

STUDIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION
APPREHENSION AND SELF-ESTEEM

JAMES C. McCROSKEY
West Virginia University

JOHN A. DALY
Purdue University

VIRGINIA P. RICHMOND
West Virginia Northern College

RAYMOND L. FALCIONE
University of Maryland

This paper reports research conducted as a part of a continuing program designed to provide empirical delineation of the communication apprehension construct. Five studies are reported which indicate a substantial correlation ($r = -.52$ to $r = -.72$) between oral communication apprehension and self-esteem. Results from two college student samples ($N = 192$ and $N = 272$), two samples of elementary and secondary teachers ($N = 202$, $N = 384$), and a sample of federal employees ($N = 211$) indicate highly consistent relationships across age groups and occupational types.

An area of communication research which has received increasing attention in recent years concerns people's motivations to communicate. A major concern in this research has been communication apprehension. The present study attempts to further the development of theory relating to communication apprehension by isolating one particular correlate of communication apprehension and examining that relationship across a variety of subject populations varying in age and occupation. The particular correlate with which this research is concerned is self-esteem.

THE NATURE OF SELF-ESTEEM

An individual's image of self has been examined under a wide variety of labels including self-concept, self-esteem, self-image, and self-evaluation (Wylie, 1961). It has been central to theories of personality (Mead, 1934; Lewin, 1936; Allport, 1937; Murphy, 1947; Cattell, 1950; Secord & Backman, 1965), therapy approaches in counseling activities (Freud, 1943; Horney, 1950; Rogers, 1951; Sullivan, 1953; Maslow, 1954), and conceptualizations of interpersonal behavior (James 1890; Combs & Syngg, 1959; Goffman, 1961; Bales, 1970). The overwhelming conclusion from both

research and theory is that the perceptions one has of self significantly affect attitudes, behaviors, evaluations, and cognitive processes.

Considerable research has been conducted to determine the various correlates of self-esteem. Jourard (1971), for example, has suggested that individuals with high self-esteem will engage in higher levels of self-disclosive behavior. Related to this is the rather consistent finding that low self-regard is associated with a variety of maladjusted and neurotic behaviors (Brownfain, 1952; Crandall & Bellugi, 1954; Block & Thomas, 1955; Hillson & Worchel, 1957; Leary, 1957). These research results led McCandless (1970) to conclude that the "literature is consensual that a good self-concept is related to other indices of social adjustment" (p. 456). An individual's level of self-esteem has also been related to persuasibility (Hovland & Janis, 1959; Cooper & Jones, 1970; Helmreich, Aronson & LeFau, 1970; Deaux, 1972) and influence attempts (Thomas & Burdock, 1954; Cohen, 1956), as well as liking (Walster, 1965) and motivation (Korman, 1970; Deci, 1975).

In classroom research the concept an individual has of self has also played an important role. Self-esteem, operationalized in various ways with diverse samples of subjects, has been consistently

linked to achievement (Brookover & Thomas, 1964; Bledsoe, 1967; Dyson, 1967; Paschal, 1968; Caplin, 1969; Alberti, 1971; Bailey, 1971). This relationship may start at a very early age (Hamachek, 1971) and extend through the school years, into choice of occupations (Priess, 1968), and further into adulthood and old age (Brim, 1966; Back & Gergen, 1968). It has been related in the classroom to role behavior in small groups (Crowell, Katcher & Miyamoto, 1955), evaluation of instruction in discussion courses (Ober & Jandt, 1973), and classroom performance (Miyamoto, Crowell & Katcher, 1956).

The conclusion of research concerned with development of self-esteem may be summarized simply: individuals derive their feelings about self from their interactions with others. Cooley (1902) labeled this initially the "looking glass self" and subsequent theorizing by sociologists such as Mead (1934) and psychologists like Festinger (1951) supports such an interpretation. Research has provided empirical evidence as well. Brookover and Gottlieb (1964) and Snyder (1965), as well as a host of others (Manis, 1955; Miyamoto & Dornbusch, 1956; Vidback, 1960; Mannheim, 1966; Doherty & Secord, 1971), have clearly indicated that Cooley's early reasoning was essentially correct. We are what others make us be.

Individuals seek out those who confirm their self-image. This is so even when that self-image is not entirely positive. Consequently, the link between self-esteem and actual behavior is not a weak one (Greenhaus & Badin, 1974). Backman and Secord (1962) found, for example, that sorority girls interacted most frequently with those they perceived as confirming their self-concept. Similarly, and at first thought somewhat counter-intuitively, Deutsch and Solomon (1959) demonstrated that people with low self-esteem view low evaluations of themselves from others as more favorable than high evaluations. Indeed, the research evidence is strong that individuals will modify their conceptions of self over time so that they are congruent with their perceptions of what others think of them (Kipnis, 1961).

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND SELF-ESTEEM

Many of the descriptions of the individual with low self-esteem and the individual with high communication apprehension appear similar. Indeed, the research in both areas emphasizes the possibility of such a relationship.

Previous research in communication apprehension has clearly indicated its pervasive nature in social interaction. In any interpersonal encounter a basic requirement is communication. To function effectively individuals must communicate with one another. Yet for some, communication experiences have been unrewarding, indeed punishing, and as a consequence these individuals avoid situations where communication might be required. One's level of communication apprehension has been found to predict a variety of important variables, such as occupational choice (Daly & McCroskey, 1975), personnel selection decision (Daly & Leth, 1976), seating choices and interaction behavior in small groups (McCroskey & Lepard, 1975), avoidance of competitive situations (Giffin & Gilham, 1971), as well as lowered trust in other's communicative attempts (Low, 1950; Giffin & Heider, 1967). It has been related to an individual's willingness to engage in self-disclosure (Hamilton, 1972; McCroskey & Richmond, in press), feelings of isolation and ineffectiveness in social activities (Low & Sheets, 1951), and ability to discuss personal problems (Heston & Andersen, 1972), especially with significant others such as parents (Phillips, 1968). This last relationship has received further support from Bing (1963), who found that highly verbal children had mothers who were more responsive and interested in their child's communication than were mothers with low-verbal children.

More recently, research has demonstrated that individuals with characteristics common to high communication apprehension tend to be rated by others as less positive than low apprehensives on a number of evaluative dimensions (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, & Cox, 1975; McCroskey & Richmond, 1975b; Daly, McCroskey & Richmond, in press). This finding seems to extend all the way

back to the elementary level where teachers evaluate students' academic potential differently simply on the basis of communication apprehension (McCroskey & Daly, 1976). Perhaps as a reaction to these negative evaluations, highly apprehensive individuals have been noted to respond differently, and in negative directions, on a number of different personality measures (Low & Sheets, 1951; McCroskey, Daly & Sorenson, 1976).

In describing the apprehensive individual, Phillips (1968) indicated that others see her or him as "tightlipped . . . uncommunicative . . . shy, diffident, fearful, apprehensive and antisocial" (40). Low and Sheets (1951) found that the individual with high communication apprehension had a greater tendency to worry, be ineffective in social interaction, and be generally withdrawn from others. In early research into the construct, Gilkenson (1940) found that fearful speakers also tended towards lower self-evaluations.

The conclusion of both lines of research merge into the hypothesis that individuals with high communication apprehension will also have lower self-esteem than others. Individuals with high apprehension of communication tend to avoid situations where communication might be required and, as a consequence, fail to receive the rewards normally associated with interaction. Similarly, when they interact with others they engage in less socially acceptable behaviors and find themselves being evaluated negatively by others. They find interactions punishing. All of this should be reflected in the way others act towards the apprehensive and, since one's self-esteem is to a large extent a function of her or his interaction with others, the apprehensive individual should clearly report a lowered self-image.

We should stress that our hypothesized relationship between communication apprehension and self-esteem does not necessarily imply that one variable is the cause of the other. Rather, we view these two variables as involved in a reciprocally causal relationship. As one is raised or lowered by external forces, an associated impact on the other should follow. Whether low self-esteem or high communication apprehension occurs first in the development

of the individual is not, and probably cannot be known. But as in the case of the chicken and the egg, we hypothesize that the presence of either will be highly predictive of the other. While this hypothesis may seem to be clearly derivable from previous research, it has not been carefully tested across a variety of subject populations with multiple measures of the variables involved. Such testing was the purpose of this investigation.

METHOD

Subjects

To test our hypothesis, data were collected from five samples representing three diverse populations. The first two samples, drawn two years apart, were students enrolled in basic courses in interpersonal communication at an eastern university. The first sample included 192 Ss and the second included 272 Ss. Data were also collected from two samples ($N = 202$ and $N = 384$) of elementary and secondary teachers who were predominantly female and ranged in age from 22 to 64. The data from the two samples were collected one year apart. The final sample was composed of 211 predominantly male adults employed in a large federal research establishment located in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. Ages of these Ss ranged from 25 to 60.

Measures

Communication apprehension among the Ss in all five samples was measured by the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), an instrument which focuses on apprehension about oral communication (McCroskey, 1970). Previous reports of internal reliability of this instrument have all exceeded .90 (cf., McCroskey, 1970). In the current study estimated reliability ranged from .92 to .95 across the various samples. This instrument was chosen primarily because of its well-established predictive and construct validity as well as its high reliability. For a complete discussion of the validity of this instrument, see McCroskey (1975).

To determine whether observed relationships between communication apprehension and self-esteem could be generalized beyond the specific PRCA measure, two additional measures were employed. The first was the Verbal Reticence Scale developed by Lustig (1974). In previous research this instrument has been observed to have a substantial correlation (.74, Lustig, 1974) with the PRCA. In the present investigation a correlation of .69 was observed. The association between the two instruments suggests their concurrent validity as measures of oral communication apprehension. Thus, the Lustig scale was administered to the second sample of college students. The estimated internal reliability of the instrument for this sample was .95.

The other communication apprehension measure employed was the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT, Daly & Miller, 1975a). The PRCA and the WAT have been found to be only moderately correlated (ranging from .30 to .40) in previous research and are believed to measure relatively distinct forms of communication apprehension, the PRCA tapping oral communication apprehension and the WAT indexing apprehension about written communication (Daly & Miller, 1975b). The WAT was administered to both samples of teachers and the sample of federal employees. Estimated internal reliability of the WAT ranged from .94 to .96 across the three samples, and the observed correlations between the PRCA and the WAT ranged from .34 to .39. Since previous research and theory have focused almost exclusively on oral communication apprehension, it was recognized that obtained results from this measure should be viewed from more of an exploratory than a theory-testing perspective.

Two instruments were employed to measure self-esteem. The McCroskey-Richmond Self-Esteem Index (MRSEI) was administered to all five samples. This is a multidimensional measure of self-esteem that has high internal reliability, satisfactory test-retest reliability, and strong evidence of both predictive and concurrent validity (McCroskey & Richmond, 1975a). In the current series of studies the median estimates of internal reliability for each of the five dimensions were as follows: Sociability, .86; Composure, .86; Competence, .84; Extroversion, .89; Character, .79.

In order to determine whether observed relationships between communication apprehension and self-esteem as measured by the MRSEI could be generalized to other measures of self-esteem, the second sample of students and the second sample of teachers were also asked to complete the Berger Self-Acceptance Scale (Berger, 1952). This decision was prompted by the extremely similar results obtained from the analyses of the data of the first three samples analyzed (e.g., the correlations between the PRCA and the competence dimension of self-esteem were *exactly* the same in all three analyses). The Berger scale was chosen because of its previously established reliability and predictive validity as a unidimensional measure of self-esteem (Berger, 1952). In the current studies the estimates of internal reliability of the scale were .89 for the student sample and .91 for the teacher sample.

Data Analyses

Each instrument was examined by means of factor analysis to determine the stability of previously reported factor structures. Since the obtained structures were very similar to those reported in previous research, these data will not be reported in detail here.

Data obtained from the five samples were subjected to correlational analyses. Simple correlations were computed to test the association between the communication apprehension scores and the scores on the individual dimensions of the MRSEI as well as the Berger scale. In addition, multiple correlations were computed between the five dimension scores on the MRSEI and the communication apprehension scores for each sample. The .05 alpha level was set for significance of all tests.

RESULTS

The results of the data analyses involving the PRCA are summarized in Table 1. These results clearly confirm our hypothesis that communication apprehension and self-esteem are negatively related. The multiple correlations for all five samples were significant, as were the simple correlations for all of the MRSEI dimensions except Character.

TABLE 1
Correlations of Communication Apprehension (PRCA)
and Self-esteem

Self-Esteem Measure	Sample				
	Students Sample 1	Students Sample 2	Teachers Sample 1	Teachers Sample 2	Federal Employees
MRSEI Dimension					
Sociability	-.24*	-.24*	-.29*	-.18*	-.23*
Composure	-.36*	-.43*	-.36*	-.35*	-.48*
Competence	-.35*	-.32*	-.35*	-.34*	-.35*
Extroversion	-.51*	-.58*	-.49*	-.51*	-.69*
Character	-.06	-.07	-.07	-.02	-.13
MRSEI Multiple Correlation	-.59*	-.63*	-.54*	-.58*	-.72*
Berger Self-Acceptance Scale	_____	-.57*	_____	-.52*	_____

*significant, $p < .05$

Similarly, the correlations between the PRCA and Berger scale scores for both samples were significant.

The magnitude of the significant correlations is of moderate strength, the highest indicating just over 50 percent shared variance. This range is consistent with the theoretical relationship between communication apprehension and self-esteem. Substantially lower correlations would call into question the social significance of the observed relationship; substantially higher correlations would suggest the variables were isomorphic, a relationship much stronger than previous research and theory would explain.

Table 2 reports the obtained correlations between the self-esteem measures and the supplementary communication apprehension measures. The obtained results from the Lustig scale, as indicated in Table 2, are very similar to those consistently observed across the five samples for the PRCA. These results, therefore, suggest that the association between self-esteem and *oral* communication ap-

prehension is not unique to the PRCA instrument, but rather can be generalized to communication apprehension that is indexed by other measures that focus on *oral* communication.

The results based on the WAT, however, suggest a need to qualify our general hypothesis. The observed correlations between the WAT scores and self-esteem are substantially lower on the sociability, composure, and extroversion dimensions of the MRSEI, and the total score of the Berger scale, than those observed for the PRCA. Only the competence and character correlations are similar for the WAT and the PRCA.

DISCUSSION

The obtained results of these five studies show a remarkably consistent relationship between oral communication apprehension and self-esteem across five samples from three widely divergent subject populations. The range of correlations with the Berger scale is only $-.52$ to $-.57$. The range of

TABLE 2
Correlations of Supplementary Apprehension
Measures with Self-esteem

Self-Esteem Measure	Sample/Apprehension Measure			
	Students Sample 2 Lustig	Teachers Sample 1 WAT	Teachers Sample 2 WAT	Federal Employees WAT
MRSEI Dimension				
Sociability	-.33*	-.13	-.09	-.13
Composure	-.31*	-.06	-.14*	-.12
Competence	-.27*	-.24*	-.27*	-.30*
Extroversion	-.65*	-.12	-.18*	-.36*
Character	-.11	-.03	-.06	-.13
MRSEI Multiple Correlation	-.72*	-.27*	-.31*	-.40*
Berger Self- Acceptance Scale	-.53*	_____	-.14*	_____

*significant, $p < .05$

multiple-correlations with the MRSEI, while greater, is only $-.54$ to $-.72$. The range on the individual dimensions of the MRSEI is even smaller.

The consistency of these results suggests that the theoretical relationship between oral communication apprehension and self-esteem is not specific to any one subject population, such as college students—the group with whom most previous work has been done. Nor is the relationship specific to any single measure of self-esteem or oral communication apprehension. Rather, the theoretical relationship is clearly generalizable to adult populations, at least those similar to the ones involved in these studies, and across self-esteem and oral communication apprehension measures.

Clearly, lowered self-esteem is associated with high oral communication apprehension and must be

considered in the delineation of the communication apprehension construct. The results of our exploratory work with writing apprehension, however, suggest a much less substantial relationship between this form of communication apprehension and self-esteem. It would appear from the results of these studies, therefore, that a clear delineation of the communication apprehension construct must take into account the various types of communication apprehension and their differential degree of association with self-esteem.

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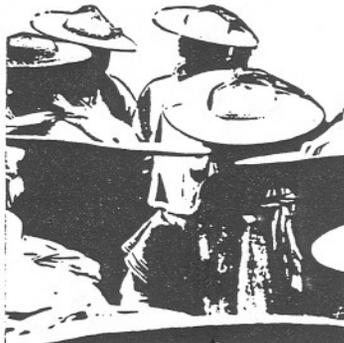
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