have been confusing to score by subjects.

Perception of Source as Resident Assistant

The result that females were more willing to have the resident assistant in charge of the floor than males were, regardless of the communication style, was not surprising. The fact that the position is live-in may cause some male subjects to be less comfortable with a woman in charge of their floor.

Along these same lines, the males rated the speaker of the casual presentation as significantly more ineffective as a leader than the formal presentation. This result may be due to sex role typing. Based on these results, for female resident assistants to be perceived as a more effective leader to all floor members, she may need to address a floor where males reside using a formal communication style only. Male floor members may need strong authoritative leadership from a female resident assistant in order to feel comfortable with her in charge of the floor.

Interestingly, the female subjects perceived no differences in leadership effectiveness between the two styles of communication. This finding may indicate that for same sex residents and resident assistants, communication style is not a factor in how effective the resident assistant is perceived to be as a leader. Both styles were rated as effective for female subjects. While no conclusions may be drawn about floors where residents are the opposite sex than the resident assistant, future research studying this question may find that for these floors, resident assistants

would be perceived as an effective leader only when they display a formal communication style.

The leadership effectiveness Likert-like item received a .45 reliability rating, therefore the conclusions regarding style differences for same sex and different sex floors were drawn hesitantly. Even though the findings are unreliable, though, they do suggest a significant impact on how resident assistants communicate with their floor members. Future research in the area of leadership effectiveness and communication styles may substantiate these findings and provide usable data for resident assistant training.

#### Perception of Future Interaction

Although no differences emerged between the two communication styles with regard to the topics chosen for discussion with the resident assistant, conclusions were drawn from these results. Past research on impression formation emphasizes the strength of first impressions. Morgan (1975) found that when positive pre-information was disseminated to floor members about their resident assistant, they perceived significantly more favorable impressions about the resident assistant and activity on the floor was greatly increased over the course of the semester. The present study indicates that first impressions are important for perceptions of certain characteristics, but that they are not significant enough to determine future interactions or relationships.

This conclusion is supported by Duck's Theory of Acquaintance (1973). His theory contends that during an initial interaction, persons assess physical and demographic characteristics of the other, but that it takes additional encounters to begin assessing a person's personality and forming a relationship. In the present study, subjects perceived the casual speaker to be significantly more personal than the formal speaker, yet no personal topics were chosen for future discussion in either communication style. This finding suggests that at the first floor meeting, residents are only forming impressions on physical characteristics and cannot determine future interactions from this first encounter. Although impressions have been formed of the resident assistants, they consist mainly of their appearance-- a highly nonverbal judgment. Only after several encounters with their resident assistants are residents able to formulate a perception of the relationship. Future research could develop this idea through a longitudinal study over a semester investigating communication styles and relationship formation.

#### Limitations of the Study

Because of the nature of this research, subject selection and methodology posed limits to the study. First, because the subjects were self-selected, the data gathered may have presented a bias, for most subjects received class credit for participation. The topic of investigation was limited

to perceptions of resident assistants on a large Midwestern campus. While a few results may be generalizable to other resident assistants on other college campuses, there can be no statements made which attempt to include any other groups of people. The requirement of having residence hall living experience limited the sample size further. No internal threats to validity occurred, however, because subjects were randomly assigned to treatment conditions.

Second, the study used a film instead of a live presentation, which may have affected the perceptions of the subjects. The experiment involved a simulated floor meeting in a residence hall, and while it was conducted in the proper setting, the video tape of the resident assistant was artificial. If a live presentation had been used, however, the treatments would not have controlled for differences in the presentations. Thus, the tape version, which was in color and had no technical flaws, was the most feasible method for conducting this type of study.

#### Areas for Future Research

Due to the limited amount of research conducted in the areas of impression formation and communication styles, there are several areas which could be explored in the future. Probably the most obvious suggestion for future research would be a replication of this study with a different sample. This may include the use of a male and female actor to compare sex differences in the treatment condition instead of the subjects'

answers. Additional studies of this type would increase the reliability and generalizability of the study and would provide valuable information for college student personnel regarding leadership and communication styles. As indicated in the review of literature, no study found dealt specifically with this topic.

Another area for future consideration would be an extension of this study in the areas of first impressions and future interaction. As noted earlier in the discussion, first impression ratings may not have as significant of an effect on future relationships as past research suggests. A study concerning the lasting effects of the first impressions over a semester would shed new light on this area. This type of study would be more descriptive in nature, however, and this may limit the use of the conclusions.

It is also suggested that future research delve more deeply into the area of college personnel and investigate the vast opportunities in communication research. This field of study is almost untouched by communication researchers, and experiments in this area would contribute greatly to the understanding of relationship formation, trust, types of messages, and communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, between resident assistants and their floor members.

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## Appendix A

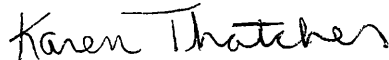
### INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The Department of Communication Studies supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate you are free to withdraw at any time.

This study is concerned with first impressions. You will be asked to view a five minute video tape and fill out three measurement items (checklists) in response to the tape. At no time will you be identified by name, however, you will be asked your sex, age, and school classification.

Your participation is solicited, but strictly voluntary. Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study. Be assured that your name will be in no way associated with the research findings. I appreciate your cooperation very much.

Sincerely,



Karen Thatcher  
Principal Investigator  
864-3363

---

Signature of subject agreeing to participate

A copy of this consent form is available upon request



Appendix C

RESIDENT ASSISTANT IMPRESSION SCALE

1. This resident assistant seems to be a very effective leader.

<u>Strongly</u> Agree	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Slightly</u> Agree	<u>Neither</u> Agree or Disagree	<u>Slightly</u> Disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly</u> Disagree
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2. I feel I could talk to this resident assistant about highly personal problems.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
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3. I do not have any confidence in this person as a resident assistant.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
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4. I would really look forward to living on this floor because of this RA.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
-----------	----------	------------	--------------	------------	----------	-----------

5. This resident assistant seems very friendly.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
-----------	----------	------------	--------------	------------	----------	-----------

6. I would deeply regret having this resident assistant in charge of my floor.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
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7. This resident assistant seems to be highly ineffective as a leader.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
-----------	----------	------------	--------------	------------	----------	-----------

8. I would dread living on this floor because of this RA.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
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9. I feel I could not talk to this resident assistant about highly personal problems.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
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10. I feel this resident assistant would be deeply concerned about her residents.

<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SlA</u>	<u>NAorD</u>	<u>SlD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
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Appendix C Con't.

11. I would be thrilled to have this resident assistant in charge of my floor.

SA      A      S1A      NAorD      S1D      D      SD

12. I have a great deal of confidence in this person as a resident assistant.

SA      A      S1A      NAorD      S1D      D      SD

13. This resident assistant does not seem friendly at all.

SA      A      S1A      NAorD      S1D      D      SD

14. I feel this resident assistant would not be concerned at all about her residents.

SA      A      S1A      NAorD      S1D      D      SD

Appendix D  
PERSONAL/IMPERSONAL TOPIC SCALE

Place a check by any/all of the topics which you would be comfortable in discussing with the resident assistant you have just heard. Beside the check, place a 1,2, or 3 by the three topics you would be most likely to discuss in the course of the semester.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Problem with an instructor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Explanation of a hall policy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Conflict with a roommate
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seeking help in managing time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Difficulty on a class assignment
- \_\_\_\_\_ An unexpected end in a romantic relationship with a person of the opposite sex
- \_\_\_\_\_ Difficulties adjusting to the school year
- \_\_\_\_\_ Disciplinary problems you were involved with in the hall
- \_\_\_\_\_ A personal illness
- \_\_\_\_\_ Asking for a personal favor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial problems
- \_\_\_\_\_ A party you attended last weekend
- \_\_\_\_\_ A weight problem
- \_\_\_\_\_ Directions to a certain location
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dating problems
- \_\_\_\_\_ Advice on a class to take



Appendix E  
CONVERSATION STYLES

Please complete the following checklist items with regard to the presentation you have just viewed.

STYLE

This presentation was:

Formal \_\_\_\_\_ Casual

Satisfactory \_\_\_\_\_ Unsatisfactory

The speaker was:

Friendly \_\_\_\_\_ Unfriendly

Insincere \_\_\_\_\_ Sincere

Warm \_\_\_\_\_ Cold

Tense \_\_\_\_\_ Relaxed

Rate the following behaviors in the presentation:

Dress of Presenter

Formal \_\_\_\_\_ Casual

Rate of Inflection

Low \_\_\_\_\_ High

Body Position

Formal \_\_\_\_\_ Casual

Variation in level of Pitch

High \_\_\_\_\_ Low

Method of Presentation

Casual \_\_\_\_\_ Formal

Speed of Delivery

Fast \_\_\_\_\_ Slow

Appendix F  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Judgments of others are so common in human social interaction that it is easy to underestimate their impact. Many times first impressions determine employment selection, peer group membership, or even the degree of respect and authority given to a person by others. For resident assistants working within a residence hall on a college campus, first impressions determine the year ahead of them. As Blimling and Miltenberger (1981, p. 87) state, "the first impression you make upon your new residents will have a lingering effect; it will either lay the foundation for future contacts or create barriers to them."

The first floor meeting with residents early in the fall is the time when important impressions of the resident assistant's personality and leadership abilities are formed. A negative impression may cause a loss of control on the floor, either through lack of trust or lack of respect and authority of the resident assistant by floor members. Interestingly, few resident assistants are aware of their ability to manage the impressions they make on their residents.

This study focused on two styles of nonverbal communication, a formal and a casual style. The behaviors included in each style were vocalics, body position, dress and method of presentation. The purpose of the investigation was to determine if either style would be rated more favorably in terms of first impressions. It also sought to discover if one style would encourage residents to discuss problems of a more personal nature than the other style with their resident assistant.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study could be included in the training sessions for resident assistants. Not only would the study facilitate them in creating the image they want to convey on their floor, but it would also provide them a method for being most effective in their job.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,



Karen Thatcher  
Principal Investigator  
864-3363