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Assessment of Affect Toward Communication
And Affect Toward Instruction in Communication

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Abstract

This paper centers on the four types of affective assessment which currently are most often needed: (1) assessment of affect toward communication, (2) assessment of affect toward communication competence, (3) affect toward courses and teachers, and (4) affect toward instructional programs. With regard to each, attention is directed toward (1) what needs to be assessed, (2) why it needs to be assessed, (3) current methods available to assess it, (4) the reliability and validity of those methods, and (5) the limitations of those methods. It is concluded that satisfactory methods for affective assessment in communication are currently available and being used.

ASSESSMENT OF AFFECT TOWARD COMMUNICATION AND AFFECT TOWARD INSTRUCTION IN COMMUNICATION

Social scientists in the field of communication studies have long been concerned with the assessment of affect. From the 1930s through the 1960s the field's interests in affect were reflected primarily in research in areas such as persuasion and attitude change, group cohesion and satisfaction, and stage fright. In the 1970s, with the advent of interest groups and divisions in our professional associations which focus attention on both communication education and the role of communication in instruction more generally, assessment interests have become much more diversified.

Early in the field's experience with attempts to measure attitudes, it was recognized that attitude measures were far from perfect predictors of subsequent behaviors. It was much later before it was realized that it was typically very poor measures of behavior which were more often the problem than the measures of attitude. Even today, we hear naive criticisms of affective measures because they are less than precise measures of erratic human behaviors. Fortunately, today it is much more clearly recognized that affect is important in its own right, whether or not it is closely tied to specific behaviors.

Although reports of affective measures have appeared in our literature for over a half-century, it was not until the rapid expansion of use of social scientific methodologies in communication research in the 1970s did our field begin to take measurement of affect seriously. Work in this area has accelerated substantially in recent years (Emmert & Barker, 1989). An extensive array of tools for assessment of affect have become available, some of which have a strong case supporting their reliability and validity. I will not attempt to survey all of these in this paper. Rather, I will draw on a few which I believe are particularly applicable to both research and application concerns with assessment.

Usefulness of Self-Report Measurement

Self-report measures, utilizing methodologies developed in other social sciences by scholars such as Thurstone (1929), Likert (1932), and Osgood (1957), have been refined and widely employed by communication researchers to assess affect related to communication (Arnold, 1989; McCroskey & Richmond, 1989). While self-report is not the only means by which affect may be assessed, the approach has several key advantages both for the communication researcher and the program evaluator.

Three measurement approaches came into common use in communication research in the 1930s which continue to be employed today: self-report (eg. Lomas, 1934), observer ratings (eg. Henning, 1935), and physiological activity (eg. Redding, 1936).

The measurement approach which appears, at first glance at least, to have the closest relationship with affect is physiological measurement. Physiological responses are hard to fake and the instruments, if handled by competent professionals, are not as subject to the human frailties of demand characteristics and experimenter biases as are other instruments. However, there are many pitfalls in the use of such instruments. Few scientists and even fewer teachers are trained in the appropriate use of the technology involved. The equipment in the hands of the untrained individual is worse than useless and very likely to lead to false assessments that are difficult to identify in research reports or program evaluations. In addition, use of such instruments for assessing large numbers of students are seldom economically or strategically feasible.

The biggest problem with physiological assessment is one of validity. Physiological instruments are designed to detect arousal and/or activity. These elements are seldom a primary concern of either the communication researcher or the program assessor. Interpretation of indicants of arousal or activity is fraught with validity problems.

which is why interpretations of the results produced by lie detectors (physiographs) are not admitted as evidence in U.S. courts. The terror one person experiences while riding a roller coaster looks very much like the excitement another person experiences on the same ride when you examine printouts from physiological instruments. The affective experience is much more than its physiological manifestation. Hence, this measurement approach holds little promise for the person concerned with assessing affect.

The second type of assessment that has appeared in the literature for many years is observer ratings. Closely related is a method known as "behavioral observation," which we will consider here also. The difference between the two is that data recorded by observer ratings involve an interpretation or evaluation on the part of the observer, while data recorded through behavioral observations are presumably more objective—usually simple counting. More ethnographic methods are more impressionistic and may not result in the recording of numerical data at all, but rather be recorded and reported in narrative form rather than through quantitative analyses. All of these systems are strongly advocated by many because they involve "real communication behaviors."

The problem with all of these observation-based systems is precisely the same as their alleged strength—they are based on observations of behavior. Affect and behavior are far from the same thing. People often behave in ways they think others will approve, rather than on how they feel. People mask their inner emotions so that they can keep others from access to their private affective responses ("Real men don't cry"). Some whole cultures participate in extremely high levels of such masking.

This brings us to the bottom line: Affect is a privately experienced phenomenon. The full depth and breadth of the affect a person experiences is only fully knowable by that person. If the person is in touch with their affective responses (are actually aware of their feelings and reactions) and are willing to disclose those feelings, their self-reports will provide valid data which may be used for assessment of affect.

As I have argued elsewhere (McCroskey, 1984b), the best way to find out how someone feels about something is to ask them. If the person knows the answer and is willing to tell you the truth, that is what you will get. If they don't know themselves, the assessor is treading on dangerous ground to assume he/she can figure out how someone feels better than the person experiencing the affect. Even clinical psychiatrists seldom venture into such unknown territory. Of course, if people want to lie about their feelings, they can do so verbally, just like they do nonverbally through their masking behaviors. As we all know, we can keep a secret if we really want to do so.

After working with self-report measures for over three decades, I am no longer amazed at how much people are quite willing to disclose about their feelings if you ask them in a confidential way in which their anonymity is assured. Many people very much enjoy completing self-report questionnaires, and need no particular inducement to do so. While some people will give bogus responses or flatly refuse to participate, they are the comparatively rare exceptions.

Since self-report methods are relatively inexpensive to employ, usually produce valid data, and are now available for the assessment of many affective concerns, it is no wonder that a large portion of affective assessment related to communication orientations and communication programs employs such methods. We will focus primarily on this approach for the remainder of this paper.

Types of Affective Assessment

There are four types of affective assessment which currently are those most needed by communication researchers and program evaluators: (1) assessment of affect toward communication, (2) assessment of affect toward communication competence, (3) assessment of affect toward courses and teachers, and (4) assessment of affect toward instructional programs. In the following sections we will consider each of these in turn, and consider (1) what needs to be assessed, (2) why it needs to be assessed, (3) current methods available to assess it, (4) the reliability and validity of those methods, and (5) the limitations of those methods.

Affect Toward Communication

One of the things that a communication course should promote is a positive value (or affect) for communication. While there are few one-to-one relationships, the way people feel about communication will generally govern their communication behavior. People with positive affect toward communication are more likely to take communication seriously, try to learn more about it, and try to be effective communicators. It is reasonable

to expect, therefore, that taking formal instruction in communication should increase a student's positive affect for communication, or at the very least, not lower that affect.

Two aspects of affect toward communication have received considerable attention in the field: communication apprehension and willingness to communicate.

Communication Apprehension

While the field has long been concerned with stage fright related to public speaking (Clevenger, 1959), as the field came to include concerns with communication settings and contexts beyond public speaking, it became clear that fear and anxiety about communicating with others was not restricted to a single setting or context (McCroskey, 1970, 1977, 1984a). Communication apprehension, the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with others, has become a topic of major concern in the field and one that is difficult to ignore if one is interested in the impact of students' personalities on their communication behavior (Daly & McCroskey, 1984).

The most commonly used instrument to assess communication apprehension is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24; McCroskey, 1993). This instrument is provided, along with scoring instructions, in Figure 1. The PRCA-24 has high internal reliability (generally above .90) and test-retest reliability for one year above .80, for two years above .70, and for three years above .60 (Rubin & Graham, 1988; Rubin, Graham, & Mignerey, 1990). The case for the validity of the instrument is strong (McCroskey, 1978; McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985).

Willingness to Communicate

While communication apprehension and willingness to communicate are related to each other, they are very different constructs and are represented by very different assessment instruments. While communication apprehension is a pure affective orientation, willingness to communicate is presumed to represent an affective-based predisposition toward behavior. That is, it represents a person's willingness to initiate communication when given the free choice of doing so or refraining from doing so.

Willingness to communicate may be assessed by the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTC; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). The instrument is provided, along with scoring instructions, in Figure 2. The instrument has high internal reliability (generally above .90) and a test-retest reliability about .80 (McCroskey, 1992). The instrument also has good content, construct, and predictive validity (McCroskey, 1992).

Both of these assessment tools are designed for assessment of individual differences among students. However, they can also be used to identify changes of orientations for groups of students exposed to individual classes or a full instructional program. While the measures are both reliable and valid under most circumstances, it is important to remember that these are self-report instruments which are transparent in their wording and, as a result, are open to self-serving or dishonest responses if the individual completing them is not motivated to be honest and self-disclosing. For example, if the respondent thinks he/she will be more likely to get a job if he/she is seen as fearless and highly willing to communicate, it would be expected that the respondent's scores would reflect these orientations.

Affect Toward Communication Competence

There has been some controversy over the relationship between communication competence and communication behavior. Some argue that the level of a person's communication competence is the primary reason people choose to communicate or avoid communication. Others see communication apprehension as a more important variable. This disagreement appears to be based on different definitions of communication competence—whether it is defined as the individuals actual cognitive and behavioral skills or it is defined as the person's perception of those skills. When the latter definition is agreed upon, there is little question but what communication competence is highly predictive of one's willingness to communicate. Choosing to communicate or not is like many other choices people make every day: if we feel we are not competent to do something, we are highly likely to avoid doing it.

Viewed in this light, one's affective orientation toward one's communication competence is seen as one of the driving forces in people's willingness to communicate. People's views of their own competence, in communication or any other behavior, do not always square with externally perceived reality. Most of us know people who consider themselves competent communicators who we wish would avoid communicating with us! There

are also many people with low self-esteem who have negative affect toward their communication competence who we see as being from moderately to highly competent. Regardless of external perceivers' views, one's own self-perception is what will guide one's decisions in the matter.

It is important, then, that people have a realistic perception of their own communication competence. Achieving this may even be a key goal of instruction in communication. Identifying individuals with distorted views of their competence may be an important aspect of selection of instructional options for students.

There are many self-report instruments available which purport to assess an individual's communicative competence. However, most of these are based on their creator's definition of what constitutes said competence, and do not ask the respondent to address the issue of their own competence directly. While these measures may or may not tap into "real" competence, which is their fundamental validity test, they do not provide a measure of the respondent's affective view of their own competence.

As a result of the above, the Self-Report of Communication Competence (SPCC: McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) was developed. This instrument and its scoring procedure are presented in Figure 3. This instrument asks respondents to directly assess their own competence in a dozen combinations of receiver and context on a 0-100 scale, much like the grading scale commonly used in schools.

The obtained internal reliabilities for the total score on this instrument have been consistently high (above .90), and most of the sub-score reliabilities have been found to be satisfactory (except for the dyadic dimension), in the .70-.89 range for the most part (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988; Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey, 1989). The only test-retest reliability obtained to date was .80 over a 14 week period. The instrument also has good content and construct validity based on the available data.

It is important to stress that this instrument does not purport to be a valid measure of a person's true competence as a communicator. Its validity for this purpose remains untested, but is not presumed to be high. It was designed to be an assessment of one's affect toward their competence, and it appears to be a valid measure if used for that purpose.

Affect Toward Courses and Teachers

While the two previous sections were directed toward assessment of individual self-perceptions and orientations which, in aggregate form, can also be use in course or program assessment, in this section we turn to the assessment of affect related to courses and teachers directly. Because of our work at West Virginia University relating to the role of communication in instruction generally, we have had a continuing interest in the assessment of affect in the instructional process which could be applied to any classroom or other instructional environment. The methods we have developed should be useful to both researchers and program evaluators.

Our view of what needs to be assessed in the affective domain has evolved over several years. We now see three affective orientations of particular relevance to the evaluation of individual courses or instructional packages. These are (1) affect toward the teacher (or teaching team), (2) affect toward the content of the course, and (3) affect toward the behaviors recommended in the course. While we presume these affective orientations are interrelated, we see each as independently important. For example, affect toward the teacher may be an important aspect of student motivation and teacher evaluation, but affect toward the content in the course and the behaviors recommended in the course have much more social significance for the assessment of the value of the course to the curriculum.

In assessing these three affective elements, we have chosen to distinguish between attitude and behavioral disposition or intent. Hence, we measure attitude toward the teacher and likelihood of taking another course with that teacher; attitude toward the content in the course and likelihood of taking another course in that content area; and attitude toward the behaviors recommended in the course and likelihood of engaging in the behaviors recommended. These six assessments may be combined for one general affect score, combined into two scores (distinguishing between attitude and behavioral intent), into three scores (distinguishing between the teacher, the content, and the behaviors recommended), or examined individually.

The Instructional Affect Assessment Instrument (IAAI) is presented along with its scoring system in Figure 4. The bipolar scale system employed evolved from research I conducted in the mid-1960s which was directed toward the development of a widely usable measure of attitude (McCroskey & Richmond, 1989). It was determined, through studies involving 154 topics and 40 bipolar scales, that certain scales were useable across many topics while others were usable across many different topics. Different categories of bipolar items were found to group together

for beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral dispositions. This information led to the development of several instruments for measuring attitude change, the Generalized Immediacy Scale (Andersen, 1979), and various versions of the IAAI (Andersen, 1979; Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1994; Kearney & McCroskey, 1980; McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond, 1990; Scott & Wheelless, 1977).

Portions of the instrument have been used in many instructionally oriented dissertations and other research projects over the past two decades, as well as being used in a departmental instructional assessment program (discussed below). The internal reliability of the instrument has proven to be exceptionally high. The six base scores have generally produced alpha reliabilities above .90; when combined into two- or three-score combinations around .95; and for a single total score well above .95. Factor analysis has indicated that while the scores form a single factor, forced two-, three-, and six-factor solutions usually are consistent with expectations based on the theoretical combinations discussed above. The content or face validity of the measure is high, and the predictive validity drawn from the research using it is exceptionally good.

While use of this instrument as a basis for assessment of teacher or course quality is quite appropriate, it should be recognized that this is a fairly general evaluative tool. It does what it was designed to do, assess affect. It does not assess the causes or effects of that affect. A thorough assessment program will need to include other tools to supplement this general one.

Affect Toward Instructional Programs

Program reviews are now routine events in most academic institutions. The "accountability" movement has accomplished what good educational practice should have accomplished many years previously—it has forced academic units to provide data to establish that they are accomplishing the goals they profess. What this has done is to make many units aware that their program(s) are just not as good as they should be, and many other units aware that their programs are more effective than they thought. Most importantly, this movement has enabled most programs to make better decisions because they have better data upon which to base those decisions.

While some communication programs have no explicit affective objectives, most have such objectives at least at the implicit level. In many cases these affective objectives are at least as important as are the more commonly explicit cognitive and psychomotor (or performance) objectives. Since the latter types are more commonly shared with the students in the program, they are more likely to be explicit. Although affective objectives are often known by program administrators and faculty, they are not commonly provided to the students, nor are the students routinely tested to see if those objectives are met. Attainment of cognitive and performance objectives are usually used to measure student achievement, attainment of affective objectives are more commonly used to measure course and/or program achievement.

University administrators today are concerned with producing "satisfied customers" as well as graduates. Hence student and alumni attitudes are now recognized as important in and of themselves. Administrators expect that majors/graduates in a program should have positive affect toward the content of that program, the faculty of that program, and the behaviors taught in that program. They see students/alumni as individuals with valuable input to identify the strengths and weaknesses of programs.

Fortunately, the same type of assessment instrument we noted previously as useful for assessing individual courses and instructors can be employed in program assessment. Figure 5 presents the program assessment version of the IAAI which we have used successfully and currently employ. As will be noted by comparison of Figure 5 with Figure 4, the IAAI needs very little modification for these two different purposes.

It has been our experience that the alpha reliabilities for this version of the IAAI are just as good as they are for the individual course/instructor version. Again, the face validity of the instrument is very high.

As I noted previously, use of purely quantitative measures for affective assessment is somewhat limiting. Some more open-ended, qualitative assessments often are useful supplements to the quantitative data. Some of the open-end questions we have used include:

I (would / would not) recommend this program to others.

Please discuss your response:

The program offers _____ to persons pursuing a degree in Communication Studies (please elaborate):

The program needs to consider changing /revising the following (please elaborate):

The most positive aspect of the program is (please elaborate):

I believe that the program (has helped/will help) prepare me for the career position I desire. YES NO
(please explain your answer)

Analysis and interpretation of the responses to questions such as those above can be quite difficult. One does not have nice, neat numbers such as are provided by the formal self-report scales. Rather, the assessor must read the responses carefully to gain a broad perspective of how students are responding. One must be particularly careful not to over-react to a few extremely positive or extremely negative respondents. While a small number of extreme respondents are covered by the large majority of more moderated respondents in quantitative data, the unskilled (or biased) assessor is much more likely to fall prey to considering the extreme or unusual response to be more worthy of note than the common, but not colorful, responses of the majority.

Conclusion

Assessment of affect must hold a central position in any well-developed assessment program—whether that program is directed toward assessment of student needs and achievements, assessment of course or teacher quality, or assessment of program quality or outcomes. While some teachers and administrators see the goals of courses and programs to be exclusively cognitive and/or performance centered, affect is not only important in itself, it also is a critical factor in the achievement of the other goals as well. It is very difficult to learn (cognitively) or do (perform) what one does not like (affectively).

It is not only courses with "appreciation" in their title that must teach "appreciation." Developing an appreciation for communication is developing positive affect, a positive value for communication. It should be expected that students who complete our classes and our programs will have heightened positive affect toward communication—they will be more willing to communicate, less apprehensive about communicating, and perceive themselves to be more competent communicators. We should also expect them to have heightened positive affect toward the courses and programs they have taken—to value the content they studied, to recognize the worth of the behaviors learned, and to appreciate the faculty who taught them. To know whether these noble objectives are being met, we must assess the students' affect.

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FIGURE 3

SELF-PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE SCALE

DIRECTIONS: Below are twelve situations in which a person might need to communicate. People's abilities to communicate effectively vary a lot, and sometimes the same person is more competent to communicate in one situation than in another. Please estimate how competent you believe you are to communicate in each of the situations described below. Indicate in the space at the left of each item how competent you estimate you are. Presume 0 = completely incompetent and 100 = completely competent. Choose any numbers between 0 and 100 to estimate your level of competence.

- _____ 1. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
- _____ 2. Talk with an acquaintance.
- _____ 3. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
- _____ 4. Talk in a small group of strangers.
- _____ 5. Talk with a friend.
- _____ 6. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
- _____ 7. Talk with a stranger.
- _____ 8. Present a talk to a group of friends.
- _____ 9. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
- _____ 10. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
- _____ 11. Talk in a small group of friends.
- _____ 12. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

Scoring: The SPCC permits computation of one total score and seven subscores. The range for all scores is 0-100. Follow the procedures outlined below.

- 1. Public speaking--add the scores for items 1, 8, & 12; divide the sum by 3. Scores above 86 = high SPCC, scores below 51 = low SPCC for this context.
- 2. Meetings--add the scores for items 3, 6, & 10; divide the sum by 3. Scores above 85 = high SPCC, scores below 51 = low SPCC for this context.
- 3. Group discussion--add the scores for items 4, 9, & 11; divide the sum by 3. Scores above 90 = high SPCC, scores below 61 = low SPCC for this context.
- 4. Interpersonal--add the scores for items 2, 5, & 7; divide the sum by 3. Scores above 93 = high SPCC, scores below 68 = low SPCC for this context.
- 5. Stranger--add the scores for items 1, 4, 7, & 10; divide the sum by 4. Scores above 79 = high SPCC, scores below 31 = low SPCC for these receivers.
- 6. Acquaintance--add the scores for items 2, 6, 9, & 12; divide the sum by 4. Scores above 92 = high SPCC, scores below 62 = low SPCC for these receivers.
- 7. Friend--add the scores for items 3, 5, 8, & 11; divide the sum by 4. Scores above 99 = high SPCC, scores below 76 = low SPCC for these receivers.

To compute the total score for the SPCC, add the totals for stranger, friend, and acquaintance, then divide by 3. Scores above 87 = high SPCC, scores below 59 = low SPCC.

FIGURE 4

INSTRUCTIONAL AFFECT ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT (COURSE FORM)

DIRECTIONS: Using the following scales, please evaluate this class. Please circle the number for each item which best represents your feelings.

A. My attitude about the content in this class is:

1. Good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Bad
2. Worthless	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
3. Fair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unfair
4. Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

B. My attitude about the behaviors recommended in this class is:

5. Good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Bad
6. Worthless	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
7. Fair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unfair
8. Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

C. My attitude about the instructor in this class is:

9. Good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Bad
10. Worthless	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
11. Fair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unfair
12. Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

D. My likelihood of actually attempting to engage in the behaviors recommended in this class is:

13. Likely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unlikely
14. Impossible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Possible
15. Probable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Improbable
16. Would Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Would

E. My likelihood of actually enrolling in another class with similar content, if I had the choice and if my schedule permitted: (If you are graduating, assume you would still be here.)

17. Likely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unlikely
18. Impossible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Possible
19. Probable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Improbable
20. Would Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Would

F. The likelihood of my taking another course with this teacher, if I had a choice, is: (If you are graduating, assume you would still be here.)

21. Likely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unlikely
22. Impossible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Possible
23. Probable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Improbable
24. Would Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Would