

## PERSONALITY CORRELATES OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION: A RESEARCH NOTE

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Research is reported indicating significant relationships between communication apprehension and 18 of 21 personality variables studied. High communication apprehension was found to be associated with a wide range of socially maladaptive personality characteristics.

Communication apprehension is a broad-based fear or anxiety related to the act of communication held by a large number of individuals. High communication apprehensives are persons for whom apprehension about participating in communication outweighs the projected gain from communicating in a given situation (Phillips, 1968; McCroskey, 1970). Such persons anticipate negative feelings and outcomes from communication, and will avoid communication, if possible, or suffer from a variety of anxiety-type feelings when forced to communicate.

Previous research has indicated the pervasive nature of communication apprehension. Estimates of the magnitude of severely affected individuals range from 5 to 20 percent of the population. In a recent nationwide survey of adults the number one reported fear was fear of communication (Bruskin Associates, 1973). Empirical investigations of the construct have confirmed that one's level of communication apprehension is predictive of occupational choice (Daly & McCroskey, 1975), seating choice in small groups (McCroskey & Leppard, 1975), seating choice in classrooms (McCroskey & Sheahan, 1976), lowered interaction (Wells & Lashbrook, 1970), as well as a person's level of self-esteem (McCroskey & Richmond, 1975) and self-disclosure (Hamilton, 1972). In addition, individuals high in communication apprehension tend to avoid competitive situations (Giffin & Gilham,

1971), lack trust in others' communication (Low, 1950; Giffin & Heider, 1967), have difficulty discussing personal problems (Heston & Andersen, 1972) especially to significant others such as parents (Phillips, 1968), and feel isolated and ineffective in social relationships (Low & Sheets, 1951). Others see them as less attractive, favoring more nonapprehensive individuals (Quiggins, 1972; McCroskey, Daly, Richmond & Cox, 1975). In short, the highly communication apprehensive individual tends to both isolate her or himself and be isolated by others.

In general, communication apprehension has been treated as a personality-type variable. The most widely used general personality measures (e.g., Cattell's 16 PF, MMPI), however, do not include a dimension designed specifically to tap this orientation. Since these widely administered personality inventories have undergone years of testing, refinement, and validation, the absence of a communication apprehension dimension suggests that communication apprehension may not represent a single, unique personality variable but rather may be related to a number of previously isolated dimensions of personality. This appears to be particularly possible in the case of the 16PF personality inventory (Cattell, Eber & Tatsuoka, 1970), probably the most carefully developed and validated measure currently in use. The development of this instrument employed orthogonal factor analysis to

insure the relative independence of the 16 factors. Thus, if communication apprehension is broadly associated with general personality, rather than existing as a unique personality element, the absence of a specific dimension designed to measure communication apprehension would be expected. One purpose of the present research, therefore, was to determine whether communication apprehension is associated with one or more of the personality dimensions commonly measured by personality inventories currently in use.

In addition to the general measures of personality, communication researchers have employed several specific measures of personality-type variables (e.g., dogmatism, Machiavellianism, tolerance for ambiguity, need to achieve, internal-external locus of control) in recent years and found them to be predictive of some communication behaviors. A second purpose of the present research, therefore, was to examine possible relationships between these variables and communication apprehension.

The presence of previous communication research employing general and specific personality measures also led us to expect that we would be able to develop empirically based descriptions of high and low communication apprehensives as a result of observed associations found between communication apprehension and the personality variables studied. As noted below, this expectation was confirmed by our results.

## METHOD

Data were collected from two samples. In the first phase of the research, 99 undergraduates enrolled in basic communication classes completed the 16 PF, Form C (Cattell, Eber & Tatsuoka, 1970) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) developed by McCroskey (1970).

The 16 PF is a factorially derived instrument tapping sixteen dimensions of personality. Over 25 years of intensive development, validation, and revision by hundreds of investigators has established the reliability and validity of this instrument and made it one of the most cited and used in personality

assessment. It has been standardized with diverse population samples in a number of different nations. The factor structure has remained strong across testings. Scores on the 16 PF have been found to be predictive of numerous communication orientations and behaviors in dozens of studies, particularly in organizational environments.

The PRCA is a Likert-type, self-report measure that has been widely used in communication apprehension research. It has been found to be highly reliable (McCroskey, 1970, 1975) and has strong indications of both concurrent and predictive validity (McCroskey, 1975).

The second phase of the research involved 189 elementary and secondary teachers from three eastern states. The Ss completed the PRCA as an index of communication apprehension. In addition they completed a 20-item measure of dogmatism (Trolldahl & Powell, 1965), the Mach IV index of Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970), a measure of tolerance for ambiguity (Rydell, 1966), a measure of need for achievement (Costello, 1967), and the Rotter (1966) index of internal-external locus of control.

On the basis of previous research involving the various personality measures, directional hypotheses were generated for the expected relationship between communication apprehension and 16 of the 21 variables studied. To conserve space, these hypotheses and their underlying rationales are not explained here, but are noted in Table 1. A more complete report of this phase of the research may be obtained upon request from the first author.

Pearson product moment correlations were computed between PRCA scores and the various personality measures. Although the exact probability levels obtained are reported below, the criterion set for statistical significance was  $p < .05$ .

## RESULTS

The obtained correlations are reported in Table 1. In general, the hypothesized relationships were observed. Specifically, as hypothesized, communication apprehension was found to be positively correlated with anxiety, dogmatism, and external con-

tol, but negatively correlated with cyclothymia, emotional maturity, dominance, surgency, character, adventurousness, confidence, self-control, tolerance for ambiguity, and need to achieve. Thus, 13 of the 16 directional predictions were confirmed. Observed relationships between communication apprehension and sensitivity (.10), eccentricity (-.15), and radicalism (-.14) were in the hypothesized direction but were not statistically significant.

No relationships between communication apprehension and intelligence, sophistication, or self-sufficiency were predicted, and no significant relationships were observed. Although no relationships between communication apprehension and either trustfulness or Machiavellianism were predicted, both were found to be positively related.

### DISCUSSION

Communication apprehension has been described as a broad-based personality-type characteristic that has a major impact on an individual's communication behavior (McCroskey, 1970). The results of this research are strongly supportive of the claim that this characteristic has a broad relationship with an individual's total personality. A supplementary analysis indicated that the 16 PF and the PRCA formed a multiple correlation of .72 ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that a very substantial percentage of the subjects' variance in communication apprehension (52 percent) can be predicted from knowledge of the subjects' total personality. Of the 21 personality characteristics studied, communication apprehension, as measured by the PRCA, was found to be significantly related to 18.

Although significant associations were observed between communication apprehension and 18 of the variables studied, the magnitude of association was not large for most of the variables (see Table 1). Only six of the variables shared as much as 10 percent of their variance with communication apprehension. Adventurousness (29%), surgency (27%), and general anxiety (25%) showed the greatest association, while the associations with self-control (12%), emotional maturity (11%), and

tolerance for ambiguity (11%) were large enough to be considered clearly meaningful. The magnitude of the correlations between communication apprehension and the individual dimensions of the 16 PF indicate that no one dimension could be relabeled a communication apprehension dimension. Thus, communication apprehension appears to be a variable that is substantially associated with an individual's total personality rather than a specific personality dimension.

An examination of the previous research that has employed the personality measures included in this study permits us to generate empirically based pictures of both high and low apprehensives. The picture of the highly communication apprehensive individual that may be drawn from these results is mainly a negative one. Such an individual is likely to exhibit many of the following tendencies:

Aloof, prefers working alone, rigid, has hard time expressing self, quiet, reserved, stiff, changeable, dissatisfied, easily annoyed, strongly influenced by emotions, lacks leadership, a follower, submissive, conforming, obedient, serious, reflective, slow, cautious, silent, seeks low interaction occupations, undependable, irresolute, lacks internal standards, low task orientation, withdrawn, has feelings of inferiority, rulebound, restrained, avoids people, free of jealousy, concerned about others, good team worker, pliant, permissive, worrier, moody, avoids participation in groups, dislikes interaction, likes quiet environment, shy, ineffective speaker, little success in groups, lacks self-control, inconsiderate, unconscientious, indecisive, tense, restless, impatient, frustrated, low morale, closed minded, amoral orientation to life, manipulative, low tolerance for ambiguous or uncertain situations, low need to achieve, and sees external forces as controlling her or his life.

The picture of the individual with low communication apprehension, on the other hand, is generally a positive one. Such an individual is likely to exhibit many of the following tendencies:

High interactor, joiner, seeks high communication occupations, stable, calm, integrated philosophy of life, mature, a leader, independent, self-assured, assertive, competitive, cheerful, expressive, talkative, responsible, determined, high moral standards, innovative, sociable, many emotional responses, enjoys

TABLE 1  
Observed Correlations Between Communication  
Apprehension and Measures of Personality

Personality Measure	Hypothesized Relationship	Correlation	Obtained Non-Directional Probability
<u>16 PF (N = 99)</u>			
Factor A - Cyclothymia	-*	-.27	.01
Factor B - Intelligence	0**	-.18	.07
Factor C - Emotional Maturity	-*	-.33	.001
Factor E - Dominance	-*	-.21	.04
Factor F - Surgency	-*	-.52	.0001
Factor G - Character	-*	-.21	.04
Factor H - Adventurousness	-*	-.54	.0001
Factor I - Sensitivity	+	.10	.32
Factor L - Trustfulness	0***	.20	.04
Factor M - Eccentricity	-	-.15	.14
Factor N - Sophistication	0**	-.16	.10
Factor O - Confidence	-*	-.29	.01
Factor Q1 - Radicalism	-	-.14	.15
Factor Q2 - Self-sufficiency	0**	-.10	.67
Factor Q3 - Self-Control	-*	-.35	.001
Factor Q4 - Anxiety	++	.50	.0001
<u>Specific Measures (N = 189)</u>			
Dogmatism	++	.16	.03
Machiavellianism	0***	.19	.01
Tolerance for Ambiguity	-*	-.33	.0001
Need to Achieve	-*	-.15	.04
Internal-External Locus of Control	++	.15	.04

\* Hypothesis supported by results.

\*\* Null hypothesis, not rejected by results.

\*\*\* Null hypothesis, rejected by results.

people, thick-skinned, impulsive, distrustful, ego-involved, self-opinionated, resilient, secure, able to cope, self-confident, strong control, self-respect, chosen for leadership, objective, balanced, decisive, calm, relaxed, composed, high morale, open minded, not manipulative, tolerant of ambiguous or uncertain situations, high need to achieve, and sees self in control of her or his own life.

Although it is unlikely that any single individual would completely model either of the above de-

scriptions, the general patterns appear clear. The highly communication apprehensive individual is a withdrawn, socially maladaptive individual who has little chance for success in contemporary society while the individual with little communication apprehension is an outgoing, socially adaptive person that is highly likely to succeed in contemporary society.

The results of this study are particularly important, for they represent the first intensive empirical



study of the relationship between communication apprehension and general personality measures. At the same time, they provide strong support for the description of the communication apprehensive generated by Phillips (1968) through intensive case studies. It is clear that communication apprehension is a severely debilitating, personality-type characteristic that requires much more attention from communication scientists and educators in the future than it has received in the past.

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