

Willingness to Communicate

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Although talk is a vital component in interpersonal communication and the development of interpersonal relationships, people differ dramatically in the degree to which they actually do talk. Some people tend to speak only when spoken to—and sometimes not even then. Others tend to verbalize almost constantly. Many people talk more in some contexts than in others. Most people talk more to some receivers than they do to others. This variability in talking behavior is rooted in a personality variable that we call “willingness to communicate” (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). This variable—its nature, its causes, and its effects on interpersonal communication—is the focus of this chapter.

WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AS A PERSONALITY CONSTRUCT

Whether a person is willing to communicate with another person in a given interpersonal encounter is certainly affected by situational constraints. Many situational variables can have an impact. How the person feels that day, what communication the person has had with others recently, who the other person is, what that person looks like, what might be gained or lost through communicating, and the demands of time can all have a major impact, as can a wide variety of other elements not enumerated here.

Willingness to communicate, then, is probably to a major (though as yet undetermined) degree situationally dependent. Nevertheless, individuals exhibit regular willingness-to-communicate tendencies across situations. Indeed, consistent behavioral tendencies with regard to frequency and amount of talk have been noted in the research literature for decades (Borgatta & Bales, 1953; Chapple & Arensberg, 1940; Goldman-Eisler, 1951). Such regularity in communication behavior across interpersonal communication contexts suggests the existence of the personality vari-

able, willingness to communicate. It is this personality orientation which explains why one person will talk and another will not under identical, or virtually identical, situational constraints.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE WILLINGNESS-TO- COMMUNICATE CONSTRUCT

The present willingness-to-communicate (WTC) construct has evolved from the earlier work of Burgoon (1976) on unwillingness to communicate; from Mortensen, Arnston, and Lustig (1977) on predispositions toward verbal behavior; and from McCroskey and Richmond (1982) on shyness. All of these writings center on a presumed traitlike predisposition toward communication.

Unwillingness to Communicate

Burgoon (1976) originated the first construct in this area. She labeled her construct "unwillingness to communicate" and described this predisposition as a "chronic tendency to avoid and/or devalue oral communication." To argue the existence of such a predisposition, Burgoon drew upon work in the areas of anomie and alienation, introversion, self-esteem, and communication apprehension. All of these areas of research (which we discuss at greater length later) indicate variability in people's willingness to speak in various communication settings.

A self-report measure, the unwillingness-to-communicate scale (UCS), was developed as an operational definition of the construct. The measure was found to include two factors. One factor was labeled "approach-avoidance" and subsequently was found to be so highly correlated ($> .80$) with a measure of communication apprehension as to be virtually interchangeable with such a measure. The other factor was labeled "reward." This factor was not correlated with a measure of communication apprehension ($r = .01$).

Data reported by Burgoon (1976), while pointing to the potential usefulness of the UCS, also demonstrated that it was not a valid operationalization of the construct which had been advanced. The scores on the approach-avoidance (or communication apprehension) factor were found to be correlated with a measure of communication apprehension, total participation in a small group, and the amount of information-giving and information-seeking in a small group. The reward factor was uncorrelated with any of these criterion measures. In contrast, scores on

the reward factor were correlated with satisfaction with a group, attraction to group members, and perceived coordination in a group, while scores on the approach-avoidance factor were uncorrelated with these criterion measures.

These results were discouraging because the behavioral measures of communication, which could be taken as validating a willingness or unwillingness to communicate predisposition, were only correlated with the approach-avoidance, or communication apprehension, factor scores. Thus the results did not provide support for a general predisposition of unwillingness to communicate. Rather, they indicated only that people who are fearful or anxious about communication are likely to engage in less communication than others—a finding observed many times before and since this investigation.

The results of the validation research for the UCS, then, suggest that the measure is not a valid operationalization of the construct of a global predisposition to be willing or unwilling to communicate. However, the results do not deny the possible existence of such a predisposition. In fact, they provide additional evidence that some regularity in the amount a person communicates may exist.

Predispositions Toward Verbal Behavior

Mortensen et al. (1977) argue that "the more global features of speech tend to be consistent from one class of social situations to another." Although they recognize the importance of variance in situational characteristics in determining how much a person will communicate, they note findings from over 25 years of research which indicate consistency in the amount of an individual's communication across communication situations. They also suggest that there is a characteristic predisposition to say a given amount and that such a predisposition operates within the constraints of individual situations. They label this phenomenon "predispositions toward verbal behavior."

Unlike Burgoon (1976), these authors do not explore the possible causes of the global predisposition. Rather, they simply argue that it exists and provide a self-report scale that is designed to measure it. This measure is known as the Predispositions Toward Verbal Behavior (PVB) Scale. It is a 25-item, Likert-type scale employing a seven-step response option.

On the basis of the data reported by Mortensen et al. (1977), the PVB appears to be a unidimensional scale, although they indicate that an interpretable multiple-factor solution can be forced. Only one of the five factors interpreted centered on a general disinclination to engage in com-

munication. The remaining factors appeared to measure dominance in communication, initiating and maintaining interpersonal communication, frequency and duration of communication, and anxiety about communication.

Data on validity indicated the ability of the PVB to significantly predict both the number of words spoken and the duration of talk in interpersonal interactions. This is a positive indication of validity of the scale. However, since only five of the 25 items focus directly on a general willingness or unwillingness to communicate (the communication disinclination factor), the reason for the obtained predictive validity is in considerable doubt. The predictive power of the instrument suggests that it is a valid measure of something, but whether that something is a general willingness to communicate is very questionable.

A reported high correlation of the PVB with a measure of communication apprehension ($r = .67$) increases this doubt. As we noted previously, considerable research prior and subsequent to the development of the PVB has found communication apprehension to be predictive of the amount a person says in various settings. Communication apprehension measures are not presumed to be direct measures of a global predisposition to approach or avoid communication. Rather, they are presumed to be indicants of the amount of fear or anxiety an individual is likely to experience about communication. Such fear or anxiety, however, is likely to be one of the antecedents of general predispositions to be willing or unwilling to communicate.

The PVB, therefore, does not appear to be a valid operationalization of a general predisposition to be willing or unwilling to communicate. As was the case with the UCS, however, the research results based on the PVB provide additional indications that some regularity exists in the amount that an individual communicates.

Shyness

"Shyness" is a term which has been used by many researchers when investigating traitlike predispositions toward communication. Unfortunately, some researchers fail to provide any definition of the term, and those who do are far from universal agreement. Leary (1981), basing his efforts on earlier work on shyness, has generated a construct he calls "social anxiety." He notes two components in his construct—an internally experienced discomfort and externally observable behavior. Some writers in the area of shyness have focused on the internal experience. Their work has paralleled work in the area of communication apprehen-

sion. Others have focused on shyness as reduced communication behavior. This approach appears to be consistent with a concern for a predisposition toward willingness to communicate.

The work of McCroskey and Richmond (1982) falls in the latter category. They define shyness as "the tendency to be timed, reserved, and most specifically, talk less." They note that communication apprehension is one of possibly numerous elements which may impact that tendency but that the two predispositions are conceptually distinct.

In earlier work, McCroskey attempted to develop a simplified version of a measure of communication apprehension for use in a study with preliterate children (McCroskey, Andersen, Richmond, & Wheelless, 1981). As a serendipitous artifact of that work, he developed a self-report scale which was factorially distinct from, yet substantially correlated with, a measure of communication apprehension. The items on the scale centered on the amount of talking that people report they do. He initially labeled the new instrument the Verbal Activity Scale (VAS) but changed the name to the Shyness Scale (SS) in later reports of its use. We will refer to it here by its original name to avoid confusion of this measure with a large number of other available measures also called shyness scales which focus on anxiety about communication rather than communication behavior.

In the belief that measures of communication apprehension and the VAS were tapping distinctly different, although related, constructs, McCroskey and Richmond (1982) attempted to validate both by examining their factorial independence and their relationships with reports of communication behavior taken from untrained observers who were friends of the subjects completing the measures. Employing both college student and older adult samples, they found that the measures were factorially distinct, as McCroskey had found in previous work, and that they were significant predictors of observer reports of communication behavior. The validity coefficient for the VAS and the observer reports of behavior was .53.

While these results suggest that the VAS is a valid measure of something, it is not certain that "something" is a predisposition to be willing or unwilling to communicate. The VAS is a self-report of the amount of talk in which one typically engages. The data reported by McCroskey and Richmond (1982) suggest that the scores generated are valid predictors of the amount of talk in which observers *believe* the individual engages. Even if we grant the validity of observer reports as quality indicants of actual behavior, this simply means that the VAS is a valid report of behavioral tendencies in communication. It does not validate the existence of a personality-based predisposition to be willing

or unwilling to communicate. That a person can with some accuracy self-report whether he or she talks a lot or a little does not necessarily demonstrate that the behavior being reported is consistent with a predispositional desire, much less produced by such a predisposition.

As was the case with the research involving the UCS and PVB noted above, the research involving the VAS lends additional support for the argument that some regularity exists in the amount an individual communicates. Unfortunately, it is not clear that the VAS is a measure of a personality-based predisposition to be willing or unwilling to communicate, even though it may be a valid measure of a behavioral tendency to communicate more or less.

Willingness to Communicate

As of this writing, there has been no instrument reported in the literature which has been positively demonstrated to be valid measure of our construct of a personality-based predisposition which we have labeled "willingness to communicate." However, abundant evidence exists to support the argument that people exhibit differential behavioral tendencies to communicate more or less across communication situations. To presume that such a personality orientation exists, then, seems reasonable in spite of the lack of availability of a demonstrably valid measure of it.

A recently developed self-report instrument, known as the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scale (see Figure 3.1), may provide a valid operationalization of the construct. It has strong content validity and there is some support for its construct validity. We briefly describe its development.

Underlying the construct of willingness to communicate is the assumption that this is a personality-based, traitlike predisposition which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers. For us to argue that the predisposition is traitlike, it is necessary that the level of a person's willingness to communicate in one communication context (like small group interaction) is correlated with the person's willingness in other contexts (such as public speaking, talking in meetings, and talking in dyads). Further, it is necessary that the level of a person's willingness to communicate with one type of receiver (like acquaintances) is correlated with the person's willingness to communicate with other types of receivers (such as friends and strangers).

This assumption does not mandate that a person be equally willing to communicate in all contexts or with all receivers—only that the level of

Directions: Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume that you have *completely free choice*. Indicate the percentage of time you would choose to *communicate* in each type of situation. Indicate in the space at the left what percent of the time you would choose to communicate. 0 = never, 100 = always.

- _____ 1. *Talk with a service station attendant.
- _____ 2. *Talk with a physician.
- _____ 3. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
- _____ 4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.
- _____ 5. *Talk with a salesperson in a store.
- _____ 6. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
- _____ 7. *Talk with a policeman/policewoman.
- _____ 8. Talk in a small group of strangers.
- _____ 9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.
- _____ 10. *Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.
- _____ 11. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
- _____ 12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
- _____ 13. *Talk with a secretary.
- _____ 14. Present a talk to a group of friends.
- _____ 15. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
- _____ 16. *Talk with a garbage collector.
- _____ 17. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
- _____ 18. *Talk with a spouse (or girl/boyfriend).
- _____ 19. Talk in a small group of friends.
- _____ 20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

*Filler item

Scoring: To compute the subscores, add the percentages for the items indicated and divide the total by the number indicated below.

Public: 3 + 14 + 20; divide by 3.

Meeting: 6 + 11 + 17; divide by 3.

Group: 8 + 15 + 19; divide by 3.

Dyad: 4 + 9 + 12; divide by 3.

Stranger: 3 + 8 + 12 + 17; divide by 4.

Acquaintance: 4 + 11 + 15 + 20; divide by 4.

Friend: 6 + 9 + 14 + 19; divide by 4.

To compute the total WTC score, add the subscores for Stranger, Acquaintance, and Friend. Then divide that total by 3.

Figure 3.1 Willingness to Communicate Scale (*continued*)

(continued)

Normative means, standard deviations, and internal reliability estimates for the scores, based on a sample of 428 college students, are as follows:

Score	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reliability
Total WTC	67.3	15.2	.92
Public	56.1	22.2	.76
Meeting	60.0	20.9	.70
Group	73.4	15.8	.65
Dyad	79.5	15.0	.69
Stranger	41.3	22.5	.82
Acquaintance	75.0	17.9	.74
Friend	85.5	13.8	.74

Figure 3.1 Willingness to Communicate Scale

willingness in various contexts and with various receivers be correlated. Thus, if Person A is much more willing to communicate in small groups than in a public speaking context, the underlying assumption is not necessarily violated. However, if Person A is more willing to communicate than Person B in one context, it is assumed that Person A will be more willing to communicate than Person B in other contexts as well. If no such regularity exists when data are aggregated for a large number of people, willingness to communicate in one context will not be predictive of willingness to communicate in another context, and willingness to communicate with one type of receiver will not be predictive of willingness to communicate with another type of receiver. In this event, the data would invalidate the assumption of traitlike predisposition and necessitate that we redirect our attention to predispositions that are context-based and/or receiver-based. Alternatively, we could forego the predispositional approach in favor of a purely situational explanation of willingness to communicate.

The WTC scale includes items related to four communication contexts—public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, and talking in dyads—and three types of receivers—strangers, acquaintances, and friends. The scale includes 12 scored items and 8 filler items. In addition to an overall WTC score, presumably representing the general personality orientation of willingness to communicate, 7 subscores may be generated. These represent the four types of communication contexts and three types of receivers.

Available data on the instrument are very promising (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). The internal reliability of the total WTC score is .92. Internal reliabilities for the subscores for communication context range from .65 to .76. Internal reliabilities for the subscores for types of receivers range from .74 to .82. The mean correlation among context subscores is .58, which is also the mean correlation among receiver-type subscores. After correction for attenuation, the mean correlation among context subscores is .88; among receiver-type subscores it is .82. Factor analysis indicates that all 12 scored items load most highly on the first unrotated factor, indicating that the scale is unidimensional. No interpretable multidimensional structure could be obtained through forced rotations in McCroskey and Baer's (1985) study.

The preceding correlations and reliabilities suggest that an individual's willingness to communicate in one context or with one receiver type is closely related to his or her willingness to communicate in other contexts and with other receiver types. This does not mean, however, that individuals are equally willing to communicate in all contexts and with all types of receivers. In fact, major mean differences were observed across the sample of subjects studied on the basis of receiver type. The observed mean percentage of time that people would be willing to communicate with friends was 85.5. For acquaintances and strangers the percentages were 75.0 and 41.3, respectively. Contexts produced less dramatic differences in willingness. The percentages for the contexts were as follows: dyad, 79.5; group, 73.4; meeting, 60.0; and public, 56.1. In general, the larger the number of receivers and the more distant the relationship of the individual with the receiver(s), the less willing the individual is to communicate.

The data generated by the WTC scale suggest the validity of our construct of a general predisposition toward being willing (or unwilling) to communicate. The scale also appears to be valid. The items clearly represent the construct as we have outlined it, and the subscore correlations suggest that the instrument is measuring a broadly based predisposition rather than a series of independent predispositions. Whether the WTC scale can be used a valid predictor of actual communication behavior is another question, one that remains to be answered by future research. People conducting that research must take care that the behavior to be observed be under conditions where the subjects truly have free choice of whether to communicate or not. Other observational data would be only marginally related to the validity of the WTC scale.

ANTECEDENTS OF WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

That there is regularity in the amount of communication behavior of an individual across situations has been clearly established in many research studies. We have posited a personality-based mediational variable as the immediate cause of that regularity—willingness to communicate. The question that we now address is why people vary in this predispositional orientation. We refer to the variables that we believe lead to differences in willingness to communicate as “antecedents.” It is likely that many of these antecedents develop concurrently with the willingness-to-communicate predisposition. Hence it cannot be clearly established that the antecedents are the causes of variability in the willingness to communicate. It is more likely that these variables may be involved in mutual causality with each other, and even more likely that both the antecedents and the willingness to communicate are produced in common by other causal elements.

The antecedents that we consider here are variables that have received considerable attention from scholars in communication and/or psychology. Each of them is of interest to scholars for a variety of reasons, only one of which is a possible relationship with willingness to communicate. The variables we consider are introversion, anomie and alienation, self-esteem, cultural divergence, communication skill level, and communication apprehension.

Introversion

The construct of extroversion-introversion has received considerable attention from scholars in psychology for several decades (Eysenck, 1970, 1971). The construct postulates a continuum between extreme extroversion and extreme introversion. The nearer the individual is to the extroversion extreme, the more “people-oriented” the person is likely to be. The more introverted the individual, the less need the individual feels for communication and the less value the person places on communicating. Introverts tend to be inner-directed and introspective. They also tend to be less sociable and less dependent on others’ evaluations than more extroverted people.

Introverts are often characterized as quiet, timid, and shy. Other things being equal, they prefer to withdraw from communication. This may stem in part from anxiety about communication. However, the relationship between introversion and communication apprehension is only modest ($r = .33$; Huntley, 1969). Numerous studies have indicated a relationship between introversion and communication behaviors charac-

teristic of people presumed to have a low willingness to communicate. For example, Carment, Miles, and Cervin (1965) found that introverts participated in a small group discussion significantly less than extroverts and tended to speak only when spoken to rather than initiating interaction. Similarly, Borg and Tupes (1958) found that introverts were significantly less likely than extroverts to engage in the communication behaviors necessary to exercise leadership in small groups.

Anomie and Alienation

Anomie refers to a state in which an individual's normative standards are severely reduced or lost. Anomies are normless; they have failed to internalize society's norms and values, including a value for communication. They often feel alone and socially isolated (Bloom, 1970; Dean, 1961; Elmore, 1965). Alienation, an extreme manifestation of anomie, is a feeling of estrangement, of being apart and separate from other human beings and from society in general.

Alienation has been found to be directly related to withdrawal from communication (Giffin, 1970; Giffin & Groginsky, 1970). Anomie-alienation have also been found to be associated with negative attitudes toward communication and reduced interaction with peers, parents, teachers, and administrators (Heston & Andersen, 1972). In short, anomie and alienation appear to generate behavior characteristic of people presumed to have a low willingness to communicate.

Self-Esteem

A person's self-esteem is that person's evaluation of his or her own worth. Since self-esteem is discussed at length in Chapter 7, we will not elaborate on the construct here.

A person with low self-esteem might be expected to be less willing to communicate because of a feeling that he or she has little of value to offer. Similarly, a person with low self-esteem may be less willing to communicate because he or she believes that others will respond negatively to what might be said. Although we believe there is good reason to consider self-esteem to be an antecedent of willingness to communicate, little research support is available that directly bears on this issue.

In an unpublished study, we found self-esteem to be significantly related to the number of times people talked in a small group setting—the higher the self-esteem, the more times they talked. However, we also found that if the variance attributable to communication apprehension was removed, self-esteem accounted for no significant variance in the

times talked. Thus it may be that self-esteem is related to the willingness to communicate, but only as a function of the relationship between self-esteem and anxiety about communication, a relationship that has been found to be quite strong (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, & Falcione, 1977).

Cultural Divergence

Although communication exists in all human cultures and subcultures, communication norms are highly variable as a function of culture. Thus one's communication norms and competencies are culture-bound. In a few countries, like Japan, a single culture is almost universally dominant. In other countries, like the United States, there is a majority culture and many subcultures. These subcultures exist both as a function of geographic region and ethnicity. People from Texas and people from Maine have differing communication norms. So too do Mexican Americans, Black Americans, Japanese Americans, Native Americans, and so forth.

Whenever people find themselves in an environment in which their own subculture is in a minority position compared to other people with whom they must communicate, such a group may be described as culturally divergent. It is incumbent on the divergent individual to adapt to the larger group's communication norms in order to be effective in communication in that environment. As anyone who has traveled extensively can testify, particularly if that travel has taken one to another country, such adaptation can be difficult or even impossible to achieve.

Culturally divergent individuals are very similar to people who have deficient communication skills (whom we discuss shortly). Because they do not know how to communicate effectively, they tend to be much less willing to communicate at all for fear of failure and possible negative consequences. The difference between the culturally divergent and the skill-deficient is that the culturally divergent individual may have excellent communication skills for one culture but not for the other. Cultural divergence, then, is seen as being closely related to a traitlike willingness to communicate if a person regularly resides in a culture different from his or her own. On the other hand, if the person communicates primarily in one culture and only occasionally must do so in another culture, the impact will be only on situational willingness.

Communication Skills

Work in the area of reticence (Phillips, 1968, 1977, 1984) leads us to believe that a major reason that some people are less willing to com-

municate than others is deficient communication skills. To be reticent is to avoid social interaction, to be reserved, to say little. In this sense, it is to behave exactly opposite to how one would expect a person to behave who is willing to communicate.

Early work in the area of reticence focused on behavior as a function of anxiety about communication and was essentially similar to the work to be discussed here related to communication apprehension. The original definition of a reticent individual advanced by Phillips (1968, p. 40) was "a person for whom anxiety about participation in oral communication outweighs his projection of gain from the situation."

More recent work in this area has moved away from anxiety and chosen to focus on communication skills. Although Phillips and others working with the reticence construct do not deny that many people engage in reduced communication because they are apprehensive about communicating, they choose to focus their attention on people who may or may not be anxious but who are definitely deficient in their communication skills.

Case studies drawn from work on communication skills training with reticent individuals indicate that when skills are increased, the willingness to communicate in contexts related to the training also increases. This reinforces our belief that for some people, willingness to communicate in some contexts and/or with some receivers is reduced as a function of not knowing how to communicate. The relationship between communication skills and a general predisposition to be willing to communicate is unknown at this time. Most likely, small skill deficits would have little relationship. However, the perception of one's own skill level may be more important than the actual skill level. Hence people with low self-esteem may see their skills as deficient—even if their skills in reality are quite satisfactory—and be reticent as a result.

The relationship between skills and willingness is a complex one. Low skills, as noted earlier, may lead to lowered willingness. Conversely, low willingness may result in decreased experience in communication and, hence, reduced skills. In addition, such things as low self-esteem and high communication apprehension may lead to reduced levels of both skills and willingness. For all these reasons, however, it is reasonable to believe that skill level and willingness level should be related.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) is "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with

another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, 1984). An individual's level of CA is probably the single best predictor of his or her willingness to communicate. The higher the CA level, the lower the level of the willingness to communicate.

Although most of the work related to CA has been done under the CA label (Daly & McCroskey, 1984; McCroskey, 1970, 1977), similar work has also been done under other labels. Some of these include "stage fright" (Clevenger, 1959), the early work on "reticence" (Phillips, 1968), "unwillingness to communicate" (Burgoon, 1976), "social anxiety" (Leary, 1983), "audience anxiety" (Buss, 1980), and "shyness" (Buss, 1980; Zimbardo, 1977).

Although there are some meaningful differences in the conceptualizations advanced under these various labels, the main differences involve the operational measures employed. Both subjective examination of the measures and correlational analyses (Daly, 1978) indicate that the measures are highly related and are probably all tapping into the same global construct.

Regardless of the operationalization of the construct, research overwhelmingly indicates that people who experience high levels of fear or anxiety about speaking tend to avoid and withdraw from communication. Although not measured directly, these research results strongly suggest that CA directly affects an individual's willingness to communicate. Because we believe that CA is the most potent of the antecedents of willingness to communicate, we examine this construct in greater detail in the next section.

THE COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION CONSTRUCT

In the following section we outline the essential components of the CA construct. In particular, we discuss the types of CA, its causes, effects, and measurement.

Types of CA

Our concern with CA views the construct as a traitlike, personality-type variable. Over the almost two decades in which research on CA has been conducted, most of the attention it has received has centered on this view. However, the overall conceptualization of CA extends beyond the traitlike predisposition and identifies four types of CA which extend from the traitlike to the purely situational. The four types are referred to as traitlike, context-based, receiver-based, and situational. We consider each in turn.

Traitlike CA is viewed as a relatively enduring, personality-type orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety of contexts. Our concern here is with oral communication. However, traitlike apprehension about other modes of communication has also been studied under the labels of writing apprehension (Daly & Miller, 1975) and singing apprehension (Andersen, Andersen, & Garrison, 1978).

Traitlike CA is presumed to be a relatively stable predisposition toward experiencing fear and/or anxiety in a variety of communication contexts. While an individual's level of traitlike CA is presumed to be subject to change over time as a function of differing communication experiences or treatment interventions, it is also presumed to be relatively consistent over extended time periods in the absence of major traumatic experiences or systematic interventions. In short, it is imbedded in the total personality of the individual.

Context-based CA is viewed as a relatively enduring, personality-type orientation toward communication in a given type of context. Apprehension about public speaking, commonly known as "speech fright" or "stage fright," is an example of this type of CA. Whereas traitlike CA is presumed to generalize across communication contexts, context-based CA is presumed to be restricted to a single type of context. For example, a person could have consistently high CA with regard to communication in public but experience little CA in dyadic or small group interactions. Similarly, a person could have consistently high CA with regard to interpersonal communication but experience little CA when presenting a public speech or talking in a large meeting. As was the case with traitlike CA, context-based CA is presumed to be stable over extended periods of time.

Receiver-based CA is viewed as a relatively enduring orientation toward communication with a given person or group of people or a given type of person or group of persons. This type of CA is viewed as personality-based and/or a response to consistent situational constraints generated by a given person or group of people. Receiver-based CA that centers on a certain type of person or group of persons (strangers, acquaintances, or friends) is presumed to be rooted in personality. However, that which centers on a particular person or group of persons (the boss, the teacher, or one's colleagues) may be a function of both personality and situational constraints generated by the other person or group. If one is apprehensive about all bosses, this probably stems from a personality orientation and would likely be quite stable over time. If, however, the person is usually not bothered by bosses, but is bothered by one particular boss, this probably stems from situational constraints

generated by that boss. This would be much more subject to change as a function of the boss generating different situational constraints.

People can differ greatly in the level of receiver-based CA. For example, a teacher might experience very little CA when talking to a student but a great deal when talking to the principal. Similarly, a speaker may experience a great deal of CA when talking to a group of strangers but very little when talking to a group of friends.

Length of acquaintance may be expected to have a major impact on the degree to which receiver-based CA is affected by personality as opposed to situational constraints generated by a given receiver or group of receivers. The shorter the acquaintance period, the more we should expect personality to be a factor (Richmond, 1978).

Situational CA is viewed as a *transitory orientation toward communication with a given person or group of people*. This type of CA should be expected to fluctuate substantially as a function of changed constraints introduced by the environment in which the communication takes place and the behavior of the other person or people in the communication encounter.

Receiver-based, context-based, and traitlike CA should be expected to be predictive of situational CA considered across relevant situations. However, they should not be expected to be equally predictive. Receiver- and context-based CA should be expected to be more predictive than traitlike because they relate more directly and restrictively to elements present in given situations. However, traitlike CA is also presumed to be predictive of CA experienced across a wide variety of situations. It will be most predictive of the average situational CA experienced when a variety of types of context and types of receivers are considered together.

Causes of CA

The two primary explanations provided for the development of personality in human beings center on heredity and environment. In short, one can be born with it or learn it. Explanations for the development of CA have focused on these two factors.

Researchers in the area of social biology have established that significant social traits can be measured in infants shortly after birth, and that infants differ sharply from each other on these traits. One of these traits is referred to as "sociability," which is believed to be a predisposition directly related to adult sociability—the degree to which one reaches out to other people and responds positively to contact with other people.

Research with identical and fraternal twins of the same sex reinforces the theoretical role of heredity in personality development. Identical twins are biologically identical, whereas fraternal twins are not. Thus, if differences between twins raised in the same environment are found to exist, biology (heredity) can be discounted as a cause in one case but not in the other. Research has indicated that biologically identical twins are much more similar in sociability than are fraternal twins. This research is particularly important because it was conducted with a large sample of adult twins who had the opportunity to have many different and varied social experiences (Buss, 1980).

This research strongly suggests that heredity may have an important bearing on an individual's willingness to communicate. Whether such hereditary influence passes through CA to affect the willingness to communicate, however, remains an unknown. No hereditary research to date has involved the measurement of CA, so the question of the impact of heredity on CA must remain open. At this point we doubt that a substantial impact exists. Research on the treatment methods for reducing high CA (McCroskey, 1972; McCroskey, Ralph, & Barrick, 1970) suggests that methods based on learning models are highly effective and require relatively brief time periods to implement. It strikes us as unlikely that such would be the case if CA were biologically based. Thus, at present we believe any substantial impact of heredity on the willingness to communicate more than likely passes through some other antecedent of this predisposition. The one we consider most likely is extroversion-introversion. In any event, in the absence of directly relevant research, any presumed relationship must rest on pure speculation.

We believe that CA is a learned phenomenon. More specifically, traitlike CA represents an accumulation of state anxiety experiences (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984). An explanation of this process centers on work in expectancy learning, particularly that concerning learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975).

People develop expectations with regard to other people and with regard to situations. Expectations are also developed concerning the probable outcomes of engaging in specific behaviors (such as talking). To the extent that such expectations are found to be accurate, the individual develops confidence. When expectations are found to be inaccurate, the individual is confronted with the need to develop new expectations. When this continually recurs, the individual may develop a lack of confidence. When no appropriate expectations can be developed, anxiety is produced. When expectations are produced that entail negative outcomes seen as difficult or impossible to avoid, fear is produced.

When applied to communication behavior, these last two cases are the foundation of CA.

Reinforcement is a vital component of expectancy learning. Organisms form expectations on the basis of attempting behaviors and being reinforced for some and either not reinforced or punished for others. The most gestalt expectancy is that there is regularity in the environment. This forms the basis for the development of other, more specific expectations. When no regularity can be discovered in a given type of situation, either because none exists or there is too little exposure to that type of situation to obtain sufficient observation and reinforcement, the organism is unable to develop a regular behavioral response pattern for that situation that will maximize rewards and minimize punishments. Anxiety is the cognitive response to such situations, and the behavior is unpredictable to a large extent. However, nonbehavior such as avoidance or withdrawal is probable, since even though this does not increase the probability of obtaining a reward, in many instances it decreases the probability of receiving punishment. The organism essentially becomes helpless.

In the early animal research concerning helplessness, dogs were placed in a environment in which rewards and punishments were administered on a random schedule. After attempting behaviors to adapt to this environment but receiving no regular response from the environment, the dogs retreated to a corner and virtually stopped behaving. They became helpless, and some actually died (Seligman, 1975). Although a major portion of the research supporting the learned helplessness construct has been conducted with animals, Feinberg, Miller, and Weiss (1983) have demonstrated its applicability to the learning of communication behavior by humans.

We learn our communicative behavior by trying various behaviors in our environment and receiving various rewards and punishments (or the absence of rewards or punishments) for our efforts. Over time and situations, we develop expectations concerning the likely outcomes of various behaviors within and across situations. Three things can occur from this process, all of which can occur for the same individual, and all of which are environmentally controlled. However, they may occur to greatly different degrees for different individuals. The three things that can occur are positive expectations, negative expectations, and helplessness. Let us consider each.

When we engage in communication behaviors that work (that is, are reinforced by the achievement of some desired goal), we develop positive expectations for those behaviors and they become a regular part of our communicative repertoire. In the early childhood years, much of this

occurs through trial and error; during later stages of development, cognition becomes more important. We may think through a situation and choose communication behaviors that our previous experience suggests should be successful. Formal instruction in communication adds to our cognitive capacity to develop such expectations and choose appropriate behaviors. To the extent that our behaviors continue to be reinforced, we develop stronger positive expectations and our communication behavior becomes more regularly predictable. In addition, we develop confidence in our ability to communicate effectively. Neither anxiety nor fear—the core elements of CA—is associated with such positive expectations.

The development of negative expectations follows much the same pattern as that of positive expectations. We discover that some communication behaviors regularly result in punishment or a lack of reward and tend to reduce those behaviors. During later stages of development, we may make cognitive choices between behaviors for which we have positive and negative expectations, the former being chosen and the latter rejected. However, we may also find situations for which we have no behaviors with positive expectations for success. If we can avoid or withdraw from such situations, this is a reasonable choice. However, if participation is unavoidable, we may have only behaviors with negative expectations available. A fearful response is the natural outcome. Consider, for example, the person who has attempted several public speeches. In each case, the attempt resulted in punishment or lack of reward. When confronted with another situation that requires the individual to give a public speech, the person will fear that situation. The person knows what to expect, and the expectation is negative.

The development of helplessness occurs when regularity of expectations, either positive or negative, is not present. Helplessness may be either spontaneously learned or developed over time. Spontaneous helplessness occurs in new situations. If the person has never confronted the situation before, he or she may be unable to determine any behavioral options. While this is much more common for young children, adults may also confront such situations. For example, visiting a foreign country where one does not understand the language may place one in a helpless condition. Similarly, some people who are divorced after many years of marriage report that they find themselves helpless when it comes to communication in the "singles scene." Such spontaneous helplessness may generate strong anxiety feelings, and the behavior of people experiencing such feeling is often seen by others in the environment as highly aberrant.

Helplessness that is learned over time is produced by the inconsistent receipt of reward and punishment. Such inconsistency may be a function

of either true inconsistency in the environment or the inability of the individual to discriminate among situational constraints in the environment that produce differential outcomes. For example, a child may develop helplessness if the parent reinforces the child's talking at the dinner table on some days and punishes it on other days. If the child is unable to determine why the parent behaves differently from day to day, the child is helpless to control the punishments and rewards. Similarly, the child may be rewarded for giving an answer in school but punished for talking to another child in the classroom. If the child is unable to see the differences in these situations, the child may learn to be helpless. When helplessness is learned, it is accompanied by strong anxiety feelings.

Learned helplessness and learned negative expectations are the foundational components of CA. The broader the helplessness or negative expectations, the more traitlike the CA. Inversely, the more situationally specific the helplessness or negative expectations, the more situational the CA. It should be stressed that helplessness and negative expectation (as well as positive expectations) are the product of an interaction between the individual's behaviors and the responses of other individuals in the environment. The development of the cognitive responses of the person, then, may be heavily dependent on his or her behavioral skills, partly dependent on those skills and partly dependent on the responsiveness of the environment, or almost entirely a result of the environment. Thus any hereditary component which may exist may only have an impact through its interaction with the environment.

Internal Effects of CA

The effects of traitlike CA have been the focus of extensive research, much of which has been summarized elsewhere (McCroskey, 1977). Unfortunately, much of this work has centered on the impact of CA on communication behaviors. This research is not completely compatible with the conceptualization of CA as a cognitively based variable. Although CA may indeed be linked with communication behavior, current theory suggests that traitlike CA is a precursor of CA in a given situation which may have, but not necessarily *will* have, an impact on situational willingness to communicate (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984).

As has been noted elsewhere (McCroskey, 1984), *the only effect of CA that is predicted to be universal across both individuals and types of CA is an internally experienced feeling of discomfort*. As CA is heightened, feelings of discomfort increase and willingness to communicate is predicted to decline.

The importance of this conceptualization of CA must be emphasized. Since CA is experienced internally, the only potentially valid indicant of CA is the individual's report of that experience. Thus self-reports of individuals, whether obtained by paper-and-pencil measures or careful interviews, or under circumstances where the individual has nothing to gain or lose by lying, provide the only potentially valid measures of CA. Measures of physiological activation and observations of behavior can provide, at best, only indirect evidence of traitlike CA and thus are inherently inferior approaches to measuring CA. Physiological and behavioral instruments intended to measure CA must be validated with self-report measures, not the other way around. To the extent that such measures are not related to self-report measures, they must be judged invalid. Currently available data indicate that such physiological measures and behavioral observation procedures generally have low validity as measures of traitlike CA but may be somewhat more valid for measuring situational CA (Behnke & Beatty, 1981; Clevenger, 1959).

External Effects of CA

As noted earlier, there is no single behavior that is predicted to be a universal product of varying levels of traitlike CA. Any impact of CA on behavior must be mediated by willingness to communicate in interaction with situational constraints. Nevertheless, there are some externally observable behaviors that are either more or less likely to occur as a function of varying levels of CA. Behavioral prediction from traitlike CA should be assumed to be correct only when considering aggregate behavioral indicants of the individual across time, contexts, and receivers.

Three patterns of behavioral response to high traitlike CA may be predicted to be generally applicable: communication avoidance, communication withdrawal, and communication disruption. A fourth pattern is atypical but sometimes does occur—excessive communication. We now consider each of these patterns.

When people are confronted with a circumstance that they anticipate will make them uncomfortable, and they have a choice of whether or not to confront it, they may decide either to confront it and make the best of it or to avoid it and thus avoid the discomfort. Some refer to this as the choice between "fight" and "flight." Research in the area of CA indicates that the latter choice should be expected in most cases. In order to avoid having to experience high CA, people may become less willing to communicate and therefore select occupations that involve low communication responsibilities, pick housing units that reduce incidental

contact with other people, choose seats in classrooms or in meetings that are less conspicuous, and even avoid social settings. Avoidance, then, is a common behavioral response to high CA.

Avoidance of communication is not always possible, no matter how high a person's level of traitlike CA or low the willingness to communicate. People can find themselves in a situation that demands communication with no advance warning. Under such circumstances, withdrawal from communication is the behavioral pattern to be expected. This withdrawal may be complete (absolute silence) or partial (talking only as much as absolutely required). In a public speaking setting, this response may be represented by the very short speech. In a meeting, class, or small group discussion, it may be represented by talking only when called upon. In a dyadic interaction, it may be represented by answering questions briefly or supplying agreeing responses with no initiation of discussion.

Generally, then, verbal communication is substantially reduced when a person wishes to withdraw from communication. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, may not be reduced, but the nonverbal messages sent may be primarily of one type. That type is referred to as "nonimmediate." Nonimmediate messages include such things as frowns, standing or sitting away from other people, avoiding eye contact, and standing with arms folded. These messages signal others that a person is not interested in communicating and tend to reduce communication initiation attempts from others.

Communication disruption is the third typical behavioral pattern associated with high CA. The person may have disfluencies in verbal presentation or unnatural nonverbal behaviors. Equally likely are poor choices of communicative strategies. It is important to note, however, that such behaviors may also be produced by inadequate communication skills, anomie-alienation, and cultural divergence. Thus inferring the existence of high CA from observations of such behavior is often inappropriate.

Overcommunication as a response to high traitlike CA is believed to be uncommon (McCroskey, 1984), but this pattern is exhibited by at least some people. This behavior may exhibit overcompensation for a person's high level of apprehension and a low level of willingness to communicate. It also might represent a circumstance where a person has a high need and willingness to communicate but also has high apprehension. Willingness and apprehension are presumed to be

substantially, but not perfectly, correlated. Thus this may represent the "fight" response, an attempt to communicate in spite of the presence of high apprehension. The person who elects to take a public speaking course in spite of his or her extreme stage fright is a classic example. Less easily recognizable is the individual with high CA who attempts to dominate social situations. Most of the time people who employ this behavioral option are seen as poor communicators but are not recognized as having high CA. In fact, they may be seen as people with very low CA.

Measurement of CA

As we noted previously, since CA is an internally experienced phenomenon, it must be measured by means of self-report by the person who experiences it. The most commonly employed instrument for measuring traitlike CA is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). The original 20-item instrument (PRCA-20; McCroskey, 1970), as well as two later versions (PRCA-10, PRCA-25; McCroskey, 1978), were dominated by items related to public speaking. This led to questions as to whether the instrument actually measured traitlike CA or was only measuring one form of context-based CA.

Although a strong case was built for the validity of the earlier forms of the instrument (McCroskey, 1978), a new form was generated which included a balanced number of items for each of four contexts (PRCA-24; McCroskey, 1982): public speaking, speaking in large meetings, speaking in small groups, and speaking in dyads. In addition to providing more face validity for the instrument as a traitlike measure, this version provided a method by which subscores could be generated for the four general communication contexts included.

The latest version of the instrument, known as the PRCA-24B (McCroskey, 1986), permits the generation of subscores not only for types of communication context but also for types of receivers—strangers, acquaintances, and friends. The PRCA-24B correlates very highly with the PRCA-24 (McCroskey & Baer, 1985), but since it permits generation of scores related to receiver types, it may be more useful for some purposes than others. Since all forms of this instrument are highly intercorrelated, they all have concurrent validity. However, the PRCA-24 and PRCA-24B have more face validity and provide greater flexibility in use. Hence, these are the forms that we would recommend for use.

EFFECTS OF WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE ON INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Research relating to the impact of willingness to communicate on interpersonal communication has been conducted under a variety of constructs—CA, shyness, unwillingness to communicate, predisposition toward verbal behavior, talkativeness, reticence, quietness, and social anxiety, to name a few. Such research has been reported in the literature of psychology and communication for over four decades. The three basic research models that have been employed are (1) direct observation of amount of communication with assessment of outcomes; (2) measurement of a predisposition (such as CA) which is presumed to be related to the willingness to communicate, allowing communication to occur, and assessing outcomes; and (3) simulation of talkativeness variation with assessment of outcomes.

Regardless of the model employed, the results of this research have been remarkably consistent. The general conclusion that can be drawn from this immense body of research is that reduced willingness to communicate results in an individual being less effective in communication and generating negative perceptions of himself or herself in the minds of others involved in the communication.

Since this research has been thoroughly summarized (Daly & Stafford, 1984) and interpreted (Richmond, 1984) previously, we will not take the space here to repeat those efforts. Instead, we will simply draw from that work some of the conclusions that appear most obvious from the research results.

Interpersonal communication occurs primarily within three general environments—school environments, organizational environments, and social environments. While these three environments are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive of all environments in which interpersonal communication can occur, they will suffice for our purposes here.

In the school environment, students with a high level of willingness to communicate characteristically have all the advantages, even though they may be reprimanded occasionally for communicating when they are not supposed to. Teachers have positive expectations for students who are highly willing to communicate and negative ones for those less willing. Student achievement, as measured by teacher-made tests, teacher-assigned grades, and standardized tests, is consistent with these expectations—in spite of the fact that intellectual ability has not been found to be associated with communication orientations.

Students who are less willing to communicate are also seen in negative ways by their peers. Such negative perceptions have been

observed all the way from the lower elementary level through graduate school. In contrast, students who are willing to communicate have more friends and report being more satisfied with their school experience. With both academic achievement and social support on the side of the student who is willing to communicate, it should not be surprising that such students are more likely to remain in school and graduate than those who are less willing.

The impact of willingness to communicate within the organizational environment is no less than that in the school. People who are highly willing to communicate receive preference in the hiring process and are more likely to be promoted to positions of importance in the organization. People who are less willing to communicate tend to self-select themselves in occupational roles that ensure themselves lower social status and lower economic standing. People who report a higher willingness to communicate also report being more satisfied with their employment and are much more likely to remain with an organization. People with lower willingness to communicate tend to generate negative perceptions in the minds of their co-workers. They are seen as neither task-attractive nor credible and are rejected for leadership positions.

On the social level, the picture is very similar. People with a high willingness to communicate have more friends and are less likely to be lonely. They are likely to have more dates and to date more people than those who are less willing to communicate. The latter are more likely to engage in exclusive dating and to marry immediately after completing their schooling. People who are highly willing to communicate are seen as more socially and physically attractive by others, which may explain some of the effects noted earlier.

CONCLUSION

The general conclusion that we draw from the research and theory summarized here is that a global, personality-type orientation toward willingness to communicate exists which has a major impact on interpersonal communication in a wide variety of environments. While willingness to communicate in a given situation can be affected by situational constraints, traitlike willingness to communicate has a potential impact in all communication settings. High willingness is associated with increased frequency and amount of communication, which in turn are associated with a variety of positive communication outcomes. Low willingness is associated with decreased frequency and

amount of communication, which in turn are associated with a variety of negative communication outcomes.

While not denying the existence or importance of other personality variables in interpersonal communication, we believe that willingness to communicate plays the central role in determining an individual's communicative impact on others. Thus willingness to communicate deserves to receive a high degree of attention from scholars concerned with individual differences in communication.

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