

# CHAPTER 11

## COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND SHYNESS

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter deals with a person's fear or anxiety concerning communication in various situations. Causes of communication apprehension and the resulting differences in individuals are discussed. Expected behaviors of high- and low-communication-apprehensive people are given. The reader is given two tests to assess apprehension and shyness and suggestions for overcoming these problems.*

### INTRODUCTION

In previous chapters much of the discussion focused on communication skills. Learning these skills is of great value in improving communication; however, there is one aspect of communication that can be equally important. This is a concept called communication apprehension, which is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. A person with high levels of communication apprehension tends to avoid communication much of the time. A pharmacist with a high level of communication apprehension would not only talk less with patients than other pharmacists, but would also talk less about professional concerns. While there is no doubt that acquiring the skills mentioned throughout this book would help alleviate this problem, for many people it is not enough. Many persons have acquired or developed good communication skills, yet remain highly anxious because they don't believe in their competence. This chapter will

explain the concept of communication apprehension and give ways to overcome it for those who need it.

### INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN SHYNESS

Much is made of the "uniqueness" of individual human beings. Indeed, no two human beings are exactly alike, not even identical twins. The number of ways people can differ from one another probably is infinite, but one of the more meaningful of these ways (possibly the most meaningful) involves our typical patterns of communication behavior. Many of our everyday references to people in our environment indicate our general awareness of such differences. We have often heard the following comments: "She never says much."; "He really is a quiet fellow."; "I wish, just for once, he would shut up."; "She has an opinion on everything."; "I never can understand what she is talking about."; "Getting an opinion out of him is like pulling teeth." All of these comments have one thing in common—they refer to presumed habitual communication patterns of individuals that mark them as different from some (or many) other individuals. The comments differ from each other in that they refer to different kinds of individual differences. The three most important kinds of differences fall into the categories of (1) effectiveness of communication, (2) amount of communication, and (3) desire for communication.

**Effectiveness of Communication.** We all recognize that some people are far more effective communicators than others. The successful salesperson, the inspiring minister, the effective teacher, and the continually reelected politician are obvious examples of effective communicators. Their opposite numbers are equally recognizable. Many times we envy the effective communicators and are thankful that we are not like the people at the opposite end of the continuum.

**Amount of Communication.** Although differences among people in terms of effectiveness are often easily recognizable, differences in the amount a person communicates (the number of times a person talks and the number of words said) are somewhat less obvious. Nevertheless, we often do recognize such differences. You have

probably noticed some of the following: (1) the student who has her or his hand up to answer every question in class; (2) the person who seems to talk all of the time in a group discussion; (3) the person who stands alone at a social gathering and never approaches anyone else; (4) the person who stays in his or her room rather than joining the discussion in the lounge; (5) the person you continually have to question in order to maintain a conversation; and (6) the teacher who regularly assigned oral reports rather than leading class discussion.

One thing we need to remember is that we all vary to some extent in our own communication behavior. We talk more one day than another or in one situation than another. Nevertheless, some of us talk more in virtually all situations.

**Desire for Communication.** The most important but least observable way that people differ with respect to communication is in their desire for communication. Desire is something that is within us and can only be inferred by another person. It has been said that humans are social creatures. That is only partially true. Some persons are not. Some people have a great desire to communicate with other people, while others would be just as happy if they never had to communicate with another person. The crucial importance of differences in desire is reflected in the impact of desire on the amount of communication actually attempted and the probable effectiveness of that which is attempted. The higher the desire to communicate, the greater the attempt made.

Before reading any further, complete the following short scale. Follow the instructions carefully, and be honest in your response.

**DIRECTIONS:** The following 14 statements refer to talking with other people. If the statement describes you very well, circle "YES." If it somewhat describes you, circle "Yes," or if you do not understand the statement, circle "?". If the statement is a *poor* description of you, circle "no." If the statement is a *very poor* description of you, circle "NO." There are no right or wrong answers. Work quickly and record your first impression.

- |     |     |   |    |    |   |
|-----|-----|---|----|----|---|
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 1. I am a shy person.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 2. Other people think I talk a lot.                                 |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 3. I am a very talkative person.                                    |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 4. Other people think I am shy.                                     |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 5. I talk a lot.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 6. I tend to be very quiet in class.                                |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 7. I don't talk much.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 8. I talk more than most people.                                    |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 9. I am a quiet person.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 10. I talk more in a small group (3-6 people) than other people do. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 11. Most people talk more than I do.                                |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 12. Other people think I am very quiet.                             |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 13. I talk more in class than most people do.                       |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 14. Most people are more shy than I am.                             |

SCORING: YES = 1, yes = 2, ? = 3, no = 4, NO = 5.

Please score your responses as follows:

1. Add the scores for items 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12.
2. Add the scores for items 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 13, and 14.
3. Complete the following formula: Shyness = 42 - (total from step 2) + (total from step 1).

**Interpretation of Your Score**

The scale you have completed is known as the "Shyness Scale." It is designed to measure the amount of verbal behavior in which you normally engage. The scale has been used in a number of formal research investigations, so if you filled it out honestly, we can give you some idea of how you compare with other people.

If your score is between 37 and 46, your verbal behavior is typical of most people in the United States. You may be shy and withdrawn in some situations, verbal and outgoing in others. Typically, however, you talk about as much

as most people around you. If your score is between 47 and 52, you are more talkative than the average person. There are probably very few situations in which you feel shy and many in which you are verbally dominant of others. If your score is between 53 and 70, you are among the most talkative people in our society. It is unlikely that you think of yourself as shy, even in a few situations. Others are likely to perceive you as an extrovert, dominant, aggressive, and a leader, and pushy, and overbearing. If your score is between 31 and 36, you are less talkative than the average person. There are probably numerous situations in which you feel shy, and not too many in which you are verbally dominant. If your score is between 14 and 30, you are among the least talkative people in our society. It is likely that you think of yourself as shy in most situations. Others are likely to perceive you as an introvert, withdrawn, passive, easygoing, thoughtful, and reticent.

Whatever your score, you will notice that it places you in a category distinct from the other four groups. You are, in other words, "different." Whether this difference is to your advantage or to your disadvantage depends on many things, not the least of which are the values of the people around you. In general, however, any given culture has certain norms and expectations for verbal behavior. If you conform to those norms, generally you will receive better responses from others than if you do not.

#### **Effects of Individual Differences**

It is a well-known "fact" that in the North American culture there are a lot of people around who "talk too much." It is also a well-known "fact" that women talk a lot more than men, and generally talk too much. These two commonly accepted "facts" have one thing in common—they are cultural truisms that have no basis in truth.

First, extensive research has been unable to discover any general differences between men and women in terms of either amount of talk or level of shyness. Some women talk more than others, so do some men. Second, extensive research has indicated that the more a person talks, the more positively they are evaluated, other things being equal. What this indicates is that it is not the excessive

amount of talking that causes people to have negative reactions, rather it is poor quality of content. The grain of truth in the truism that there are a lot of people around who "talk too much" is that we tend to notice and ascribe negative perceptions to people who talk a lot but have little worthwhile to say. The grain of truth in the truism about women talking too much comes from the chauvinistic assumption that women are inferior and therefore have little to contribute. The key point is that in North America, talk is highly valued.

In general, as a person's habitual level of talk increases, the person is perceived more positively and vice versa. In North American culture, shyness is not a positive virtue. Most shy people recognize this, but only between 10% and 20% consider their shyness not to be a problem; the other 80% to 90% do consider shyness to be a handicap. The conclusion that can be drawn is that if we want to be perceived more positively we must increase the quality and quantity of our interpersonal communication. While it is true that people who talk a lot are perceived to have higher quality communication in many instances, there is also some truth to the old saying, "Keep quiet and let people think you are a fool; open your mouth and prove them right."

Thus, for high talkers with little to say, reducing the talk level may increase positive perceptions. For low talkers, the picture is clear—increased talk is the only path to more positive perceptions. It is not the quality of communication that is their problem, it is the amount.

#### TYPES OF LOW VERBALIZERS

That people differ greatly in the amount of communication in which they engage is well known but the causes for these differences are not fully known. It would be easy to conclude that whatever the cause(s), people who talk a lot are a lot alike and people who seldom talk are a lot alike. Indeed, this general assumption seems to dominate society's reactions to people who talk a lot (high talkers) and to people who don't (low talkers). Unfortunately, such a conclusion is not valid, at least for the low talker group. We will consider five distinctly different types of people,

all of whom share the characteristic of being low talkers.

1. **The Skill Deficient.** While there are exceptions to the general pattern, people tend to do what they do well and avoid what they do badly. People who are very poor tennis players do not accept many invitations to play tennis. The same principle applies to talking. People who have low skill levels will tend to avoid situations that would require them to communicate.

In the area of oral communication, a significant minority of people in our society have speech problems, such as stuttering, articulation disorders, and voice problems. Not all such people become low talkers, but most do. Similarly, people who *do not use English as their native language* are very likely to become low talkers in situations that require English. Thus, many people are low verbalizers not because they lack desire to communicate but because of substandard skills. If their skills could be improved, their communication would also increase.

2. **The Social Introvert.** One of the most heavily researched areas in the field of personality is that of extroversion/introversion. It has been demonstrated that people differ drastically in the degree to which they wish to interact with other people. Some people have a very high need and desire to be with other people (social extrovert) while others prefer to be alone most of the time (social introvert). The latter group will tend to be low verbalizers, not because of a lack of communication skills, but simply because they perceive little need for interaction.

While one of the types of low verbalizers is the social introvert, it is interesting to note that people tend to perceive all low verbalizers as introverts and all high verbalizers as extroverts. This causes us to misperceive people in many cases, most notably people in the public media whose job it is to be high verbalizers. Both Johnny Carson and Barbara Walters are seen by most television viewers as outgoing, extroverted people, yet they consider themselves shy and introverted.

3. **The Socially Alienated.** Most people in any society attempt to conform to the norms and values of that society. This is considered a sign of the "well-adjusted" per-

son. Some individuals, however, are alienated from the society in which they live. They reject societal norms and values and may make no attempt to conform to them.

One of the norms in most societies is that of a moderate-to-high amount of communication. The society values communication in its own right, and also employs communication for the achievement of other goals and values. The individual who is socially alienated may reject the value of communication and become a low talker. In addition, the person may see little social utility in communication since he or she is not interested in attaining the goals and values sought by other members of the society. Such persons may even put a negative value on communication because they see others employing it in ways they do not approve. Such orientations typically result in a low verbalization pattern.

**4. The Ethnically/Culturally Divergent.** We often tend to confuse national citizenship and culture. We think and act as if everyone in a given nation or society shares the same culture. While in some small, developing countries this may more nearly be true, it certainly is not true in large, developed countries like the United States. We have many ethnic groups and subcultural groups. Communication norms in these various groups are not all alike; some tend to value silence more than talk.

**5. The Communication Apprehensive.** As previously stated, communication apprehension is the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with others. High communication apprehensive individuals recognize the importance of communication but are impeded by their fear or anxiety. The person who has substandard communication skills or who is either ethnically or culturally divergent may also develop communication apprehension. But most people who are communication apprehensive have neither substandard skills nor are divergent from the general culture. Generally they are normal people who are simply afraid to communicate.

Communication apprehensive people tend to be low verbalizers. If one fears something, it is natural to avoid it or withdraw from it. This is precisely what highly communication apprehensive people tend to do. Communi-

cation apprehension will be explained fully, but before reading further, complete the following scale.

*Directions:* This instrument is composed of 24 statements concerning your feelings about communication with other people. Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Are Undecided; (4) Disagree; or (5) Strongly Disagree. There are no right or wrong answers. Many of the statements are similar to other statements. Do not be concerned about this. Work quickly, just record your first impression.

- \_\_\_ 1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
- \_\_\_ 2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
- \_\_\_ 3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
- \_\_\_ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
- \_\_\_ 5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
- \_\_\_ 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
- \_\_\_ 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
- \_\_\_ 8. Usually, I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings.
- \_\_\_ 9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called on to express an opinion at a meeting.
- \_\_\_ 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
- \_\_\_ 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
- \_\_\_ 12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
- \_\_\_ 13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
- \_\_\_ 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
- \_\_\_ 15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
- \_\_\_ 16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
- \_\_\_ 17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

The scale you completed is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). To determine your score on the PRCA, complete the following steps:

1. Add the scores of items 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 24.
2. Add the scores of items 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23.

Complete the following formula:

$$\text{PRCA} = 72 - (\text{total from step 1}) + (\text{total from step 2}).$$

Your score should range between 24 and 120. If your score is below 24 or above 120, you have made a mistake in computing the score. The PRCA is designed to measure a general trait of oral communication apprehension. The higher your score, the more apprehension you have about communicating with other people.

If your score falls between 65 and 79, the level of communication apprehension that you feel is similar to that of most people. Some communication situations may cause you to be fearful or anxious, but in others you will be very comfortable. If your score falls between 59 and 65, you experience less communication apprehension than most people. Probably only a few situations cause you to be fearful or anxious. If your score is between 24 and 58, you are among those in our society who experience the least communication apprehension. You are likely to be a high talker, one who actively seeks out opportunities to communicate with people. Very few, if any, communication situations cause you to be fearful or tense. If your score is between 80 and 87, you experience more communication apprehension than most people. There probably are

quite a few situations that cause you to be fearful or anxious, but some situations do not bother you. If your score is between 88 and 120, you are among those in our society who experience the most communication apprehension. You are likely to be a low talker, one who actively avoids many communication situations. You are probably fearful or tense in most communication situations.

Somewhere between 60% and 70% of the over 40,000 people who have completed the PRCA have scored between 59 and 79. This, therefore, is referred to as the "normal" range. If your score falls outside of this range, the concept of communication apprehension may have especially high relevance to you. If you score below 59, researchers in this area refer to you as a "low communication apprehensive." If you score above 79, you are referred to as a "high communication apprehensive." Between 15% and 20% of the people who have completed the PRCA fall into each of these extremes. Thus, even though you may be classified as high or low in terms of your communication apprehension, you certainly are not alone, as about one person in five is either a low or high communication apprehensive.

People in the so-called "normal" range of communication apprehension tend to respond very differently in different situations. One situation (e.g., a public speech) might prompt them to be highly anxious, while another situation (e.g., answering a question in class) might result in no anxiety or tension at all. The low and the high communication apprehensives, however, tend to respond to virtually all oral communication situations in the same way. The low communication apprehensive is unlikely to feel any fear or anxiety about communicating, even in situations in which an outside observer would suggest that he or she should be anxious (e.g., giving their first speech on a television show). Oral communication simply doesn't bother such people. While this typically may be an advantage to a person living within our society, fear is a normal human response to a threatening situation. A person who has never, or rarely, experienced fear in threatening situations may make poor choices on when and when not to communicate (for example, communicating during

a robbery in a pharmacy). The high communication apprehensive is likely to feel high anxiety even in situations in which an outsider would suggest there is no cause for such anxiety, such as meeting a new physician or other prescriber who has just moved into town. Such a person is likely to avoid communication in many situations in which communicating would have been to their advantage.

#### GENERALIZED AND SITUATIONAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

In general, high communication apprehension is a negative element in a person's life. It not only causes discomfort but it can also lead to ineffective or even counterproductive communications. It is important to put communication apprehension into perspective. Such a sense of perspective is not common to people at either end of the communication apprehension continuum because high communication apprehensives commonly report belief that they are the only ones who feel that way. Low communication apprehensives often have a hard time conceiving how anyone could be anxious about communication. Moderate communication apprehensives recognize that some situations bother them, but not other situations. They assume that most people are bothered by fewer situations than they.

To understand where your apprehension fits into the broader picture, you need to be able to distinguish between generalized communication apprehension and situationally specific communication apprehension. Your generalized communication apprehension level is a personality-type trait. It is a predisposition to respond to communication situations either with or without apprehension, regardless of the nature of the situation itself. Situationally specific communication apprehension is produced by the circumstances surrounding a specific communication encounter. As a result, a person may feel high communication apprehension in one situation and virtually none in another.

The above discussion may appear to establish a dichotomy between trait-like and situational communication ap-

prehension. It is more useful, however, to think of the two as opposite ends of a continuum. At least three steps on that continuum can be identified: (1) communication apprehension as a trait; (2) communication apprehension with a given individual or group across situations; and (3) communication apprehension with a given individual or group in a given situation.

**Communication Apprehension as a Trait.** Trait, or personality-type, communication apprehension is at one extreme end of the continuum. While for most people this trait plays a very unimportant part in life, for those people who are very low or very high in trait communication apprehension it can play a dominating role. The PRCA is the best available measure of this trait. As with most personality-type measures, your PRCA score can predict your behavior only if your score is extremely high or extremely low. Such extreme scores suggest that your behavior is influenced by your general feelings about communication rather than by any specific communication situation in which you find yourself. You are thus anxious in virtually all communication.

**Communication Apprehension with a Given Individual or Group Across Situations.** Almost 95% of the population reports having apprehension about communicating with some person or group in their lives. The people that may produce this communication apprehension may be the boss, dad, teacher, a peer in the office, or virtually anyone else in the person's environment. Some people simply cause us to be apprehensive. This may be a function of how they behave toward us, or it may be because of the role they play in our life. Of course, virtually all of us know someone who makes us feel completely comfortable while interacting. Nevertheless, it is quite normal for us to find that talking to specific people is apprehension provoking.

**Communication Apprehension with a Given Individual or Group in a Given Situation.** At the far end of our continuum is communication apprehension experienced with a given individual or group under a single situation. Virtually all of us experience this form of communication apprehension from time to time. Consider some extreme

examples: a pharmacist calls you aside and accuses you of shoplifting; you are expected to give a 20-minute in-service talk at a nursing home with only a day's notice; you know that you have offended a physician and that you need to talk to him to apologize.

You will notice that in each of the above examples, the situation is unique. Even though we would not usually experience communication apprehension in these given situations, apprehension is aroused.

What, then, causes communication apprehension? This fear or anxiety may (1) stem from our basic personality, (2) be a function of the person or persons with whom we are communicating, or (3) be unique to the specific circumstances of the interaction. From whatever source it arises, it does cause discomfort, may result in avoiding communication, and is likely to result in ineffective communication.

#### PERSONALITY CORRELATES OF TRAIT COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

A person's level of trait communication apprehension is very much a part of that person's overall personality. Although human beings are very complex and no two individuals have identical personalities, personality characteristics are not completely unique to individual human beings. Rather, there are patterns of personality into which most of us can be categorized. It is useful, therefore, to examine the personality patterns of people with high and low levels of trait communication apprehension. In this way we can better visualize the way each type of person approaches their environment and other people.

**General Anxiety.** General anxiety is characterized by an uneasiness and worry that extends across situations. The person with a high degree of general anxiety is uneasy and worried virtually all of the time, whether there is any good reason for such concern or not. This person is likely to be restless most of the time, and to be impatient and tense as well.

General anxiety is sometimes confused with communication apprehension since people with either high communication apprehension or high general anxiety are likely

to exhibit some of the same behaviors in communication situations. The key difference is that these characteristics are common to persons with high general anxiety in most situations, but they only occur for high communication apprehensives in communication situations. A high or low level of communication apprehension does not necessarily result, however, in a matching level of general anxiety.

**Tolerance for Ambiguity.** Some people have a personality that allows them to communicate in an environment where there is a lot of uncertainty. Other people have little or no tolerance for uncertain situations. This personality variable is known as "tolerance for ambiguity."

People with a low tolerance for ambiguity are likely to have high levels of communication apprehension. Since such situations increase demands for communication, the high communication apprehensive is likely to withdraw, whereas the low communication apprehensive is likely to increase communication. Tolerance for ambiguity and communication apprehension are negatively related: as level of communication apprehension increases, tolerance for ambiguous communication decreases, and accordingly the probability that the person will withdraw from such situations increases.

**Self-Control.** Self-control is the personality variable that describes how much control a person has over his or her own emotions. The degree of self-control and communication apprehension in a person are negatively related; as communication apprehension increases, self-control tends to decrease. As might be expected, people high in self-control tend to be more calm, more composed, more in control in general, and be less afraid of communicating. People who are low in self-control are more likely to be highly communication apprehensive. They are afraid to talk and communicate because they are insecure and lack control over their emotional states. They may withdraw from communication so that they do not lose control over their emotions and say things they do not mean.

**Adventurousness.** A person with an adventurous personality is one who enjoys new experiences and tends to become bored with routine or repetitive matters. Such

people like to experience new things, people, places, and ideas. They tend to be more sociable and outgoing and have a lot of variability in their emotional responses. People low in adventurousness, on the other hand, tend to be cautious, somewhat withdrawn, and often feel somewhat inferior to others around them.

Communication is one of the pathways to new experiences. Thus, adventurous individuals are less likely to have high levels of communication apprehension. They show more interest in communication and are likely to seek communication opportunities. Individuals low in adventurousness are more likely to be communication apprehensive and to withdraw from prospective communication experiences.

**Emotional Maturity.** Have you ever met a person who is very changeable, who is friendly and pleasant one day but out-of-sorts the next, who is easily upset and annoyed in work or social settings? This person is likely suffering from a lack of emotional maturity. A person with an emotionally mature personality tends to be stable, calm, and well balanced most of the time.

Most emotionally mature people enjoy communicating and show a much greater desire to communicate, greater flexibility in their communication, and greater adaptability to the moods of others with whom they are communicating. The more emotionally mature a person is, the less likely it is that he or she will be a high communication apprehensive. Emotionally immature people have difficulty simply handling themselves without the increased burden of relating to others. Thus, communication can become problematic to the emotionally immature. Such people are more likely to become high communication apprehensives.

**Introversion.** The person with an introverted personality tends to be shy and withdrawn and prefers to spend much time alone. Generally, introverts find other people to have a very limited appeal, and they are happier when they are alone. At the other end of the personality continuum, extroverts are bold, aggressive, and talkative. They are much happier when they are with other people.

Introverts tend to have higher levels of communication

apprehension. Extroverts tend to have lower levels of communication apprehension. However, this relationship is far from perfect. Some introverts have little or no apprehension about communicating, but prefer not to communicate because they just do not care that much for other people. They may withdraw from communication, but they do so from preference rather than from fear. Similarly, some extroverts have fairly high levels of communication apprehension, but they are so people-oriented that they force themselves to communicate in spite of their fears. Consequently, we can sometimes mistake the introvert for the high communication apprehensive or the extrovert for the low communication apprehensive. Their communication behaviors are very similar. Nevertheless, such mistakes are the exception rather than the rule. The relation between introversion and high communication apprehension is positive and strong.

**Self-Esteem.** Self-esteem refers to the way a person evaluates himself or herself in terms of overall worth. People with low self-esteem tend to feel that they are not very worthwhile, that they are more likely to fail than to succeed, and that they are less competent than other people around them. In contrast, the person with high self-esteem tends to see himself or herself as a valuable member of the society, a winner, competent and likely to be successful.

People with low self-esteem tend to have higher levels of communication apprehension. People with high self-esteem expect to succeed in their communication experiences, just like they expect to succeed in other ways. People with high self-esteem tend to be leaders in most communication environments, while those with low self-esteem tend to be the followers.

**Innovativeness.** Innovativeness is the personality characteristic that refers to a person's willingness to change or accept change in the society around them. There is a strong negative relationship between an individual's innovativeness and their level of communication apprehension. High levels of innovativeness tend to be associated with low levels of communication apprehension. People who are willing to introduce a change must be willing to

accept challenges about the usefulness of the change. This makes it very difficult for a high communication apprehensive to be very innovative. As a consequence, high communication apprehensives may become resistant to change because change tends to necessitate more communication in their environment.

**Tolerance for Disagreement.** Tolerance for disagreement is an individual's tolerance for other people taking positions different from one's own. Some people are able to tolerate a very high level of disagreement before they feel they are in conflict with another person, while others have a very low level of such tolerance. For example, competitive debators tend to have a very high level of tolerance for disagreement because of the communication environment in which they must exist. Debators are constantly in disagreement with each other. Hence, in order to succeed, they must be able to handle this disagreement without taking it personally.

Tolerance for disagreement is negatively associated with communication apprehension. People with high levels of communication apprehension tend to have lower levels of tolerance for disagreement. Because communication demands increase when disagreement is present, and communication is not rewarding to them, even a small amount of disagreement can cause a high communication apprehensive to perceive that they are in conflict with another person. At this point, the high communication apprehensive has to choose between more communication and submission to the other person. Typically, they choose to submit. High communication apprehensives tend to have a low tolerance for disagreement and usually try their best to avoid situations in which disagreement is likely to occur.

#### **BEHAVIORS OF HIGH AND LOW COMMUNICATION APPREHENSIVES**

**In the Classroom.** The classroom is a major environment for communication. As such, it is not surprising that behaviors of high and low communication apprehensives in the classroom are substantially different.

High and low communication apprehensives make dif-

ferent decisions concerning what classes to take when given free choice. Low apprehensives prefer classes with small enrollments where there is ample opportunity for students to interact with each other and with the instructor. High communication apprehensives tend to avoid small classes in favor of larger, lecture-type classes in which most of the communication occurs while the instructor is talking to the students and the students are simply listening and taking notes.

Once a student is enrolled in a class, whether voluntarily or through a requirement, one might assume the student will simply accept any communication requirements and do his or her best. Such an assumption is incorrect. High communication apprehensives often drop a class with high communication requirements, even if it is a required course. For example, one study found that over 50% of the students with high communication apprehension dropped a required public speaking course during the first 3 weeks of the course, just before the first speech was due to be presented. Other studies have found that high communication apprehensives who remain in courses with high communication requirements are very likely to be absent on days when they are scheduled for presentations. This is true not only at the college and high school levels but also at the elementary school level where "show and tell" or "book report" assignments are required. Young children often claim they are unable to read so they can avoid having to read out loud to the class.

Low communication apprehensives are likely to engage in similar behaviors if there is little opportunity for communication in the course. Their attendance in lecture classes is likely to be low; they would rather get the necessary information by reading or talking to other students than having to sit through "boring" lectures. Similarly, research has indicated that low communication apprehensives do not like automated, individualized instruction in which they are given learning objectives, reading lists, audio-visual assignments, or tests having no opportunity for interaction with a teacher. They are likely to avoid or withdraw from the class or, as an alternative if they must have the credit, complete the class in as short a time as is permitted.

Where a person chooses to sit in a classroom also reflects the person's level of communication apprehension. Low communication apprehensives tend to sit in front and center of the traditional classroom. High communication apprehensives tend to sit along the sides and in the rear of the room. Most interaction in the typical classroom is focused on the center of the room in the first few rows. This is where the low apprehensive chooses to sit, and where the high communication apprehensive tries his or her best to avoid.

Finally, the type and amount of participation in the class are both affected by communication apprehension. Low communication apprehensives frequently volunteer to participate, even if they are not certain that they know the correct answer. High communication apprehensives will almost never volunteer to participate, even if they are certain they know the correct answer. They may knowingly give a wrong answer when called on because they think it will decrease the chance that they will be called on later.

In short, communication apprehension has a direct impact on student preferences for instructional systems and on student behaviors in the classroom. In most instances the tendencies of high communication apprehensives push them toward behaviors that decrease their likelihood for success in the academic setting, but the tendencies of low communication apprehensives push them toward behaviors that increase their likelihood of success.

**In the Small Group.** While small-group discussion is less threatening than a public speaking setting, it still places rather high communication demands on an individual. Consequently, it is not surprising that high communication apprehensives typically attempt to avoid small-group communication or sit rather quietly in a group if they must be present. Low communication apprehensives enjoy such experiences, will participate fully or even dominate the entire group, and frequently volunteer to serve on committee.

Both high and low communication apprehensives seem to have an innate ability to figure out where to sit in a small-group setting in order either to inhibit or facilitate communication. Research has indicated which seats at a table tend to facilitate communication and which ones in-

hibit communication. Low apprehensives choose seats that facilitate communication, high apprehensives choose seats that inhibit communication.

**In Dyads.** The behavior of high and low communication apprehensives in dyadic relationships (communication between two people) differs sharply, as it does in other environments. In general, low communication apprehensives assume a dominant, leadership role, while high communication apprehensives take on a submissive, follower role.

The insecurity of the high communication apprehensives is reflected by the very low amount of self-disclosure in which they engage. They prefer not to talk about themselves. Also, they seem to be overly concerned with being certain that the other dyad member understands or agrees with them. They use a disproportionately large number of expressions known as "rhetorical interrogatives," expressions such as "you know?", "O.K.?", and "you see?". Low apprehensives, of course, engage in much more self-disclosure and proportionately less use of rhetorical interrogatives.

In studies that have coded actual verbal behavior, a major difference in behavior between high and low communication apprehensives has been observed. Whereas low communication apprehensives communicate in a dominant fashion, attempting to control their dyad partner, high communication apprehensives tend to communicate an opposite manner. They seldom disagree and often submit to the assertions and requests of their dyad partner. We may speculate that this type of communication behavior is related to the high communication apprehensive's low tolerance for disagreement and desire to keep the amount of communication required of him or her at a minimal level.

**In Choosing an Occupation like Pharmacy.** The choice of an occupation is one of the more significant choices ever made by an individual. In large measure, this choice will determine whether the individual will be happy in later life, whether the individual will be successful, and what the economic and social standing of the individual will be. While many factors influence the choice of an occupation,

one important factor influencing this important decision, possibly the most important, is that individual's level of communication apprehension.

Occupations differ greatly in the degree to which they place communication demands on an individual. Consider the differences for example, between the occupations of pharmacist and trial lawyer, or between barber and accountant, or between forest ranger and salesperson. We certainly should not be surprised, therefore, that high communication apprehensives tend to choose occupations with lower communication demands and low communication apprehensives tend to choose occupations with high communication demands. In fact, we might suggest that this is as it should be, for if it were otherwise the individual might be badly placed, unhappy, and unsuccessful.

Recent studies suggest that a large proportion of high apprehensives (25% to 30%) are attracted to the profession of pharmacy. Perhaps many of these individuals view pharmacy as a profession that does not require a great deal of communication. The recent development of the clinical role of the pharmacist certainly demands much more pharmacist involvement in the communication process with patients. Schools of pharmacy are also emphasizing and developing communication courses in their curriculum. Therefore, many high communication apprehensives may be somewhat startled when they enter pharmacy school.

While these profiles, based on extensive research, are accurate in general, they do not necessarily apply to any single individual with either high or low communication apprehension. Not all high communication apprehensives engage in all of the profiled behaviors of the high communication apprehensive, and much less do they engage in them all of the time. Different situational constraints cause an individual to behave differently on some occasions. Much of the same can be said for the individual low communication apprehensive. Nevertheless, these profiles represent the tendencies that should be expected, other things being equal, for both high and low communication apprehensives.

One should be particularly careful not to infer a per-

quiet person is at a severe disadvantage in an interview situation.

Quiet pharmacists seek jobs that require low amounts of communication. Although there are numerous jobs in pharmacy that have low communication demands, the profession is changing dramatically in its approach to pharmacy practice. Communication is a vital part of the pharmacist's role. The quiet pharmacist of the future may still find jobs, but their chances for promotions will not be as good as talkative pharmacists. Not only are quiet people promoted less often, they usually do not anticipate promotion, nor do most desire it. Promotions usually mean more responsibility and supervision of others. This, of course, means more communication.

**Quality of Care.** Because the quiet person avoids communication or is relatively ineffective when he or she engages in it, we must be concerned that quiet pharmacists will either not give patients information they need or will be ineffective in doing so. Both of these situations could seriously affect patient compliance and ultimately the health of the patient.

The acceptance of the clinical role of the pharmacist places more communication demands on the pharmacist. This role must become visible through active participation by pharmacists. It is highly unlikely that the high communication apprehensive pharmacist will aid the promotion of the clinical role of the pharmacist.

#### OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

Although there are a variety of reasons why an individual is a quiet person, the one that has the attention of most communication researchers is communication apprehension. They consider it to be similar to a wide variety of other phobic and neurotic anxieties. Many of these anxieties have long been of concern to psychologists, and many methods of helping people overcome them have been devised and tested. Most approaches have been less than overwhelmingly successful. However, communication researchers have adapted the more successful approaches for use with communication apprehension. There are three

widely used approaches for reduction of communication apprehension as a formal treatment, and there are things an individual may do in the absence of these formal treatments.

Formal treatment of communication apprehension does not mean treatment in a medical sense, requiring highly trained professionals to administer. Although these treatments have been developed by psychologists, they can be employed by people with a minimum of training. One method has even been successfully administered by high school students with only a few hours of training. These treatments are (1) systematic desensitization, (2) cognitive modification, and (3) skills training.

**1. Systematic Desensitization.** The treatment method that has been found to be the most successful is known as "systematic desensitization." This method is a form of behavior modification derived from learning theory. The underlying rationale for this treatment is that anxieties, in this case communication apprehension, are learned behavior and anything learned can be unlearned.

Systematic desensitization involves a two-step process. First, people are taught to recognize tension in their bodies and to relax that tension. A surprisingly large proportion of the population has never learned to recognize when they are tense, much less how to relieve tension. Once this process is learned, the second step can be implemented. This step involves conditioning people to relax in the presence of stimuli that previously produced tension. In some instances, the stimulus is brought progressively nearer the person being treated, as in the case of people who fear snakes. In other cases, the person being treated is asked to imagine the presence of the stimulus. Here the person is asked to imagine a series of communication situations, progressing from those that previously aroused little tension (you are talking to your best friend) to those that normally would cause great tension (you are about to give a speech on television and you have lost your notes). The person learns to completely relax while imagining one situation before moving on to a more difficult one.

Systematic desensitization is very effective for most people with high communication apprehension. Up to 80%

to 90% of the people treated report complete elimination of their apprehension. These are remarkably good results, particularly in light of the fact that this process can take as little as 6 or 7 hours and can be administered by almost anyone with a minimum of training. In fact, some pharmacy schools have implemented these programs with remarkable success.

While the effectiveness of systematic desensitization is extremely high, it may also be limited. That is, not all quiet people who undergo systematic desensitization immediately stop being quiet people. This treatment method is directed only at quietness resulting from communication apprehension. There is no evidence that systematic desensitization has any positive impact on people who are quiet because they have skill deficiencies, are social introverts, are socially alienated, or are ethnically or culturally divergent from their surrounding society. For example, a person who is both highly communication apprehensive and skill deficient may be helped by systematic desensitization to overcome the apprehension, but he or she may still be a quiet person. Even with this limitation, however, systematic desensitization must be considered the most effective treatment yet developed. Positive effects are not only noted immediately, they have also been found to persist and actually increase over a 2-year period.

**2. Cognitive Modification.** Cognitive modification is a treatment method that also is based on learning theory. The underlying rationale for this treatment is that people have learned to think negatively about themselves, in this case, how they communicate, and can be taught to think positively.

Cognitive modification involves four steps. First, the person who is receiving treatment is informed of the full rationale for the treatment. He or she is taught that communication apprehension is learned and that as a result of learning he or she has adopted a set of behaviors that impairs communication. The person is told that he or she will learn to identify those behaviors and replace them with more positive behaviors. The second step involves identifying negative self-statements that the person makes about his or her communication abilities. Such self-statements

or thoughts might include "I'll sound stupid," "I don't have anything to say," or "Everyone is watching me." The person is assisted in developing a list of negative self-statements. The third step involves learning coping statements to be used in place of the negative statements. Coping statements such as the following might be taught: "They don't know any more than I do," "Speak slowly, it helps," "This is easier than I thought," and "This is no big deal." The fourth and final step involves practice. The individual receiving treatment must continually practice substituting coping statements with negative statements in actual communication environments.

The effectiveness of cognitive modification is quite high. Whether it is as good as or better than systematic desensitization is still unclear. However, the two treatment approaches can be used together with a substantially improved prospect for success. Of course, since cognitive modification is specifically directed toward communication apprehension, as was the case with systematic desensitization discussed above, its effectiveness is limited to communication apprehension and has no application to other causes of quietness.

**3. Skills Training.** Skills training is the oldest and by far the least successful method of treating communication apprehension. It takes the form of the public speaking class. Public speaking classes have been taught in the United States since before the nation was founded, and the antecedents of these classes can be traced back over 2000 years. Many testimonials have been made to the value of such classes, and beyond question they are valuable to most people. Unfortunately, those people in greatest need of help usually benefit the least from such training and many actually get worse.

Skills training is an effective treatment if, and only if, there is a skill deficiency and there is no accompanying problem of communication apprehension. If there is both a skill deficiency and a problem of communication apprehension, the problem of communication apprehension should be solved first by systematic desensitization or cognitive modification, or by combination. Only then may the skills deficiency be addressed.

**FOLLOW-UP EXERCISES**

Although formal treatment procedures are available in many places and are generally highly beneficial, not everyone has access to such treatment. When no formal procedures are available, the quiet person who wishes to overcome what he or she perceives to be a problem is forced to find alternative methods. The following are three steps that many people have found useful. The first step has also been found useful by highly talkative people who see their talkativeness as a problem.

**Step 1.** Develop a thorough understanding of the process of human communication. If a course in communication theory is available, such a course can be very helpful. We are referring to a course on the content of communication, not a skills course. While the latter may be helpful in some instances, research has clearly demonstrated that the study of the human communication process helps overcome high communication apprehension and has some impact on improving communication skills. If no formal course is available, reading several communication books will be helpful. Many people develop high communication apprehension as a result of not understanding how the human communication process works and by making incorrect assumptions both about their own level of communication skill and that of other people. It is important, to develop a good understanding of the human communication process and whether that understanding is developed as a result of formal instruction or independent reading is of little consequence.

**Step 2.** Learn to recognize tension in the body and how to relax that tension. This may be learned by listening to specially prepared cassette tape recordings designed for this purpose.

**Step 3.** Learn to identify the negative self-statements and thoughts you have when you are communicating. Prepare a list of these by writing them down whenever you are aware you are using it. Develop a list of coping statements. Practice saying the coping statements to yourself whenever you approach a difficult communication situation. Always repeat a coping statement to yourself when you feel tension. Repeat one several times when you catch

yourself using a negative self-statement.

If you follow these three steps, you should find apprehension about communication reduced. Do not expect massive change overnight. These steps do not represent some kind of "miracle cure." Rather, if followed carefully, you should recognize gradual progress over time. Remember, it took a long time to acquire apprehension and it will not instantly disappear.

#### A FINAL WORD

We have stressed throughout this chapter that people differ greatly among one another in communication behavior. Our focus has been on two of the major areas in which these differences occur—the amount of communication and apprehension about communication. As a result of reading this chapter we hope that you have a better understanding of your communication behavior and why you behave the way you do, and also that you will have gained some ideas about how you would like to alter some of your communication behavior.

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