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A Narrative Inquiry Exploring How College Communication Professors Engage Students With Public Speaking Apprehensions

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A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING HOW COLLEGE COMMUNICATION
PROFESSORS ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH PUBLIC SPEAKING APPREHENSION

A Dissertation

by

Derek J. Riedel, B.A., M.A.

Presented to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The University of the Incarnate Word

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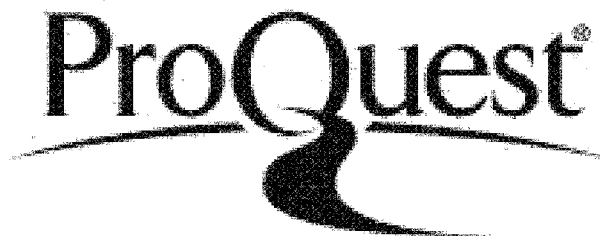


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Derek J. Riedel

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The dissertation process has been a rewarding journey. Throughout this process I have accomplished many of my goals with the help of some very good friends, some excellent mentors, and most importantly, the constant support of my family.

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Dr. Ettling, thank you for always pushing me to do my best work and not take any shortcuts. I will always appreciate your belief in me.

ABSTRACT

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING HOW COLLEGE COMMUNICATION PROFESSORS ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH PUBLIC SPEAKING APPREHENSION

by

Derek J. Riedel

Dissertation Director: Dr. Dorothy H. Ettling

University of the Incarnate Word, 2012

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how communication professors at four-year private universities help students who exhibit public speaking apprehension (PSA) learn to cope with their anxiety. The research was framed in the narrative inquiry paradigm, interviewing eight college communication professors about their experiences working with public speaking students. Each of the eight professors worked at private universities in a large southwest metropolitan city. The researcher attempted to gather critical incidents that shed light on valuable learning experiences that could be useful to professors looking for ways to help reduce their students' PSA.

The researcher found three common themes embedded in the interviews: (a) meeting with students individually and establishing relationships with them; (b) building community and trust in the classroom; and (c) placing less emphasis on grades. Each of the common themes contributed in one way or another to the critical incident that shaped the professor's teaching perspective. Although the purposeful sample was limited in size it revealed that Communication Orientation Motivation (COM) Therapy and systematic desensitization can both be useful treatment techniques for students willing to improve their public speaking ability. Findings revealed that professors were able to change an

apprehensive student's perspective by focusing on public speaking as a communicative effort rather than a performance. The study offers recommendations for professors engaged with students at all levels of education in addressing this issue.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Context of the Study

Communication apprehension (CA) affects many people in varying degrees. Research suggests an increasing concern beginning nearly 35 years ago when it was estimated that 10-20% of the United States population suffered from extreme CA (McCroskey, 1976, p. 2). More recent research indicates that number to be between 70 and 75% of the population reporting a fear of public speaking (Dwyer, 1998, p. 3). Dwyer (1998) suggests that “when Americans were asked to rank their greatest fears, 41 percent listed the fear of giving a speech, while only 19 percent listed the fear of death” (p. 3). Students suffering from CA often find it hard to complete required speaking courses. McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, and Payne (1989) state “we would expect lower grade point averages and higher dropout rates among high CA students compared to those with low CA” (p. 101).

Communication apprehension is defined as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1970, p. 269). Public Speaking Apprehension (PSA) is a type of CA. Daly, McCroskey, Ayres, Hopf, and Ayres (as cited in Castillo, 2010) defines public speaking anxiety (PSA) “as a specific type of communication-based anxiety that causes individuals to go through physiological arousal such as increased heart rate, negative self-focused cognitions, and/or behavioral concomitants when they are informed that they will be delivering a presentation or actually delivering a presentation” (p. 14). Ayres and Hopf (1993) defined PSA (or speech anxiety as they refer to it) as “those situations when an individual reports he or she is afraid to deliver a speech” (p. 4). There are four subsets of

communication apprehension: group apprehension, meeting apprehension, interpersonal apprehension, and public speaking apprehension (Dwyer, 1998). Among these CA subsets, PSA has been studied extensively because of its importance to the public speaking community.

If students with CA are not able to successfully cope with their symptoms, too many may drop out of school. McCroskey and Beatty (1998) suggested that people may decide to choose occupations that require low communication responsibilities so that they can reduce experiencing high communication anxiety. Students with CA may not only avoid certain careers but may also avoid communicating with other students in class. According to Dwyer (1998), these students “often say their fear of public speaking makes them feel stupid and less intelligent than others or even weak and cowardly” (p. 17). McCroskey and Beatty discussed this issue by stating “avoidance, then, is a common behavioral response to high CA” (p. 225).

Despite the vast amount of CA and PSA research that has been conducted, very little has focused on the experiences teachers have helping students suffering from PSA cope with their issue. Much of the past and current research focuses on what causes CA and how it can be treated (Kelly & Keaten, 2000; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; McCroskey et al., 2002). This researcher was concerned with how PSA affected university speech students. The researcher was interested in the following questions: from the communication teacher’s perspective, what is the classroom experience like for a student struggling with PSA? How does a teacher help the student manage PSA? Have teachers found tools that help reduce the student’s level of PSA? Are there certain situations that may elicit higher levels of PSA than others? A student showing signs of PSA may feel

inadequate or uncomfortable in the communication classroom. A student suffering from PSA may also decide not to continue with a course unless the instructor is able to help them cope with their condition. Exploring how teacher experiences have helped students afflicted with PSA improve their PSA levels is a worthwhile study to pursue.

There are many reasons researchers offer for why people struggle with PSA. It may be a learned trait or the result of a bad experience at one point in their educational or personal life (Freeman et al., 1997; McCroskey, 1984). Their PSA could be the result of biological tendencies, or something they have little control over such as their personality. Such tendencies are commonly referred to as communibiological theory (Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel 1998; Beatty & McCroskey, 1998). Beatty and McCroskey stated that “because CA is something that an individual is born with, it should not come as a surprise to learn that changing one’s CA level typically is very difficult, and for some, impossible” (as cited in McCroskey, et al., 1998, p. 228).

Research suggests that despite the overtures of recent theorists (Beatty and McCroskey, 1998), PSA can be successfully treated (Ayres and Hopf, 1993). In their seminal Communibiological theory work, Beatty et al., (1998) stated that they view trait communication apprehension as:

An individual’s expression of inborn, biological characteristics, that are antecedent to social experience and, like many other personality traits, do not depend primarily on learning processes. As such, individual differences in communication apprehension are mostly traceable to differences in biological functioning. (p. 199)

Kelly and Keaten (2000) stated that “the primary role of genetics in the communibiological explanation of communication anxiety would seem to leave little room for ‘nurture,’ and hence, suggests limited effects for treatment” (p. 49).

Many advances (Multidimensional therapy, Dwyer, 1998 & Dwyer, 2000) have been made in the last 10 years concerning the causes and treatments of PSA symptoms. PSA is not something that should hold students back because they need to be an effective and competent speaker in order to successfully complete their speaking assignments. Several treatment techniques (Systematic Desensitization, Cognitive Restructuring, Visualization, and Skills Training) have been researched in hopes of helping speakers successfully reduce their PSA. These apprehension treatment techniques were discussed more thoroughly in the literature review.

No matter what causes an individual's PSA, the mere thought of this problem can inhibit the potential greatness of many current and future communication students. To these students, a sound understanding of symptoms and consequences related to PSA can be beneficial to potentially reducing their apprehension and improving their public speaking ability. Some CA theorists believe that once PSA is diagnosed and the individual understands where their apprehension comes from, a successful treatment plan can be applied, effectively reducing symptoms of PSA. Sawyer and Behnke (2009) stated that "the overall strategy for treating communication-related state anxiety is to design instructional activities that maximize habituation and minimize sensitization effects" (p. 94).

Communibiologists believe that individuals suffering from PSA can do little to reduce the symptoms that exist. They argue speakers will be plagued by apprehension any time they are in a public speaking situation. In their opinion, there is little the speaker can do to rid themselves of PSA. Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) suggested "it is becoming increasingly clear that biology is by far a larger influence and should be the

centerpiece of etiological theories of trait communication apprehension” (p. 214). If there is little the student can do to reduce his or her PSA, perhaps a better personal understanding of their experiences can be of use in properly managing PSA.

McCroskey and Beatty (2000) continued to explain their belief in communibiology by suggesting “research indicates that, while a few people can change a great deal, most people can’t change much. Much of the change which we can observe is due to unfolding genetic programming, not individual volition” (p. 3). They suggested that if one is to use a treatment technique, systematic desensitization (SD) can be an effective treatment technique but not to the point of “producing low apprehensive from high apprehensive” (p. 3).

PSA is a real issue affecting many people. For as long as public speaking has been around, people have suffered from varying degrees of apprehension. Some individuals avoid any public speaking encounters all together. There are other people that “select housing units that reduce incidental contact with other people, and may choose seats in classrooms or in meetings that are less conspicuous” (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998, p. 225).

Statement of the Problem

More research needs to be conducted to explore how teachers help students manage apprehension when speaking. Previous research discusses potential treatment techniques but does not discuss how teachers help students cope with PSA. How does a developing student cope with PSA? What can researchers learn from college communication professors whom have worked with students with PSA? Can a student overcome PSA to comfortably speak in public?

Dwyer (1998) identified four types of communication apprehension: traitlike, context-based, audience-based, and situational (p. 10). Which of these CA types most often affect college students in public speaking situations? Do teachers believe their students' apprehension is attributable to any one particular type of CA? These are some of the questions that were answered in chapters 4 and 5. This research discovered how college communication professors facilitated student learning and understanding of public speaking apprehension. Their experiences and subsequent insight revealed opportunities and suggestions for improvement, reduction, and growth for students exhibiting PSA.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how communication professors at four-year private universities help students who exhibit public speaking apprehension learn to cope with their anxiety.

Research Questions

This researcher explored these research questions during this study:

Research Question 1: How do communication professors help public speaking students understand public speaking apprehension (PSA)?

Research Question 2: What activities do communication professors select in their classroom to help public speaking students manage public speaking apprehension?

Research Question 3: Are there examples of communication professors observing improved PSA in their classrooms?

Theoretical Framework

Bodie (2010) defined public speaking anxiety as a “situation specific social anxiety that arises from the real or anticipated enactment of an oral presentation” (p. 72). Bodie suggested that, “since PSA is a subtype of social anxiety” (p. 72) distinctions between trait and state PSA and its three components, physiology, cognitive, and behavioral can be made in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Theoretical Construct

State-Trait Distinction		
Three System Distinction	State	Trait
Physiological	Physiological arousal (e.g., heart rate) during one or more speaking milestones	Physiological arousability and/or psychological reactivity to a public speaking stressor
Cognitive	Psychological anxiety during one or more speaking milestones	Feelings about public speaking in general and/or general feelings about specific time points of speeches
Behavioral	Behavioral manifestations of anxiety during one or more speaking milestones	Typical behavioral responses to most public speaking situations

Note. Table 4 Six-Way Classification for the Conceptualization and Measurement of PSA. Reprinted with permission. Bodie, G. D. (2010). A racing heart, rattling knees, and ruminative thoughts: Defining, explaining, and treating public speaking anxiety. *Communication Education*, 59 (1), 70-105.

Bodie (2010) posited that “the state-trait distinction helped to partially assuage the concern highlighted by Clevenger” (p. 77). Bodie also pointed out that “other research has addressed Clevenger’s concern by developing causal models explaining how the different PSA components are related” (pp. 77-78).

Bodie (2010) explained these two distinctions as “open[ing] up not only several possible etiological explanations of PSA but also several options for treatment” (p. 77). Bodie observed that PSA can be conceptualized as either a trait or state, and further identifies four characteristic speaking events:

(1) anticipation-prespeech, (2) confrontation-the first speaking minute, (3) adaptation-the last speaking minute, and (4) release-time between end of speech and one minute postspeech (Behnke & Carlile, 1971; Carlile, Behnke, & Kitchens, 1977). Behnke and Sawyer (1999) have further segmented the anticipation stage into three characteristic events-immediately prior to receiving the assignment, during speech preparation, and immediately prior to speaking. (p. 72) Bodie’s conceptualization of PSA forms the theoretical construct of the research.

Overview of Research Design

This research was conducted in a qualitative format, interviewing eight university communication professors about their experiences helping students exhibiting PSA cope with their apprehension. Each of the interviews was extensive and thorough, focusing on the work experiences of each professor. This was a narrative inquiry design in the context of a qualitative paradigm. Webster and Mertova (2007) stated:

The recent increase in the use of narrative inquiry across disciplines stems from the realization that the traditional empirical research methods cannot sufficiently address the issues such as complexity, multiplicity of perspectives and human centeredness. These issues can be more adequately addressed by narrative inquiry. (p. 31)

Webster and Mertova also suggested that “narrative research forms a seamless link between the theory and practice embodied in the inquiry, and literature is used to enable conversation between theory and practice” (p. 33).

Researchers have suggested that story telling (narrative) can be an effective tool for discussing the positive aspects of teacher education (Carter, 1993; Webster & Mertova, 2007; Elbaz, 1990). Carter emphasized how a story accurately represents how teachers work when she stated:

The special attractiveness of story in contemporary research on teaching and teacher education is grounded in the notion that story represents a way of knowing and thinking that is particularly suited to explicating the issues with which we [teachers] deal. (p. 6)

Narrative story telling can be an effective research method used to delve more deeply into the experiences an individual feels are important to share with the public. Story telling lends a voice to an experience that may otherwise go unnoticed. Webster and Mertova (2007) cited Elbaz’s six reasons on “why story is particularly fitting to make teachers’ voices public:”

1. Story relies on tacit knowledge to be understood.
2. It takes place in a meaningful context.
3. It calls on storytelling traditions which give structure to expression.
4. It often involves a moral lesson to be learnt.
5. It can voice criticism in socially acceptable ways.
6. It reflects the inseparability of thought and action in storytelling – the dialogue between the teller and the audience. (p. 31)

Significance of the Study

Understanding how PSA affects students in communication courses has great significance for several reasons. First, students spend much of their time developing and presenting speeches in their college classes. A student exhibiting signs of PSA would have difficulty performing well in many of their classes. A student may be much more

effective when apprehension does not hold them back in public speaking settings. Often, their academic success can hinge on their comfort level in front of audiences (i.e. a willingness to present when asked and their overall effectiveness in front of peers).

Further understanding of what emotions and feelings a student encounters when he or she suffers from PSA enlightened future research in ways that can help other teachers and students on how to cope with PSA. This study addressed possible benefits for participants (communication professors) and will benefit the theory and application of PSA in general and specifically to students. This study also benefited the training of future communication teachers.

Limitations

The qualitative study was limited by a small sample size of eight university communication professors. The sample was also limited to private universities, excluding possible variable experiences public university professors may have. Finally, this study was also limited by only exploring the experiences of communication professors. Excluding professors from other disciplines limited the scope and diversity of the study. This study was transferable but is not generalizable.

Delimitations

The study confined itself to communication university professors teaching at private four-year universities in a large southwest metropolitan city.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter reviewed the literature about the significance and origins of public speaking apprehension (PSA), the theories related to PSA, and the interventions used in treating PSA. Public speaking anxiety has also been referred to as: speech anxiety, stagefright, public speaking anxiety and the fear of public speaking (Ayres & Hopf, 1993, p. 4). Ayres and Hopf (1993) defined speech anxiety as “those situations when an individual reports he or she is afraid to deliver a speech” (p. 4). Ayres and Hopf explained what PSA is not—“situations in which a person experiences anxiety but is not aware of the source of the anxiety” (p. 4). The theoretical construct in the previous chapter (figure 1) portrays how PSA may not be confined by any of the current four approaches of communication avoidance.

In 1997, Wadleigh reviewed communication avoidance research with apprehension, shyness, and reticence as the three main factors. Then, by explaining the causes, measuring, and intervening, Wadleigh outlined the current literature on communication avoidance. The researcher’s synopsis of Wadleigh’s review can be seen in the figure below:

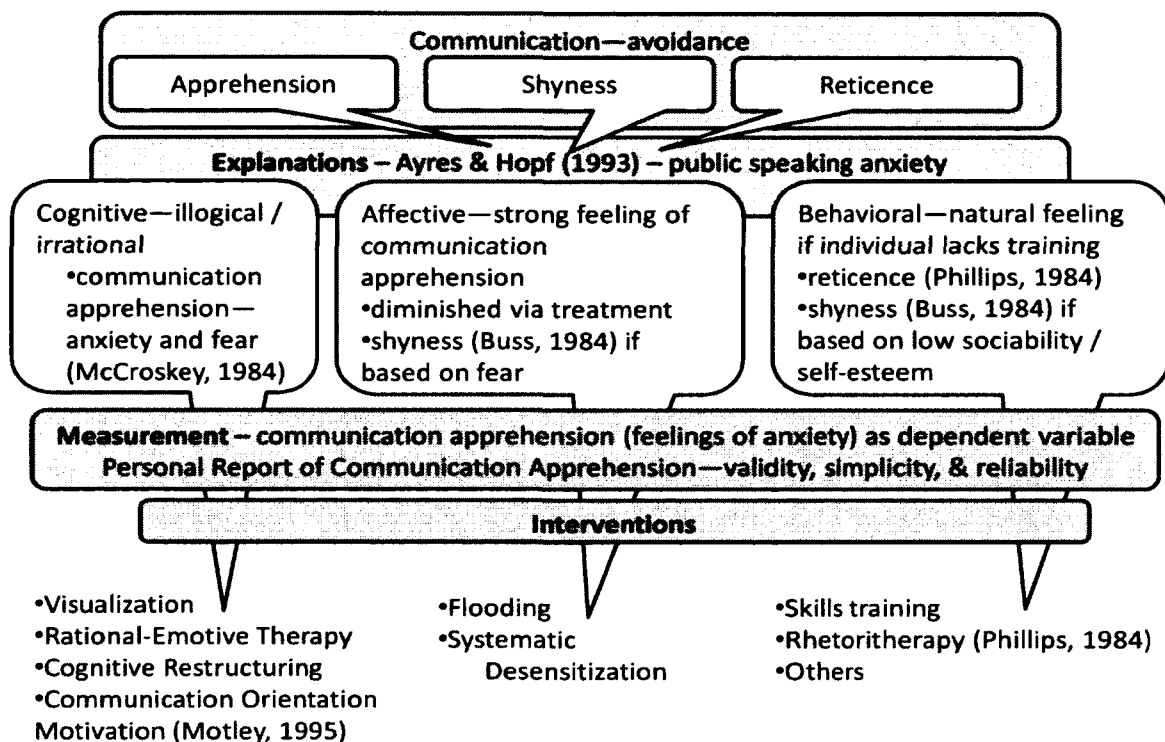


Figure 1. Communications Avoidance Research in 1997.

In 2009, Wadleigh again reviewed CA research in comparison to his earlier review of the literature in 1997. Communication avoidance is summarized by the researcher in the figure below with a fourth approach, psycho-physiological added, and behavioral now labeled as learned/modelled. Again, causes are explained, along with measurements and suggested interventions are included.

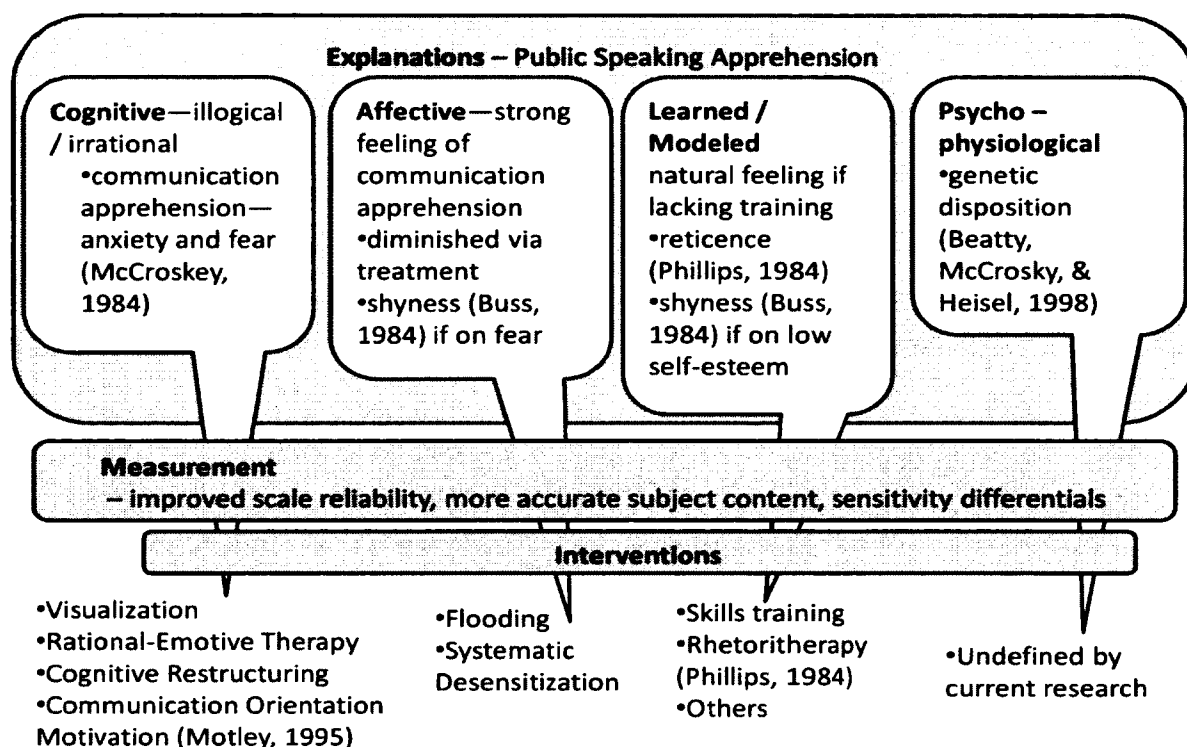


Figure 2. Communication Avoidance Research in 2009.

It seems that the prominence of communibiological theory in the psychophysiological approach has altered the landscape in CA research as the four approaches appear to compete for paradigm status.

Communication apprehension. Communication apprehension (CA), known as “... fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1970, p. 269) is well documented in concept and in its practical physical and emotional manifestations (Motley, 1997). People often avoid public speaking, or interpersonal opportunities to their social and even career detriment. Consequently, researchers and educators alike are concerned with intervention approaches to treat speech apprehension. This is especially true for communication students. For students struggling with CA, academic and interpersonal success can be

hindered. According to McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, and Payne (1989), students' academic success could be "related to overall grade point average" while also "experienc[ing] emotional distress during or anticipating communication...and are perceived by others and themselves as less competent, skilled and successful" (p. 101). In his overview of the last 40 years of communication apprehension, McCroskey (2007) drew two conclusions as he tried to find out why so many students were dropping public speaking classes at Penn State and why there had been a rash of student suicides in the late 1960s:

I drew two conclusions from this experience: 1) The Phillips special class [working one-on-one with reticent students] approach is helpful, and 2) there may be hundreds or even thousands of students in public speaking classes who drop the course, change their major to one that doesn't require a public speaking class, or even transfer to another school that doesn't have that requirement. (p. 183)

When McCroskey became the chair of the communication department at West Virginia University in 1972, he learned that public speaking was a required class for all students. Because of a lack of success in the classes and subsequent lacking interest in taking other communication classes, his department convinced the administration to end the public speaking class requirement and offer more interpersonal communication classes that did not require public speaking. McCroskey (2007) reflected about this change, saying "the enrollments in the department tripled in four years. Clearly, public speaking classes are very beneficial to most students, those that are not high CAs. Requiring public speaking classes for high CAs may do as much harm, or even more, than they benefit these students" (p. 183).

Three intervention methods are widely used to treat PSA: cognitive modification, systematic desensitization, and skills training (Allen, Hunter, & Donohue, 1989).

However, despite a large body of research regarding PSA interventions, how to identify and select the best treatment technique still remains unknown. Because a standard treatment technique remains unclear, researchers who embrace primarily a communication biological cause for PSA caution that intervention research may be all together unsatisfactory. Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel, (1998) posited a communication paradigm called communibiology by stating:

Although efforts to reduce communication apprehension are laudable and perhaps any improvement in the condition justifies the effort, we should not be surprised if results of an experiment in which the potential threats to internal and external validity are controlled, reveal substantially less impact of the treatment on PSA than implied in some of the extant literature. (p. 213)

Other trait-like PSA researchers continued their quest for an educationally based treatment, which is personalized for specific individuals (Ayres & Hopf, 1993; Kelly, 1982).

Shyness. McCroskey and Richmond defined shyness as “the tendency to be timid, reserved, and most specifically, talk less” (as cited in McCroskey et al, 1998, p. 123).

McCroskey and Richmond suggested “that apprehension [PSA or CA] is one of possibly numerous elements that could impact that tendency but stress that the two predispositions are conceptually distinct” (p. 124). Shyness is often attributed to both CA and more specifically, PSA (Buss, 1980; Richmond & McCroskey, 1985) through heredity.

Richmond and McCroskey believed that “scholars are much less willing to disregard the role of heredity today than they once were, and some are even willing to argue that heredity may be the single most important predictor of communication orientations” (p. 23). Buss discussed some of the causes of audience anxiety when he stated:

One cause of audience anxiety [PSA], almost by definition, is *properties of the audience*. Size is important. Teachers at ease in a small class may have strong qualms about teaching a large class. Rookie baseball players tend to be awed when they first play in Yankee Stadium. I remember vividly the first time I stepped into an auditorium to face 500 tightly packed students. Despite years of previous teaching, I felt oppressed by the mass of people whose attention was focused on a single point, me. (p. 169)

Buss's above statement illustrates an example of situational apprehension that may sometimes plague an otherwise confident speaker. For instance, a student may feel fine in front of a group of peers but may experience anxiety in front of a larger, mostly unknown audience even when delivering the same topic. As Richmond and McCroskey (1985) suggested, "situational CA is viewed as a transitory orientation toward communication with a given person or group of people...it is not viewed as personality based, but rather as a response to the situational constraints generated by the other person or group" (as cited in McCroskey, 1984, p. 39).

Buss (1980) believed that "the most frequent and important situational cause of shyness appears to be novelty. It is well known that a strange context induces caution" (p. 187). Buss continued by saying that novelty also occurs in social contexts. Public speaking is considered a social context, which can produce the novelty that induces shyness and more specifically anxiety. Buss also (as cited in Daly et al., 2009) suggested that "shyness is characterized, in part, by poor social skills" (p. 156). Buss (1997) continued by stating: "some people never acquire the social skills that make it easy and often pleasurable to deal with others. A client told me that she had no idea how to ask another woman to come to her home for a cup of coffee to just talk" (as cited in Daly et al., 2009, p. 156).

In Pilkonis' original research, "a higher percentage of men reported being shy" (as cited in Buss, 1980, p. 191). Pilkonis also suggested that his sample of Stanford University women may be less shy than most other women. He stated "women who successfully compete for places at a selective, private university may be relatively more assertive and socially competent than their male peers" (as cited in Buss, 1980, p. 172). What factors would lead to a woman at an elite private university to have less shyness than a woman at a less competitive university? Would men experience the same differences? Does natural competitiveness help reduce shyness and subsequently PSA in men as well as women?

Theories about Causation

Communibiological theory. In their initial communibiology work, Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) proposed that biological characteristics are antecedent to social experience by stating:

We propose a theory of communication apprehension anchored in the principles of psychobiology, as articulated in the temperament literature: drawing from the communication apprehension literature and the extensive research of psychobiologists, which includes neurology, neuroanatomy, and endocrinology, we view trait communication apprehension principally as individuals' expression of inborn, biological characteristics, that are antecedent to social experience and, like many other personality traits, do not depend primarily on learning processes. (p. 199)

In short, Beatty and colleagues believed that the trait-like view of PSA is rooted in the biological tendencies of an individual. These biological tendencies are often reactive to social anxieties. Beatty and McCroskey (2001) later stated that "although it may come as news to many in the field of communication, psychologists have for some time studied the role of biology in many social behaviors and processes that we would consider communication" (p. 4). McCroskey (1976) argued that:

In comparison to people low in communication apprehension, people high in communication apprehension are more likely to experience anxiety when required to communicate, avoid situations demanding communication, and engage in less oral communication when such situations are unavoidable. (as cited in Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998, p. 204)

With much of the recent research leaning toward biological traits causing apprehension, when did communibiology first begin to play a prominent role in explaining the causes of PSA? Before 1998, researchers predominately believed that CA was a learned trait (trait-like) that could be at least partially corrected and/or treated. Beatty, Balfantz, and Kuwabara (1989) suggested the possibility that biological factors may play a more significant role in PSA than previously thought:

Our implications of Beatty's (1988) findings is that factors previously believed to be situational or immediate are trait-like or at least contain strong trait-like influences. The possibility of these factors possessing such qualities has both theoretical and instructional implications. At the theoretical level, the current explanation for occurrences of public speaking state anxiety would be inaccurate. If speakers who are high in CA are predisposed to feel more subordinate, conspicuous and so than nonapprehensive speakers, then individual differences rather than situational factors are at the root of public speaking anxiety. Moreover, if these factors are part of the CA complex then the personality verses situation distinction frequently advanced in theoretical treatments of public speaking anxiety is materially blurred. (p. 281)

The key suggestion in this quote is: "...then individual differences rather than situational factors are at the root of public speaking anxiety." It is assumed that the individual differences are the biological traits (personality traits) that cause speakers to experience apprehension. This belief was first suggested by Beatty and colleagues nearly 10 years before their 'seminal' communibiology work was published. Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) posited that "our position is that people who are high in communication apprehension avoid communication more often...than those low in apprehension simply because it takes quantitatively less stimulation to activate the behavioral inhibition systems of communication apprehensives" (p. 211).

Beatty and McCroskey (1998) attempted to strengthen their argument that communication is a biological tendency when they offer five propositions accepted by psychobiologists:

1. *Proposition 1:* All psychological processes—including cognitive, affective, and motor—involved in social interaction depend on brain activity, making necessary a neurobiology of interpersonal communication
2. *Proposition 2:* Brain activity precedes psychological experience.
3. *Proposition 3:* The neurobiological structures underlying temperament traits and individual differences are mostly inherited.
4. *Proposition 4:* Environment or “situation” has only a negligible effect on interpersonal behavior.
5. *Proposition 5:* Differences in interpersonal behavior are principally due to individual differences in neurobiological functioning. (pp. 46-52)

McCroskey and Beatty (2000) explained a core tenant of communibiology by suggesting “research indicates that, while a few people can change a great deal, most people can’t change much. Furthermore, much of the change which we can observe is due to unfolding genetic programming, not individual volition” (p. 3). They continued by suggesting that if one is to use a treatment technique, systematic desensitization (SD) can be an effective treatment technique but not to the point of “producing low apprehensive from high apprehensive” (p. 3).

Biological introversion and neuroticism. Beatty, McCroskey and Heisel (1998) suggested that: “the distorted perceptions, avoidance tendencies, behavioral disruption, and unpleasant affect associated with high trait communication apprehension represent manifestations of neurotic introversion” (p. 201). According to Beatty, McCroskey, and Valencic (2001) “neuroticism refers to the tendency to experience anxiety. The opposite of neuroticism is emotional stability” (p. 88). An individual who struggles with emotional instability is likely to face instability when asked to present an extemporaneous speech in front of an audience because as Beatty, McCroskey and Valencic (2001) stated, “persons

high in this personality dimension [neuroticism] have low self-esteem and tend to be shy, emotional, tense, irrational, depressed, prone toward feelings of guilt, moody, and of course, anxious” (p. 88). The speaker’s biological tendency to be shy and emotional can lead to fear-causing irrational thoughts that the audience will not agree with their ideas or think that they are a terrible speaker.

Eysenck and Eysenck suggested that “shyness appears to involve some features of introversion (keeping in the background, preferring one’s own company) and of neuroticism (feelings of inadequacy and worry, emotional arousal)” (as cited in Beatty, McCroskey & Heisel, 1998, p. 200). Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel stated that “previous reviews of literature reveal that neurotic introverts and individuals high in trait communication apprehension demonstrate identical proclivities regarding academic achievement, occupational choice, dating behavior, and social interaction in general” (p. 200). Research indicates that stressful speaking situations (for grades) can elicit high PSA in students. Witt and Behnke found that the manner of delivery impacted students with PSA. They found that “students reported lower trait (Study 1) and state (Study 2) PSA for manuscript-based speeches than extemporaneous or impromptu speeches; extemporaneous speeches elicited more trait and state PSA than impromptu speech” (as cited in Bodie, 2010, p. 83). Beatty and McCroskey (2009) stated “tendencies to avoid communication, such as communication apprehension, are directly related to introversion (the opposite of extraversion) and neuroticism” (p. 55). Perhaps the students who attempt to avoid communication eliciting situations such as public speaking do so because of their genetic disposition to introversion and the fear that is associated with it.

Trait-like/State communication apprehension distinction. McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey (2009) defined trait-like communication apprehension (CA): “trait-like CA is viewed as a relatively enduring, personality-type orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety of contexts” (p. 107). McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey indicated that state CA “represents the reactions of an individual to communicating with a given individual or group of individuals at a given time” (p. 109). McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey continued their definition of state CA by declaring that “state CA is viewed as a transitory orientation toward communication with a given person or group of people. It is not viewed as primarily personality based, but rather as a response to the constraints generated by the other person or group” (p. 109). Sawyer and Behnke (2009) suggested that “a state refers to a transitory condition varying over time, whereas a trait is seen as a more stable individual difference or personality characteristic” (p. 85).

Recent researchers have worked to distinguish the characteristics that differentiate state and trait-like CA (Sawyer & Behnke, 2009). These same researchers have also identified characteristics of the “speaking situation [that] triggers public speaking state anxiety” (Sawyer & Behnke, p. 88). Sawyer and Behnke revealed “a number of scholars have found that the size and composition of audiences contributes to the state anxiety of speakers” (p. 88). Novelty and ambiguity are also believed to cause state anxiety. According to Sawyer and Behnke “novelty and ambiguity also trigger speech state anxiety reactions among novice speakers. For example, Buss (1980) has suggested that giving a presentation in unfamiliar surroundings contributes to speech anxiety” (p. 88).

Current research seems to point to inexperience and novelty as two of the main irritants of state anxiety among public speakers. Sawyer and Behnke (2009) stated “it appears that many humans treat certain forms of novel or ambiguous stimuli, especially new or unfamiliar environments, roles, and activities, as they would sources of potential danger” (p. 88). Knowing this, would a teacher believe that a student’s natural reaction to danger in the classroom would be to feel anxiety? If so, this anxiety could negatively inhibit the student from producing quality work.

Bodie (2010) cited Phillips’ work as stating that speaking skills are generally acquired from one’s social network; thus, by the time a student enters a formal, college public speaking classroom, their “social errors [have] become habits” (p. 79). This sentiment is in stark contrast to the more recent belief that traits are genetic predispositions (Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998). These authors believed that the genetic link between traitlike PSA and personality makes all intervention techniques essentially unnecessary.

Measurements

Self-report measurement. Choosing the appropriate measurement tool is important when assessing a speaker’s level of public speaking apprehension (PSA). Teachers may be able to observe student behavior and know through experience that a student struggles with PSA. These teachers are looking for physiological symptoms that indicate speaking anxiety. Teachers may also ask students to complete a scale at the beginning of each semester to identify students with possible PSA symptoms based on a self-report. As of 2011 there were measurement tools available for nearly every type of known communication apprehension (Bodie, 2009; McCroskey, 2011). In this particular

study, this researcher considered self-report scales that measure a student's perceived level of PSA.

According to Bodie (2009) there are self-report scales for the assessment of cognitive state and trait PSA (AA, CAI, CESA, PRCA, PRCS, PRPSA, STAI, and SCAM), self-report scales for the assessment of negative and positive cognitions for public speaking (ASCA, ASQ, COM, PSA, SSPS, SISST, SATI, and TQ), and measures of behavioral state PSA (AEBS, BASA, CASB, and SST, pp 74-76).

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), which tests overall communication apprehension in the context of: public speaking, interpersonal communication, meetings, and group discussions (McCroskey, 2011) has shown significance in studies conducted by McCroskey in the 1970s. McCroskey (1978) summarized: "it is clear from this series of studies that the PRCA is able to predict communication avoidance behaviors that would be expected on the basis of theory underlying the construct of communication apprehension. This provides a strong indication of predictive validity of the instrument" (p. 196). McCroskey also theorized that "it is clear from these studies, then, that the PRCA does produce scores for oral communication apprehension that are in line with what would be theoretically expected" (p. 193).

McCroskey (1970) theorized as to why speaker observation may not be an accurate assessment tool of PSA. He suggested that measuring PSA may be difficult because of a severely anxious person's likely unwillingness to communicate in any circumstance:

Many behaviors presumed to be related to communication apprehension are either impossible or, at best, extremely difficult to observe...the severely anxious person is likely not to communicate at all in a given instance; thus no rating comparable to one for actual communication could be assigned. (p. 271)

McCroskey then offered three primary advantages for why the self-report measurement offers high reliability:

I selected the self-report scales approach, specifically the Likert-type scale. This approach has three major advantages. First, such scales are easy and inexpensive to administer. Second, they can tap anxiety responses across a variety of communication contexts at one time. Third, Likert-type self-report scales, when properly developed, normally are highly reliable. Validity of such scales is often questioned, however. (p. 271)

When assessing state and trait PSA theories, researchers are encouraged to use the Personal report of public speaking apprehension (PRPSA) because of its focus on public speaking apprehension. McCroskey (2011) stated that the scale “is highly reliable (alpha estimates $>.90$) but it focuses strictly on public speaking anxiety...this is an excellent measure for research which centers on public speaking anxiety (personal website).” Interestingly, Behnke and Sawyer suggested that “self-reported state anxiety is usually highest during the minute before speaking and then declines steadily from the first minute of the speech through the release stage, one minute after speaking” (as cited in Finn, Sawyer & Behnke, 2009, p. 420).

Physiological assessment. Heisel and Beatty (2009) explained the physiological symptoms of CA best when they stated:

At an intuitive level, the mention of communication apprehension (CA) evokes images of certain physiological reactions. Indeed, those of us who have taught public speaking courses have observed the trembling hands or flushed neck of nervous students during their performances. (p. 193)

Some of these physiological symptoms include, but are not limited to: shaking knees, quivering voices, nausea, [increased heart rate], and the inability to speak (Witt et al., 2006, p. 86). Smith, Sawyer and Behnke (2005) summarized Freeston's et al. work, which concluded that "worriers reported experiencing greater incidence of cardiovascular (shortness of breath, palpitations of the heart) and gastrointestinal (nausea, diarrhea, and abdominal distress) symptoms than non-worriers" (p. 35). A major concern is that once these symptoms become affiliated with public speaking the speaker will be more likely to avoid public speaking situations all together. Finn, Sawyer, and Behnke (2009) offered the following belief concerning public speaking avoidance: "the concern here is that once a threatening social stimulus, such as speaking before an audience, becomes associated with panic, it is more likely to trigger similar reactions in future situations and will contribute to the avoidance of speaking in public altogether" (p. 418).

Researchers suggested that threatening events (such as public speeches) may often trigger the physiological symptoms that plague speakers struggling with PSA. Smith, Sawyer, and Behnke (2005) stated:

It is presumed that mental images, threatening objects or events trigger the physical reactions associated with worry that in turn foster catastrophic thinking and panic. Under this interpretation, worrying about threatening situations, such as an upcoming public speech, produces an unpleasant physical reaction or gut feeling. Subsequent recursions intensify this effect culminating in a panic attack. (p. 37)

Further research (Finn, Sawyer, & Behnke, 2009) indicated that one effective treatment strategy for identifying and treating "panic prone individuals is Dwyer's (2000)

Multidimensional Model" (p. 426). In this treatment strategy highly apprehensive individuals identify the source of their anxiety and self-select the treatment strategy that best treats the cause of their anxiety.

Behavioral assessment. Assessing a speaker's apprehension through their behaviors can be convoluted. Much of the assessment, both by the audience and by the teacher, is often based on perceptions. Mulac, Wiemann, Moloney, and Marlow (2009) stated "the more 'nervous' they appear, the less effective they will be perceived" (p. 205). A speaker may appear nervous to one audience, thus reducing their effectiveness. That same speaker may not appear nervous to another audience, making them more effective in that particular context. Mulac et al. theorized that behavioral assessment in PSA has obvious theoretical significance despite the relatively little focus that has been placed on researching this phenomenon compared to self-measurements and physiological assessments. They stated: "in spite of the obvious theoretical significance of the behavioral assessment of communicator anxiety, it has been less often measured in empirical research on communication apprehension than other facets of the phenomenon" (p. 205).

Mulac et al. (2009) discussed how one can measure observed communication anxiety:

One approach has been to construct rating instruments on which observers indicate whether, or how severely, a relatively large number of specific behaviors have occurred during a given time. Most commonly, the observers check or rate any of the behaviors that occur during a segment, and performances are not replayed for the rating of other variables. The other approach uses coders to count the frequency of the display of a small number of specific behaviors during an encounter, with the audio – or videotape replayed for each variable to be coded. (p. 210)

Clevenger and King "devised a checklist of 18 visible behaviors, drawn from speech textbooks and previous research and judged to be useful by a group of experienced speech teachers" (as cited in Mulac et al., 2009, p. 210). This type of assessment, though effective, is most likely not used often when a teacher is the primary observer. This

approach requires multiple trained evaluators in order to maintain its full effect. Using peers to evaluate student speakers could create an ethical dilemma by exposing high apprehensives to possible judgment from their peers, which could create more apprehension. Another concern is finding evaluators with an eye for the specific behaviors that indicate the speaker is suffering from apprehension.

How do people from different cultures recognize facial expressions and nonverbal behavior? Observable behavioral measurements may not be as accurate as researchers need them to be if culture-based recognition errors exist. In several studies conducted by Ekman (Ekman; Ekman & Friesen; Ekman, Sorenson, & Friesen) college students from Japan, the United States, and Brazil were shown photographs of facial expressions (as cited in Sawyer & Behnke, 2002, p. 415). Sawyer and Behnke summarized Ekman's study findings by suggesting that facial expressions associated with fear were interpreted with relatively low levels of precision (p. 415). They also explained: "for example, more than 90% of all subjects correctly identified the facial cues representing happiness, disgust, and surprise, while only two-thirds (66.31 weighted average) correctly identified facial expressions of fear" (p. 415). These findings indicate that culture may play an important role in showing that behavioral assessment might not be the most effective way to assign PSA or CA to a speaker. It shows promise as a useful tool when combined with other measurements but it may not stand alone successfully.

Mulac et al. (2009) developed seven guidelines for measuring behavioral anxiety. The guidelines in part are as follows:

1. A relatively large number of behaviors are generally perceived as indicating that the communicator is anxious. Therefore, many variables should be assessed.
2. Each behavior exists in varying amounts or degrees among speakers, and those amounts are perceived as indicating different degrees of communicator anxiety.
3. Different behaviors are perceived as differentially indicative of communicator anxiety. Therefore, different weights should be applied to each variable if variables are to be combined in any way.
4. Where important conceptually or remediationally, the variables should be explainable on the basis of a smaller number of underlying factors. Therefore, provisions should exist for computing dimension scores.
5. An overall impression or holistic assessment may be important in a given situation. Therefore, an “overall anxiety estimate” should be provided, as well as provisions for computing a total (weighted) score.
6. Videotape-recorded communication events should be assessable, given the potential for reduced reactivity in the communication setting and the ability to control for time of assessment (e.g., pretreatment or posttreatment). Therefore, measurement should be undertaken using videotape recordings.
7. Resulting data should pass the usual tests of reliability and validity. (pp. 217-218)

The above guidelines provide a good baseline for measuring behavior anxiety in speakers. It is important to have solid guidelines when measuring behavior anxiety because there can be so much ambiguity and perceptions play an important role. Guideline number six seems to be even more important because videotaping speakers will allow teachers the ability to re-assess the speakers and appropriately apply the correct measurement.

Intervention Techniques

Systematic desensitization. Systematic desensitization (SD), developed in the 1950s by Wolpe (Friedrich & Goss, 1984), typically includes three treatment steps that are administered over a previously determined period. According to Wolpe (1958), SD refers to a treatment package that systematically includes (a) training in deep muscle

relaxation, (b) construction of hierarchies of anxiety-eliciting stimuli, and (c) the graduated pairing, through imagery, of anxiety-eliciting stimuli with the relaxed state. Riedel (2004) inferred that “a key aspect of SD is the ability it affords someone to mix and match components based on inherent needs of each individual case” (p. 12).

With this technique, the person is taught to relax by successively tensing and releasing gross muscle groups throughout the body on instruction from the trainer. After completion of the last tension-relaxation cycle, many therapists have the client engage in cue-controlled relaxation -- a procedure whereby clients focus on breathing while verbalizing a cue such as “calm,” “relax,” or “let go” as they exhale. This procedure produces an even deeper state of relaxation (Lane et al., 1997). The second step exposes the participants to a previously constructed hierarchy of anxiety-eliciting public speaking situations.

Visualization. Visualization is often used as an intervention technique because of its wide variety of applications and the fact that it can be self-applied by the apprehensive individual. One popular version of visualization is known as sports visualization (Garfield, 1984). This form of visualization suggests that if an event is imagined vividly enough, the body cannot tell the difference between the real and imagined event. Applied to speech anxiety, Ayres and Hopf (1992) agreed with Garfield’s conclusions, adding that “the anxious person needs to learn to associate positive images with public speaking in order to counter feelings of anxiety” (p. 31). Ayres and Hopf defined visualization as “a procedure that encourages people to think positively about public speaking by taking them through a carefully crafted script” (p. 187).

Using image visualization is a distinctive technique developed by Ayres and Ayres (2003) for the sole purpose of providing high CA individuals a drawn depiction of “in control,” “positive” and “vivid” speakers to supplement the written visualization text. Participant generated drawings were used to provide evidence that people exposed to visualization saw themselves in a more positive, more vivid, ‘in control’ fashion than those who were not exposed to visualization (Ayres & Heuett, 2000). Researchers noted that CA sufferers who are strong imaginers may actually benefit more from having strategically drawn pictures available to look at that will supplement the oral text.

Ayres and Hopf (1989) suggested that visualization is an easy PSA treatment to administer in or out of the classroom. Ayres and Hopf (1990) also believed that visualization treatment sustains its effectiveness over time. Prior to their 1990 study, Ayres and Hopf doubted whether visualization treatment would sustain its effectiveness long after the treatment protocol was complete. Ayres and Hopf (1991) later concluded that properly educating apprehensive speakers about the rationale for their visualization treatment increased the effectiveness of the treatment. Finally, Ayres et al., (2009) revealed that speakers exposed to visualization treatment spent less time preparing notes and more time practicing their speech and studying the audience in preparation for a professional speech.

Cognitive restructuring. One of the simplest intervention techniques used in reducing PSA is Meichenbaum’s (1976) cognitive restructuring treatment (CR). CR is closely related to Rational Emotive Therapy (RET). Riedel (2004) stated “the basic difference between these two approaches is that rational-emotive therapy emphasizes the need to challenge irrational thoughts while cognitive restructuring emphasizes the need to

develop coping statements that will replace irrational thoughts” (p. 23). Cognitive restructuring involves education, skills acquisition, and rehearsal (Glaser, 1981).

The goal of this technique is to help individuals change his or her thinking in order to change anxious, fearful feelings. Cognitive restructuring targets the cognitive dimension of the personality (Dwyer, 1998). The cognitive dimension in an individual’s personality involves both the positive and negative thoughts he or she experiences on a daily basis. Riedel (2004) suggested “these thoughts, for high CA persons, will be negative in certain public speaking situations. For a number of reasons, high PSA individuals develop a negative self-thought process in the speaking realm that dictates future speaking endeavors” (p. 23).

Skills training. Ayres and Hopf (1993) defined skills training (ST) as “presum[ing] that people experience public speaking anxiety because they lack delivery skills” (p. 91). It seems natural that taking a public speaking class can help reduce PSA. When a speaker learns the necessary components of the speech process fear of unknown is minimized and the speaker can be more confident he or she has the needed skills to succeed. Kelly and Keaten (2009) conducted a literature review studying the effects of ST on communication anxiety reduction. Their findings suggested that “overall, the studies reviewed in this section have shown skills training to be an effective treatment for social interaction problems, such as shyness, reticence, and social anxiety on a variety of outcome measures” (p. 314). Other research suggested that perhaps skills training is more effective when combined with other treatment techniques. Dwyer (1998) stated “if you previously tried to learn public speaking skills, but retreated because of your anxiety, you

probably needed to learn other anxiety-reduction techniques first before attempting to learn public speaking skills” (p. 97).

Despite the current research suggesting that ST is overall effective in helping a speaker manage his or her PSA, researchers are still not convinced that teachers adequately assess skills. Kelly and Keaten (2009) believed that researchers should “use observation and evaluation of behavior” (p. 323) when determining speaking skills acquisition. They believed researchers rely on self-report measures too often for assessing a speaker’s skill development. If teachers are attempting to teach skills as an anxiety-reduction technique, they should observe and evaluate if the speaker’s skill level and comfort with public speaking has improved.

In their study of Japanese English students and the positive effects of skills training on PSA reduction, Pribyl, Keaten, and Sakamoto (2001) concluded that “students receiving skills training reported a significantly higher drop in public speaking anxiety when compared with members of a control group” (p. 152). The authors later stated “after being exposed to a year-long presentation skills class, students classified as highly anxious reported a reduction of almost 30 points in PRPSA scores, in contrast to highly anxious students in a control group, who reported a six-point drop” (p. 152). Stacks and Stone (1984) found similar results in their earlier study. They posited when entered in a skills enhancement course, apprehensive students showed significant reduction in apprehension and a “decrease in the discrepancy between communicator self-concept and idealized self-concept” (p. 329).

Communication Oriented Motivation (COM) therapy. Originally developed by Motley (1988), COM therapy stands for “communication-oriented motivation” (Motley, 2009, p. 337). Motley noted that this therapy “applies only to public speaking anxiety” (p. 337). Even though it can only be applied to PSA, studies (Ayres, Hopf & Peterson, 2000) have suggested that the reduction of apprehension in PSA individuals using COM therapy is significant.

COM therapy is defined by Motley (2009) as:

The primary assumption of the COM approach is that different public speakers have different “cognitive orientations” toward public speaking—that is, differing perspectives regarding the speaker’s goals and the audience’s demands. Two such perspectives are identified in particular – a *performance* orientation and a *communication* orientation. Higher public speaking anxiety appears to be closely associated with the performance orientation. Thus, the COM technique concentrates on persuading high-PSA individuals to abandon their performance orientation in favor of a communication orientation (see Motley, 1990). (pp. 337-338)

Motley asserted in his theory that a performance orientation toward public speaking creates more apprehension than a communication orientation does. If a speaker is struggling with PSA, he or she may be putting too much emphasis on the audience as a “judge” who is being critical of every mistake they are making. In reality, the audiences are often looking for information and understanding the concepts related by the speaker. Motley (2009) suggested that “most public speaking audiences are much more interested in understanding the speech than in scrutinizing or evaluating the speaker, and most audiences prefer a casual conversational style over a formal oratorical style” (p. 339). COM theory assumes the speaker will be more successful focusing attention on the content of the speech and away from the delivery. This revelation should spell relief for

many high-PSA sufferers who believe they have to put on a show for the audience to be seen as a credible and professional speaker.

Naturally, COM therapy shows similarities to cognitive restructuring. One of the main components of COM is to help high-PSAs change their thought pattern regarding concerns related to speaking in public. Motley (2009) discussed how COM attempts to change speaker's fears associated with speaking, which are often untrue, and cause undue anxiety. Motley stated:

COM methodically goes through the entire list [fear objects], intentionally including all items regardless of whether they have been articulated by the particular subject. In each case, the COM strategy is to demonstrate that, at least from a communication perspective, the underlying assumptions simply are not true. (p. 351)

Ayres, Hopf, and Peterson (2000) recommended COM therapy as a sound treatment technique. They stated: "this approach to reducing public speaking apprehension is appealing because it does not require trained therapists, is easy to use, and requires less treatment time than alternative interventions such as rational-emotive therapy (Ellis, 1962)" (p. 36). In an effort to test the efficacy of COM therapy Ayres, Hopf and Peterson tested 136 public speaking students at a western university. In their study, they looked at COM therapy's "impact on willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence" (p. 37).

Ayres, Hopf and Peterson (2000) divided the participants into four groups consisting of no treatment, systematic desensitization treatment, COM therapy treatment, and a placebo treatment. Their major tenant was to test the effectiveness of COM therapy in an actual public speaking setting. Ayres, Hopf, and Peterson concluded "it appears that COM therapy works as well as systematic desensitization among CA students, which

means that it ought to be the preferred treatment for them given its ease of administration” (p. 42).

Multidimensional therapy model. Dwyer’s (2000) technique adapted to Lazarus’ (1985) Multimodal therapy applied to personality traits to treat CA. The idea modeled Lazarus’ belief that personality dimensions correlated directly with the appropriate treatment, applied in this case to public speaking anxiety. Multidimensional therapy (Dwyer, 2009) invited individuals to discover their top three personality dimensions, match them to the appropriate treatment technique, and apply approach strategies to treat these three dimensions. By ranking the “firing order” or which source of personal style will be first, second, etc., subjects are taught how to first work on his or her initiating dimension in order to get to the root of the communication anxiety. It is important that an individual lay a proper foundation so that all related PSA dimensions can be reduced through treatment. Multidimensional therapy allows a therapist to identify a specific intervention, chosen on the basis of personality, thus encouraging a powerful relationship and an individualized treatment “package.”

Riedel (2004) stated:

Multidimensional therapy allows the administrator to develop a personal one-on-one relationship with each client. Because therapists [in this case, teachers] are able to focus on the individual needs of the patient [student], they are able to make a more definitive assumption of the exact treatment each patient needs based on specific personality traits. Instead of simply giving each person a standard treatment, multidimensional therapy allows an individual suffering from CA to receive a very specific intervention chosen solely on the basis of his or her personality dimension self assessment. (p. 7)

Much of the research to date in the field of PSA has been more clinical in nature. There have been few educational studies that focus on the practical application of PSA treatment in the classroom setting. This study focused on contributing to the educational side of PSA research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The methodology section outlines how the study was conducted by the researcher and how the researcher plans to demonstrate an understanding of how research findings fit into the greater body of knowledge. The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how communication professors at four-year private universities helped students who exhibited public speaking apprehension learn to cope with their anxiety.

The researcher explored the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do communication professors help public speaking students understand public speaking apprehension (PSA)?

Research Question 2: What activities do communication professors select in their classroom to help public speaking students manage public speaking apprehension?

Research Question 3: Are there examples of communication professors observing improved PSA in their public speaking?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested that the methodology chapter serves three major purposes:

First, it presents a plan for the conduct of the study. Second, it demonstrates to the reader that the researcher is capable of conducting the study. And third, it asserts the need for and offers strategies to preserve the flexibility of design that is a hallmark of qualitative methods. (p. 51)

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested that “the research questions should be general enough to permit exploration but focused enough to delimit the study – not an easy task” (p. 39). According to Creswell (2009), “research questions assume two forms: a central question and associated sub-questions” (p. 129). Creswell continued later in his

chapter by positing that “research questions and hypotheses narrow the purpose statement and become major signposts for readers...while they also focus initially on one central phenomenon of interest” (p. 141).

This researcher used the social constructivist worldview for his philosophical assumption. Creswell defined social constructivists by stating that they:

Hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things...the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. (p. 8)

The social constructivist worldview fit this particular research best because the college communication professors who were interviewed had to develop a unique understanding of how they can be sensitive to students’ needs while attempting to help them better understand their symptoms and cope with PSA.

In order to better understand sociological questions concerning how communication teachers help students suffering with PSA cope with their struggle, this study employed a narrative theory based in qualitative inquiry. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), the narrative “method assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories. The researcher explores a story told by a participant and then records that story” (p. 117). In addition, Creswell (2005) stated “for educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights” (p. 474).

Although incorporating a narrative design can be tedious and detailed, this researcher believed it provided the best opportunity for in-depth exploration of the experiences of these college professors. Once trust and openness is achieved during the

interviews the narrative design can offer a depth of richness. Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe the benefits of narrative inquiry:

Narrative inquiry requires a great deal of openness and trust between participant and researcher: the inquiry should involve a mutual and sincere collaboration, a caring relationship akin to friendship that is established over time for full participation in the storytelling, retelling, and reliving of personal experiences. It demands intense and active listening and giving the narrator full voice. Because it is a collaboration, however, it permits both voices to be heard. (p. 118)

As Marshall and Rossman stated above, this researcher will have to be open and collaborative with each participant. Allowing them full voice in the interview was paramount to uncovering important information that contributed to the future PSA body of knowledge.

Creswell (2005) succinctly outlined the key steps in conducting narrative research when he stated “seven major steps comprise the process typically undertaken during a narrative study” (p. 484). Below, are the seven steps of narrative research:

1. Identify a phenomenon to explore that addresses an educational problem.
2. Purposefully select an individual from whom you can learn about the phenomenon.
3. Collect the story from that individual.
4. Restory or retell the individual’s story.
5. Collaborate with the participant-storyteller.
6. Write a story about the participant’s experiences.
7. Validate the accuracy of the report.

Personal Background and Researcher’s Assumptions

This researcher has taught public speaking classes for nine years. During those nine years he witnessed numerous students struggle with PSA on a number of different levels. Although many of the students were able to complete the class with the help of treatments, each student had a much more difficult time dealing with the uncertainties PSA caused them than the normal student. This topic was close to the researcher’s professional experiences and was deemed as a vital study. This researcher wanted to ask

how further research provided insight into how teachers helped public speaking students cope with their PSA symptoms.

At the time of this writing, this researcher was an adjunct speech communication professor at a private four-year university in a large southwest metropolitan city. He had a Master of Arts degree in human communication and had done prior research (thesis) studying effective treatment techniques related to high public speaking apprehensive individuals. As a situational PSA sufferer, this researcher understood the difficulties that PSA could cause individuals who must speak on a regular basis.

As this researcher did initial research on the subject it became evident that there was not very much research concerning how teachers help students cope with PSA on a basic level. Over the last 40 years many experts have discussed what some of the main causes of PSA are and how this phenomenon can be treated. Through that research, professionals discovered that there are several effective treatment techniques (cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization, visualization, and skills training) that can alleviate problematic nervousness. Before a professor can help a student suffering from PSA, he or she must first understand the signs. After realizing that a student is struggling, what have professors done in the classroom to help that student feel more comfortable speaking in public? What is the teacher able to implement when there isn't enough time to use a traditional treatment technique?

As he started the interview process, the researcher understood that "his own background shapes his interpretation, and that he may position himself in the research to acknowledge how his interpretation flows from his personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Throughout this study, the researcher continued to

search for ways in which participant experiences can help the body of knowledge create a better understanding of the effects of continuous and long standing PSA. Being a fellow college professor who had done prior PSA research helped this researcher have more in common with each individual he interviewed.

Emotionally engaged researchers (those that have high ego involvement in the subject) can curb ethical issues before they surface. Lerum said “emotionally engaged researchers must continuously evaluate and construct their behavior. If anticipated in the design, these challenges will be less dilemma-laden in the field and may provide opportunities for ways of reasoning that may help negotiate such dilemmas when they do arise” (as cited in Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 82).

Research Setting

This research took place in a large southwest metropolitan city. The researcher elicited the feedback of eight college communication professors working at four-year private universities. All four universities were established more than 100 years ago and each served from 2,000-8,000 full and part-time students. The researcher estimated that the average classroom size at each of the four universities was 20-25 students. All four of the universities in this study were private. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (2012) website, each of the four private universities studied had small classes, with a student to faculty ratio averaging from 9 to 1 to 14 to 1. In comparison, the above website reported that four public universities in the same geographical area had a student to faculty ratio averaging from 18 to 1 to 25 to 1. This smaller classroom environment experienced at private universities provided a unique opportunity for teachers to provide personal attention to each of their students. Each

private university also had a diverse student population, both domestically and internationally.

The private university classroom setting provided the opportunity for communication professors to work one-on-one with students more often than they would in a larger public school classroom setting. The one-on-one setting allowed professors to more easily recognize some of the signs associated with PSA. This may not be true in a larger, public university with large groups of students in basic courses. This study intentionally chose not to look at the students themselves. It focused on each professor's experiences working with students suffering from PSA.

Participants

This researcher used purposeful sampling to choose participants for this study. Patton (1990) wrote, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance for the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling" (p. 169). Creswell (2005) defined purposeful sampling by stating: "in purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 204). The researcher identified experienced communication professors who used their experience in the classroom to share rich experiences during their interviews.

Eight participants were purposefully selected from four private four-year institutions. Creswell (2009) suggests that "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 178). All the participants were communication

instructors at their institutions. Participants were identified by researching each respective institution's website. Each communication professor was identified within the departmental roster. Each potential participant was invited by letter (Appendix A) to participate in the study and return a signed Letter of Consent (Appendix B) to the researcher if they were willing. From the respondents, the researcher chose eight participants based on the following criteria: (a) teaching speech classes; (b) have taught full-time for at least one year; and (c) willing to share their experience and participate in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher contacted the selected participants and set up a personal interview at a convenient location and time for the participant. This study incorporated one-on-one interviews. Although this type of interview is time consuming it is popular in educational research. Creswell (2005) believed that "one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably" (p. 215). Within these one-on-one interviews, the researcher asked open-ended questions to elicit the most complete participant response. Creswell suggests that "in qualitative research, you ask open-ended questions so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (p. 216).

Open-ended questions allow participants the freedom to go where they see fit, allowing a free-flowing narrative uninhibited by the researcher. Asking good questions is vital to the successful retrieval of these critical events. Strauss and Corbin divided good questions into the following groups:

1. *Sensitising* questions – What is going on here (issues, problems, concerns)? Who are the actors involved? How do they define the situation? What is its meaning to them?
2. *Theoretical* questions – What is the relationship of one concept to another (how do they compare or relate)? How do events and actions change over time?
3. *Practical* and *structural* questions – Which concepts are well developed and which are not? What, when and how is data gathered for an evolving theory? Is the developing theory logical? (as cited in Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 85)

An additional strategy is eliciting critical incidents through story-telling. The researcher asked the participants to relay one or more impactful stories they remember about working with PSA students. Critical events are important to storytelling because they demonstrate a dramatic change in the storyteller's life. This change could be unplanned or unanticipated and can help the researcher make sense of complex information.

Conducting interviews is a precise endeavor. The interviewer has to be accurate, concise, and listen well. Creswell (2005, pp. 217-218) outlined some general steps for conducting open-ended interviews:

1. Identify the interviewees.
2. Determine the type of interview you will use.
3. During the interview, audiotape the questions and responses.
4. Take brief notes during the interview.
5. Locate a quiet, suitable place for conducting the interview.
6. Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study.
7. Have a plan, but be flexible.
8. Use probes to obtain additional information.
9. Be courteous and professional when the interview is over.

Each interview was digitally recorded. Digital recordings and other identifiable data such as syllabi were kept secured and destroyed in a reasonable time not to exceed five years.

Each participant received the complete attention of the interviewer throughout the process.

Each interview was between 35 and 65 minutes in duration. Once each interview as transcribed, the transcript was e-mailed to the participant to allow him or her the opportunity to read the interview. These follow up e-mails were used as member checks, in which each interview was fine-tuned before interpreting the information and identifying themes. Each participant was able to provide feedback to the researcher if they wanted to clarify something. Merriam and Associates (2002) suggest below why member checks are important ways to accurately capture participant perspectives:

Here [member checks] you ask the participants to comment on your interpretation of the data. That is, you take your tentative findings back to some of the participants (from which you derived the raw data through interviews or observations) and ask whether your interpretation “rings true.” While you may have used different words, participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives. Some writers suggest doing member checks throughout the course of the study. (p. 26)

Additionally, data collection included requesting and reviewing syllabi for PSA related issues pertaining to theory, causation, identification, interventions, awareness, and other items. Only three of the professors offered their syllabi to the researcher. The ones that did not offer their syllabi stated their syllabi did not include any information related to PSA. They felt that the researcher wouldn’t obtain any necessary information from reading their syllabi.

Interview Protocol

The objective of the interview protocol was to ask probing questions which encouraged the interviewees to relate critical incidents about their professional experiences helping students cope with PSA. The researcher was then better able to understand and relate to the incident being told. Figure 3 below portrays this process in an interview guide.

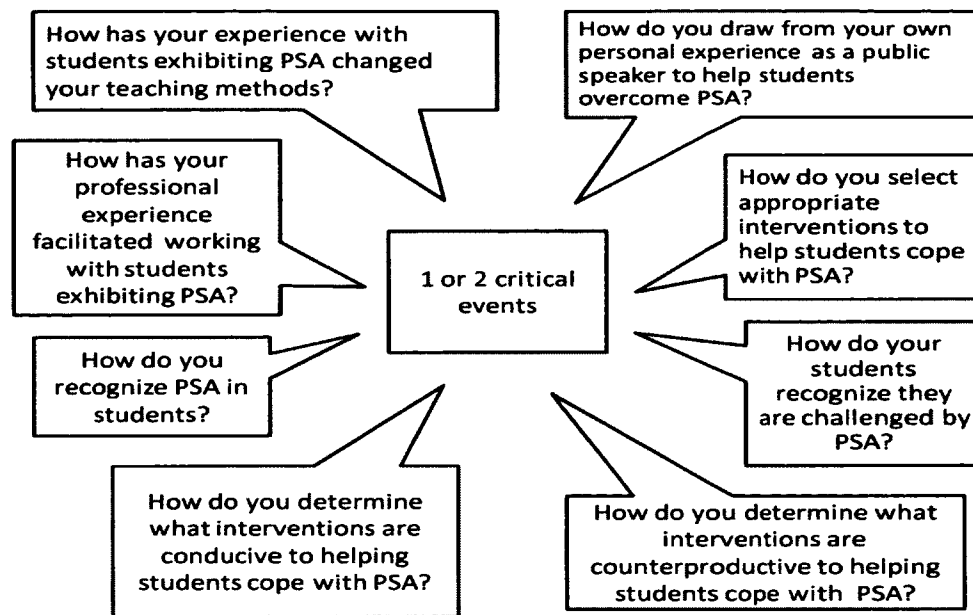


Figure 3. Interview Guide.

One way the researcher established rapport was to initially ask the participants to share some classroom experiences. This set the tone for the researcher to ask the interviewees to personally share stories about significant times where their teaching career was defined or changed. These defining moments included: a new teaching strategy, a new perspective, a refined philosophy, and a more intuitive way of teaching. The researcher continued to probe as the interviewee narrated their story, searching for relevant issues related to the guiding research questions.

Protection of Human Subjects

In order to conduct in-depth, one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2005), this researcher first received permission from the necessary number of participants (8). Since they participated on a voluntary basis, the success of this study hinged on obtaining permission from eight busy college professors. The letter asked communication

professors who had observed students experiencing PSA in the classroom to participate in this study. Seven of the initial professors that were contacted responded back quickly. One never responded back. The researcher was able to find an eighth professor to participate through the recommendation of the first professor he interviewed.

Being an ethical and trustworthy researcher is each interviewer's obligation. There are several ways to ensure ethical implementation of the findings. Researchers need to protect the anonymity of each participant. The researcher assigned simple numbers to identify each participant, protecting their true identity. This researcher understood that each participant's experiences should be carefully protected because of the sensitive nature of this subject. All digital recordings and other identifiable data were kept in a locked and secured location and will be destroyed after a reasonable amount of time not to exceed five years. PSA can elicit strong emotions. The researcher recognized there is a slight risk of discomfort associated with each interview. As a result, all participants participated on a voluntary basis. They had the ability to end their involvement at any point.

The researcher obtained the Institutional Review Board approval before starting the interviews. Each participant signed a Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix B) agreeing to be interviewed and have their experiences documented within this study. The Informed Consent letter outlined the basic tenants of the study and informed each participant of his or her right to withdraw from the study at any time. As stated above, member checks were utilized to assure that the transcription is accurate and complete according to the participants.

Data Analysis

Riessman (1993) suggested that “analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription” (p. 60). Riessman cited The Personal Narratives Group (1989a), as suggesting that “narratives are interpretive and, in turn, require interpretation” (p. 22). This researcher analyzed the narratives (Schram, 2006) for common themes within the stories and incidents that the participants shared.

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed to capture every detail. After the transcriptions were completed, the researcher read through each of them carefully to check accuracy and identify common themes. In analyzing the various strategies that the participants reported using the classroom, the following table below was developed. It identifies the most common themes from each interview transcription and assigns each theme to the professor who referred to it.

Table 2

Common Interview Themes by Professors

Themes / Professor	Prof 1	Prof 2	Prof 3	Prof 4	Prof 5	Prof 6	Prof 7	Prof 8
Meet individually/establish a relationship	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Need community and trust to be comfortable in the classroom	X	X	X	X			X	
Grades add to anxiety	X	X			X	X	X	
Videotape/audio-visual help					X		X	
Structure speeches around students		X		x				
Playful/informal setting/leeway		X	X	X			X	
Simple, familiar speech topics		X		X	X			
Vivid imagery speech		X	X	X				
Students interview each other (partners)				X	X			X
COM Therapy					X		X	
Believe in praise/nurturing students					X		X	X

Webster and Mertova (2007) explained critical events as a way of analyzing and interpreting data in narrative research. They offered the following assessment concerning the use of critical events to understand meaning in story telling:

Our memory of past critical events often leads us to adapt strategies and processes to apply to new situations. Because events are critical parts of people's lives, using them as a main focus for research provides a valuable and insightful tool for getting at the core of what is important in that research. An event-driven approach to research is also a mechanism for dealing with large amounts of data. (p. 71)

Webster and Mertova suggested that a critical event “is almost always a change experience...identified afterwards” (p. 74). Care described versatility as the main advantage of the CIT [critical incident technique], and its dependence on “the memories of respondents and their ability to recollect specific examples of the concepts in question” as its main disadvantage (as cited in Keatings, 2002, p. 34).

Woods (1993) deemed critical events to be critical in four ways:

1. *They promote student learning in accelerated ways* – e.g. through students’ attitudes towards learning, understanding of the self, relationships with others, acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. This learning involves holistic change.
2. *They are critical for teacher development* – e.g. through pride in their craftsmanship and realisation of the self.
3. *They restore ideals and commitment in teachers* – critical events maintain contrary forces. Critical events permit teachers to retain their ideals despite the assaults that might customarily be made on them. In a sense they may act as a coping strategy.
4. *They boost teacher morale* – which can be critical for the profession as a whole. (p. 77)

These criteria were utilized in analyzing the data gathered as is further detailed in Chapter 4.

Gathering this “critical” event information requires the researcher to, as Webster and Mertova (2007) suggested, engage in storytelling. They believe “this is achieved through the use of open-ended questions, whereby the researcher invites the research participants to engage in storytelling” (p. 85). Webster and Mertova suggested broadening and burrowing as two ways of measuring the “quality of the narrative sketch” (p. 87) or a critical incident. Burrowing focused on the “qualities of the event” (p. 87) or the depth of the stories or incidents. Burrowing is used as a method of analysis by identifying themes and issues that arise during the interview (Webster & Mertova).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The following strategies were used to insure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. This researcher used member checks (Creswell, 2005; 2009), rich, thick descriptions (Cresswell, 2009), audit trail, reflexivity, and adequate engagement in the data collection (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Member checks. Creswell (2009) identified member checks as a way to “determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (p. 191). Creswell (2005) described member checks as a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account (p. 252). Each participant had the opportunity to review the completed transcript from their interview to check their story for accuracy. Merriam and Associates (2002) stated that “while you may have used different words, participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (p. 26).

Rich, thick descriptions. This researcher used rich, thick description to report interview findings. According to Creswell (2009), “this description may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (pp. 191-192). Creswell stated that providing detailed descriptions of the setting can make the findings (narrative) more realistic and useful to the reader. This researcher reported the findings in such a way that the reader understands the context.

Audit trail. Merriam and Associates (2002) described audit trail in qualitative studies as “describ[ing] in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. The audit trail is dependent upon the researcher keeping a research journal or recording memos throughout the conduct of the study” (p. 27). This researcher used journals to keep detailed notes of the interview process after each interview has concluded. This researcher did not take notes during the interview, instead focusing on each participant’s story telling.

Reflexivity. Merriam and Associates (2002) described reflexivity as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the human as instrument” (p. 26). Merriam and Associates continued by writing “such a clarification allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (p. 26). This researcher used reflexivity in explaining to the reader how the conclusions were reached.

Adequate engagement in the data collection. Merriam and Associates (2002) suggested that adequate engagement in the data collection can be accomplished by “collecting data such that the data becomes ‘saturated’” (p. 31). They offered “this may involve seeking *discrepant* or *negative* cases of the phenomenon” (p. 31). This researcher immersed himself in each interview and other collected data to adequately help the reader understand the data.

All of the above strategies allowed the researcher to facilitate this study in being trustworthy and credible. Trustworthiness and credibility allowed the researcher to maintain the trust of data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how communication professors at four-year private universities help students who exhibit public speaking apprehension (PSA) learn to cope with their anxiety. The most effective way to discover how these professors helped their students overcome the fear of public speaking was to follow the narrative design, encouraging each professor to tell the researcher their “story.” Researchers have suggested that story telling (narrative) can be an effective tool for discussing the positive aspects of teacher education (Carter, 1993; Webster & Mertova, 2007; Elbaz, 1990). A professor’s experiences educate him or her in the art of helping students deal with a very personal and unique form of apprehension.

This researcher wanted each participant to tell as much of their story as they deemed useful. Did they have success stories that could be useful to others? Did they try a technique and fail? All practical experiences they shared were valuable in a number of ways. Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested that “[the narrative] method assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories. The researcher explores a story told by a participant and then records that story” (p. 117). In addition, Creswell (2005) stated “for educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights” (p. 474).

Interviews

Each of the participants was chosen because of his or her unique perspective developed by working in a smaller environment that private universities provide. The researcher contacted each participant with a letter of invitation in the mail. He followed

up on each letter with a personalized e-mail to each participant's school e-mail address. The professors quickly responded via e-mail to the invitations and were supportive of efforts to set up the interviews; thus all the interview times were established within a few days of the initial contact. Of the initial eight professors contacted, all but one responded. The researcher was able to find an eighth participant through the recommendation of his first interviewee who recommended a professor new to his university.

Each participant taught classes of 20 or fewer students, providing each of them more opportunities to work one-on-one with students and focus on weaknesses such as PSA. There was a vast range of experience among the participants ranging from one and a half to over 40 years of full-time teaching experience. Each interview was conducted at the particular professor's office, was tape-recorded for accuracy, and lasted between 35 minutes and 1 hour 4 minutes. The findings from each interview were rich and full of personal stories from each professor's experience working with students dealing with varying levels of PSA. All of the interviewees offered a unique perspective based on their personal background. Some developed their teaching style in the theatre field. One came from a debate-concentrated background, offering a unique viewpoint of someone who majored in communication studies at the graduate level so that she could continue coaching debate. One participant was involved in many of the initial experiments involving PSA in the mid 1960s. His extensive experiences focused more on the theoretical aspects of the PSA issue. Several of the participants had their own PSA struggles, which prompted them to have a deeper understanding of what their students experienced and a more compassionate view of their students' struggles.

Following a detailed interview protocol, the researcher started each interview by asking each participant to briefly talk about their academic and teaching background. He then asked an initial question along the lines of: how do you draw from your own personal experience as a public speaker to help students overcome PSA? This question seemed to flow well from the initial discussion about their professional background. Each interview proved to be unique and flowed differently than the previous interview. Some professors needed more prodding than others and some answered many of the questions through their narrative. Many of the participants had read the letter of invitation prior to the interview and already had ideas about what they wanted to share. They were open and willing to share some of their most vivid experiences in an honest and frank manner. Once they realized the researcher also taught communication classes some of them even asked questions about how he applied certain techniques in his classrooms.

Critical Incidents

After the completion of the final interview, each of the tape-recorded interviews were fully transcribed and then sent to each participant to complete member checks. Some of the interviewees responded to seeing their interview transcriptions stating that it was neat to see their words on paper but had nothing to change or add. The following includes a brief snapshot of each participant's interview and then a description of the critical incident gleaned from the interview. Critical incidents are important to storytelling because they demonstrate a dramatic change in the storyteller's life.

Through a careful review of each interview three common themes rose to the surface: the need to meet individually with a student and establish a relationship, building community and trust in the classroom, and placing less emphasis on grades. Other themes

emerged such as establishing an informal setting and nurturing and praising students; however, these themes were not identified in as many interviews as the first three were.

Professor 1

Professor 1 has taught speech communication classes for more than 40 years. He was the department chair for 21 years before relinquishing that role recently to enter a pre-retirement phase-out program. His four decades of experience teaching in a university setting provided him with both a very extensive theoretical base and a practical knowledge that allowed him to share many useful examples. He believes that a student's self-motivation to improve their speaking ability will lead to a successful reduction in PSA related symptoms:

If you just are dedicated to becoming more effective and you perceive that you need help and you listen to people who have been there and done that and advise you and you continue to work at it you get better... but ultimately it becomes a matter of motivation and the artistry of both the teacher and the person who is attempting to assuage their anxiety. (personal communication, October 18, 2011)

As a speaker gains more experience they are likely to subsequently gain confidence. Like riding a bike, as the child rides more, he or she will get better. As they get better they will be more confident and motivated to be more daring and ride longer. In the same light, public speakers are able to be more diverse in their delivery as they gain experience and confidence. This confidence will hopefully breed motivation to improve all facets of their delivery, including the reduction of the manifestations of their apprehension.

When he noticed manifestations of PSA, Professor 1 would meet individually with the student to devise a plan for improving and reducing the apprehension that was causing the discomfort. He would ask what was causing the discomfort and then assure the student that it was a common problem.

Now, if I had somebody that had extreme symptoms I would pull them aside and begin a kind of a systematic counseling. What I did was I would draw from the general experience ideas that I have long used in my approach to anxiety reduction. And essentially there what I would do is I would identify that this is a common problem. (personal communication, October 18, 2011)

Professor 1 felt that sometimes students were more comfortable meeting in the office.

Meeting individually gave him an opportunity to administer systematic desensitization (SD) treatments. SD was a useful and often used treatment technique when he first started his teaching career at a large state university in the 1960s. He talked extensively about working with students in a true SD treatment setting, complete with lounge chairs for deep relaxation:

As you know from reading the work of McCroskey and others there are different general approaches to anxiety reduction. And one of them is sort of drawn out of clinical psychology where you put the student into a situation in where they can completely relax and then you gradually introduce the anxiety inducing features. This is systematic desensitization. This is done in dealing with snake phobias, etc. In any regards, then you would introduce aspects of the public speaking situation to generate anxiety and then you would address ways of controlling and reducing that anxiety. That was the most liberal and clinical psych orientation. And it went all the way over to patterned behaviors that you would deal with systematically in helping them kind of understand their situation and through experiences adapt to the anxiety they actually had in the situation...I can recall us getting a special space with those big lounging chairs so that you could introduce through tapes total relaxation and create the anxiety producing situations and then introduce ways in which you could address them. (personal communication, October 18, 2011)

Through SD, professor 1 was able to create a systematic environment where the student felt more comfortable when experiencing gradually more intense doses of public speaking over a prolonged period of time. These smaller doses allowed each speaker to gradually gain confidence and reduce manifestations.

Critical incident. During his interview, Professor 1 did not discuss a specific critical incident, or an event that changed the way he viewed PSA and worked with students exhibiting PSA. When pressed to discuss a moment in his teaching career when

he realized a particular method would work well in helping students, he surprisingly could not think of a singular event that led him to believe he had made a breakthrough. Despite not remembering a peak moment Professor 1 seems to have gained an insight of what it really takes to be of assistance to a student with PSA. It is easy to see this insight taking place after over 40 years of teaching experience. His extensive experience has led him to believe that speakers can improve their ability and reduce their apprehension with a willingness to improve.

Yes, I think people can improve. I think it has a whole lot to do with their willingness and whether they are getting instruction that can guide them into artistic alternatives that people have used over the years...but ultimately it becomes a matter of motivation and the artistry of both the teacher and the person who is attempting to assuage their anxiety. (personal communication, October 18, 2011)

Professor 1's belief that motivation helps students reduce their PSA is a simplified way to administer apprehension treatments. In order to effectively reduce apprehension, a student must first be willing and motivated to improve as a speaker. If they aren't motivated to improve they are less likely to speak in public and improve through repetition and subsequently desensitize themselves to the unknown phenomenon.

Learning what motivates students is an art that teachers learn through their interpersonal relationships with each student. When a teacher finds something that motivates a student he or she can encourage the student on an entirely different level. In a sense, the teacher and student enter into a self-improvement contract that they undertake together. Professor 1 spoke directly about developing an interpersonal relationship with students in order to improve trust.

You have to understand I am in my 44th year as a faculty member. So, I have seen many, many, many instances. You know, you get to a point in which trying to help someone with something as personal as anxiety control in the public speaking situation boils down to an interpersonal kind of relation. And trust becomes a crucial feature of the development of that. (personal communication, October 18, 2011)

He also spoke briefly about one female student in particular with whom he worked closely a few years ago. He said when she was a young child she had a serious speech impediment. She was lucky enough to have parents who could afford to give her specialized treatment and she had the motivation to make herself a better speaker. By the time she arrived at college and started taking his classes, she was confident in her speaking ability and able to pursue her dreams of being a speech pathologist in graduate school. Professor 1 spoke glowingly about her success story and the joy in working with her as her speaking ability improved and her confidence grew.

Professor 2

Professor 2 has been at his current university for ten years. During that time his experience with public speaking courses has included teaching a small advanced public speaking class, typically consisting of six to eight students, every spring semester. This researcher learned that Professor 2 approaches his advanced PS class in a unique manner, having students speak either formally or informally every class meeting and frequently taking them outside of the classroom to speak in unusual situations. He approaches the advanced course in a practical way, teaching students to speak about real-life topics in a professional manner. Professor 2 discussed how he is not a particularly strict teacher even with the more advanced students he encounters in advanced PS:

I'm not a particularly strict teacher anyway, but I give them a lot of leeway when I see them exhibiting it [anxiety] while they're speaking and I'm kind of caring anyway, tolerant of mistakes or of their nervousness when they get up there and they can't get into it, they can sit down and try another time. Also, too, when I present assignments I try to couch them in a way that allows them to be...feel accepting of their own anxiety. So, I think I am patient and that makes me less tolerant of those teachers who demand a certain style of public speaking or a certain sort of polish that is on the other end of anxiety because it's not the only way to do public speaking. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

Professor 2 believes that each student will approach public speaking in a different way.

Some will approach it in a more playful manner and some will approach PS from an analytical standpoint. They will see PS as an intellectual endeavor. As stated above,

Professor 2 believes he should be lenient with students and tolerant of mistakes because there are so many differing personalities and they are still learning how to be proficient public speakers.

Building trust in the teacher-student relationship is important when working with someone suffering with something as personal as PSA. Professor 2 suggests that tailoring advice for students he knows well helps them reduce their anxiety levels.

It depends on the relationship that I have with the student and it depends on the severity of their anxiety, I guess, and it depends on their own character too. Some kids...you have to get to know them. Some kids respond to different framing or how I handle it...I remember one student I had, a jokey outgoing person and maybe the speaking freaked her out. I responded in a jokey, teasing way with her. If you get one of those serious students who are concerned about doing it right, you frame it intellectually for them as something to conquer as a problem rather than something personal that they can fix. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

Building a sense of community can reap benefits for the student suffering from PSA. When the speaker feels that the other students in the class have his or her best interests in mind they seem to be more willing to open up and take chances they wouldn't otherwise deem possible. Professor 2 feels creating community in his classes is vital to

the success of the students. He strives to create an environment in which students are not worried about being judged.

They gained a lot of confidence and comfort in that class [advanced public speaking]. They're not nearly as intimidated and actually look forward to it because they feel they can do it because they've done so many speeches because they were such small classes that they did so many speeches that they actually have a sense of their own voice and a strength to their voice. They're not worried about being judged as public speakers. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

Professor 2 later stated that a number of his students who have gone on to public speaking- related careers attributed their work in the public speaking class to their career success. He attributed their future success by stating, "a lot of it is really overcoming sub consciousness" (personal communication, October 20, 2011). Professor 2's experience with his students going on to public speaking-related careers is encouraging to any young speaker who struggles with PSA and believes they are not capable of being a professional speaker. With work and willingness they can become proficient enough to make a living in the public speaking world. Professor 2 does have one concern about the effectiveness of the classroom community he creates actually harming the student in the long-term. He worries that the community "may be a false sense of security that they get because they get to know me so well that they could overcome their anxiety for this setting but I don't know if that transfers over or not [to the work force]...that could be a false sense of confidence they're developing because they're comfortable with me" (personal communication, October 20, 2011).

Critical incident. Professor 2 offers a specific example of a time he worked one-on-one with a student with severe PSA to systematically manage her anxiety-causing manifestations. Over the period of one semester the student was able to face her fears little by little and realize her efforts with a fantastic 15 minute speech free of notes by the

end of the term. Professor 2 stated this student came to him with a very formal view of public speaking. “She had learned kind of the textbook way to do public speaking. She would write up her speech...and she was just terrified of putting that paper down and trying to speak, without anything...at one point she just started crying” (personal communication, October 20, 2011). After his first encounter with this student, Professor 2 decided to individualize her speaking assignments. He felt that this would help her navigate her way through the PSA as she gained more confidence.

And so I think I tailored assignments to her comfort level or to try to make her more comfortable with the sort of goals I tried to get her to do so I would have her do more assignments that had to do with her, things that she felt comfortable talking about or research weren't, uh, like foreign things that made her more anxious, like describe how you found your apartment. What bugs you the most about your roommate? So that she could feel like she wasn't ignorant about what she was talking about, and she was excited to talk about them. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

The key point in the above quote is about making the speaker comfortable. The teacher can do this by having them talk about something familiar to them—something personal that is less likely to elicit anxiety.

Professor 2's efforts seem to have worked well as he later described “maybe even surreptitiously and then she saw herself and realized that she came across more confidently than she thought and that the nervousness wasn't really as visible as she imagined it to be” (personal communication, October 20, 2011). The researcher should note that Professor 2 videotaped all speeches and asked students to watch themselves in an effort to dispel myths they had about their speaking ability. Often, this method proved to work well. He reported that students thought much lower of their ability before they watched themselves on video. He learned that building up the intensity of the

assignments throughout the semester—in a desensitizing fashion—could be effective for systematically reducing apprehension and building confidence.

By the end when she had to give her, we had an assignment that we used to do with the majors, capstone, they kinda do a portfolio here and review what they've learned, where they're going with their lives. They have to do an oral presentation about ten, fifteen minutes, and she did it, didn't have any problems, didn't have any notes, talked and pointed to that class as the most important class she had [at this university] because she got over something that had been shackling her for years and now she felt very comfortable doing it. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

This is a wonderful example of what can happen when a professor individualizes treatment based on the personality of the student. What works for one student may not work for another student showing different manifestations. Individualizing treatments in the multi-dimensional therapy mode has shown promise in many instances.

Professor 3

Professor 3 has taught at his current university for 21 years. He currently serves as the chair of his department. He has taught introduction to public speaking at his university for 15 years in small classes of 20 students or less. He received his graduate and undergraduate degrees in speech communication from a large state university. Professor 3 talked about a novel approach he takes with his classes. He starts each semester by talking about PSA openly, creating a discussion among the class: "I talk about the topic probably the second day of class. So, we typically have a very good discussion about speaker apprehension, you know, at that time, if people have a concern, they are usually able to express it" (personal communication, November 2, 2011). He also stated that he rarely sees students in his class exhibit PSA. He believes few students at his university even have the opportunity to exhibit PSA because public speaking is not

a required course; thus the students in his classes actually wanted to take the class and wouldn't take the class if apprehension were a significant concern.

A healthy classroom culture is important to Professor 3. He believes positive group dynamics make students more comfortable speaking in front of each other. He spends "a lot of time and energy" (personal communication, November 2, 2011) creating and nurturing the community in his classes.

That's my big thing is the classroom culture. I'm sorry, I spend a lot of time and energy cultivating that in all my classes, and so I think that has a lot to do with it, whether or not someone experiences apprehension. It's just, you know, do they feel like they're being supported? Do they feel like other classmates are listening or active in the evaluation of this speech? And then that's not always as easy to create that type of environment. So, I do icebreakers, for example on the first day, and I have a very informal approach to the class. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 3 later talked about his desire to make sure no classroom environment was tense. He was aware that some classes lack the dynamism to make the students interested in being there. His interest in group communication was evident when he talked about teachers driving him crazy when they say they can't get through to their classes. He says breaking the tension early on is contagious: "If you want some sort of a communication environment that makes people feel comfortable and more likely to participate, then you have to spend a little bit more time trying to create that (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Professor 3 feels that his background in group communication helps him create a pleasant environment. He referred to primary tension when discussing the classroom environment. He defined primary tension as the tension that normally takes place when a classroom comes together for the first time.

For example, people have come together in a group and they'll act disinterested or they'll act tired, or they'll look away, or they won't speak up. And it's not because they are disinterested, and it's not because they are tired, and so because they don't want to speak up, it's because of the initial tension that is naturally there...and if you don't break that, then the perception—once you get into the perception of people in that environment will be that, hey, this group of people are not interested in being here. This group is kind of tense. Well, guess what? You're going to be more nervous when you give a speech, so breaking that tension by moving the group in the social dimension. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Poor group dynamics (social dimension) can manifest itself in PSA. A student who may be more prone to PSA or have suffered from PSA symptoms in the past may experience flare ups in a tense classroom environment. On the other hand, a student who is prone to PSA might flourish in a caring and nurturing environment. Peer support is reassuring to a student facing anxiety. Professor 3 asks himself the following questions to determine the importance of trying to influence the class culture: “Is this a discussion class? Is this a class where you want people to communicate with one another? And if the answer to that is yes, then the time pays off tenfold that you spend on trying to influence the culture” (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

He uses a vivid experience topic for his first speech of the semester. He believes the vivid experience speech is easier to present because it focuses on a specific experience the speaker had and they aren't required to use outside information or incorporate research. They are simply speaking about a unique experience they had and recalling how it happened.

We start with a vivid experience type of speech. You know that type of speech is easier for students to give, because it's something that they're recalling and not having to try to remember. So, that in and of itself typically causes less apprehension, because you don't have to, and so, “wow, I've got to make sure I need to remember.” (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 3 believes having to learn and remember new information leads to apprehension in students who are already pre-disposed to PSA. When they are recalling a vivid experience in their lives, something that stuck in the memory, they aren't worried about remembering something they recently learned with which they aren't all too familiar with.

Professor 3 also believes addressing PSA concerns early in the semester and dispelling some of the myths is important. He talks about speaker apprehension the second day of class, having an open discussion to allow anyone with concerns to voice them at that point. If students exhibit PSA Professor 3 talks to them individually.

Do I get students experiencing it? Like I said, just not very much. If they do, then I will sit them down and talk to them about it individually. You know, I have those little resources on the topic that we can talk about, and so forth. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Critical incident. There were two possible critical incidents in this interview.

Professor 3 first spoke about an experience he had with one student who passed out while giving her speech. He saw her struggling with her balance so he sprinted toward the front of the classroom and caught her just before she hit the ground. As he was telling the story it was evident that he was very proud of that moment when he averted disaster. He said as much when he stated: "It's like one of my best experiences as a teacher" (personal communication, November 2, 2011). He later took that student and worked one-on-one with her in an attempt to help her overcome her severe PSA symptoms. The researcher asked Professor 3 if that student was able to successfully make it through the semester. He stated:

She was. I did talk to her afterwards, and she knew she'd always had difficulty, that's why she was taking the class. We worked a little bit individually before her subsequent speeches. I sat closer to her when she was giving her speeches, but she was great. She was like, "Now I overcame this, and I know this is a problem, and I want to keep going." And so it was her fortitude that really helped in that situation, and certainly, I was willing to work with her individually, and we did. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

The key in this situation was the student's willingness to work to reduce her apprehension. As mentioned in Professor 1's interview, a speaker's willingness to improve their speaking ability and thus reduce their apprehension is very important. If they don't have the willingness to improve they take the opportunity to improve through repetition.

The second critical incident Professor 3 discussed was placing an emphasis on establishing a positive group dynamic. Throughout the interview Professor 3 talked several times about how important it was for him to make sure he built a trusting culture in each of his courses. He felt an open and trusting culture created a nurturing environment that PSA sufferers felt comfortable enough in to take chances. The more experience they gained throughout the semester the better able they were to manage their apprehension.

If you want some sort of a communicative environment that makes people feel comfortable and more likely to participate, then you have to spend a little bit of time trying to create that...I've got to do something different, and in public speaking class, that is particularly important, because you're going to create this environment where they feel comfortable to speak and they're much less likely to be apprehensive. In fact, I would say that would be my number one tip. They're much less likely to be apprehensive if they are giving the speech in a comfortable environment, than if you have that sort of tension that exists in some classrooms. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Earlier in his interview, Professor 3 stated that he has not had much experience with overt displays of PSA among his students. He attributed the low number of cases to the fact that public speaking is not required at his university. He believes he works more often with students who willingly take the class because they don't struggle with PSA. After listening to this interview in its entirety this researcher believes Professor 3 doesn't see PSA often because of the classroom environment he creates. He starts the semester off by openly discussing PSA. His first speech is then a vivid experience that allows the students to recall an important experience in their lives without the burden of having to remember new information. Finally, he makes a concerted effort to build positive classroom camaraderie. With that positive energy each speaker will feel comfortable to express themselves and are less likely to experience PSA.

Professor 4

Professor 4 has taught theatre and public speaking as a full-time instructor at her current university for "a number of years." She is the first female the researcher interviewed. Her master's degree is an MMA in education. She has taught public speaking at the high school and university level while also working as a freelance artist and performer before starting her current job. She was the first interviewee that professed to focus on content and delivery and how delivery must serve the content. This approach most likely stemmed from her background in theatre. She believed the performance aspect of public speaking was an important skill to learn. In her opinion, the only way to improve performance is by doing an act over and over again. "What I tell my students is that I believe that the only way you can develop your public speaking skills is by speaking" (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Professor 4 believes that creating a playful classroom environment helps students feel more comfortable speaking in front of the group. She wants her students to have fun speaking so that they will begin to cultivate community.

When I approach a public speaking class, I have to approach it in a playful way. Because I think that helps to alleviate anxiety, and there are always...there's a ton of kids in there who are very anxious. That's why they're taking that class...and so, the first couple of days are days that I spend; like I guess my bottom line goal is to begin to cultivate community. To create an atmosphere in which we are playful but focused. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 4 demonstrates what this researcher has experienced on several occasions thus far during his interviews—cultivating a positive community to reduce PSA is a highly successful form of PSA reduction. She one-ups that positive community by being playful with the students, showing them that public speaking can be fun.

To start the semester off on the right note and identify which students show manifestations of PSA, Professor 4 has her students deliver a vivid experience speech. During this speech she is able to clearly identify students with PSA if they have the speech “carefully written down” (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

I begin with the first speech, which is a vivid experience structure. And most of the students are very successful with that speech because they're talking about a memory from childhood or from their lives that is vividly engraved in them. And they tell us that story. Of being in that moment and what it was like. And it's a marvelous ice breaker speech, because as a teacher you do hear those who have strong writing skills, and those who have strong, just spontaneous talking about something skills. Most of the students are successful because they're talking about something that they know about, that they care about. I do see those students who are shy, who struggle with delivery. I guess I would say that anxiety does, or apprehension does emerge in that first speech because I will see some students who instead of telling us about this vivid experience will have carefully written it down. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

It is interesting to see that Professor 4 notices PSA even in the first speech in which students are mostly talking about an enjoyable memory in their lives. She believes a manifestation of PSA in these students is displayed in them reading the majority of their speeches. She reasons that they feel the need to read most of their speech to compensate for their anxiety. She states “And those student who have the most public speaking apprehension will tend to just read their story” (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Professor 4 takes another unique approach to public speaking. After the first speech in which she identifies students with PSA, she partners apprehensive students with non-apprehensive students to create speaking partners. It is common to see partner or group speeches in public speaking classes. The groups, however, are not randomly chosen; purposefully partnering a strong speaker with an apprehensive speaker can be an effective way to decrease PSA.

The second speech is the informative speech, and I help to...I think the way that I approach the informative speech really does help to ease apprehension in certain students where it exists. And what I do is by that time, they've all give one speech and I kind of let them get to know everybody and I put them in pairs. I put an extraverted student, a student who seems to have some strengths in certain areas with a student who seems to have some apprehension or is shy, or maybe isn't as outgoing...and the informative speech requires that they interview each other. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 4 later states that the informative speech comes from the interviews.

Constructing the informative speech this way takes much of the pressure off the apprehensive student. They are able to work together with their partner (who has very little to no apprehension) to present the informative speech. The benefit in this is that they have less pressure on themselves through the sharing of information. Professor 4 spoke about the peer partnership element when she said: “so there's a peer, there's a peer

partnership element to that first informative speech, which is tremendously helpful in giving each other confidence and giving each other support, in helping each other (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

She assumes that the apprehensive student can contribute to the partnership in other ways. Perhaps they are well organized or have strong writing skills. She stated “a student who may have public speaking apprehension may be a brilliant writer” (personal communication, November 2, 2011). Working in pairs can also provide structure to the assignment. The apprehensive person is able to lean on the less apprehensive student when they aren’t sure of themselves. She stated:

When you’re given a little bit of a structure, then you kind of address that structure and in a way, your nervousness is distracted...and sometimes students who do have apprehension about speaking all by themselves can invite the person they’ve interviewed [for the informative speech] to help them to be a visual aid, to demonstrate something that then the speaker is explaining. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Having someone next them as they speak can be comforting to the apprehensive speaker. They have someone there to support them by serving as a visual aid when needed and they don’t feel as though they are in front of the audience all by themselves.

Professor 4 talked on several occasions about her belief that cultivating a strong sense of community helped apprehensive students feel more secure in their environment and subsequently see improvements in their anxiety levels. Cultivating community was a common theme among the first four interviews. Each professor discussed how creating the right atmosphere in their classes paid dividends when it came time to speak. Professor 4 demonstrated this commitment when she stated:

And I just think maybe an overall...and you probably hear this from everyone, but I think the most important thing for any public speaking class to do is to first and always throughout the semester cultivate community because when a public speaker feels that he or she has a supportive community in which to be very vulnerable, and public speaking makes you vulnerable. That's a huge, huge asset. You have to develop a sense of community. And I do it by playfulness and working on vocal and physical exercises that allow them to become aware of the fun of expressing yourself, expressing vocally and physically. Then we get to the nitty gritty of developing your speech. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 4 again referred to being playful with the students. The playful environment she created made the public speaking class fun. Too often, students enter the public speaking classroom out of obligation. They see it as a bland and monotonous environment instead of an opportunity, as Professor 4 states, to see the fun of expressing yourself vocally and physically.

Professor 4 was careful in stating her belief that all students have some form of PSA "I think so many times we have to treat apprehension as something that not only a few students have, but that everybody has" (personal communication, November 2, 2011). She suggested that if we approach the PSA concern as though everyone struggles with PSA at one point or another we will encourage all students to work on their speaking craft. She declared "and I think that [practicing] helps everyone become aware of not only the potential of the voice and body, but the areas that I need to work on" (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Once a student was identified as having a more significant level of PSA, Professor 4 instructed them to overly prepare to reduce real and perceived PSA. She found that when students are still struggling with PSA later in the semester it was because they were spending too much time on content and not enough time actually preparing themselves physically and mentally and actually practicing their speech:

Preparation, preparation, preparation. And another question that arises a lot as we're getting through into the semester and dealing with some of these target areas that they're still struggling with; when I ask when you're getting ready to make a speech, how much time percentage wise do you spend on content, and how much preparation time do you spend on delivery? Well, most of the time it is 95% content...how much time do you spend rehearsing? Getting up on your feet. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Critical incident. Professor 4 told the researcher of a time 10 years ago when she worked with a debate student who “was brilliant, just off the scale intelligent, and loved debate, but he really struggled with delivery” (personal communication, November 2, 2011). He came to her on a recommendation from his debate coach because the coach believed Professor 4 could help him improve his delivery and decrease his PSA. She stated, “I started from the very most basic thing, we started breathing. Then, we started working on vocal clarity. He just had some really bad ingrained speech habits” (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

She would take him to the theatre and have him lay down on his back so that he could visualize himself using vocal clarity and breathing properly. She didn't have him do any speaking at first, but instead paid attention to language: “we worked on consonant sounds, we worked on emphasis—you know, just basics of vocal variety and clarity” (personal communication, November 2, 2011). She wanted him to become aware of his habits. She believed that awareness was the first step in improvement.

As stated above, he was very intelligent and just had a hard time putting his thoughts together while speaking. After some time working with him she saw marked improvement as she stated “and not only did I see him improve in class and see his confidence build because he was painfully, painfully shy, but he won a number of individual speaking, individual speaker awards in the debate circuit” (personal

communication, November 2, 2011). In his improvement she saw how his willingness to improve made the difference in his PSA reduction. She learned that working one-on-one made a significant difference in that speaker's life.

Professor 5

Professor 5 was the second female professor interviewed by the researcher. She was also the second professor interviewed that had a degree and background in theatre. She had been at her current university for 34 years. She started at her university when it was still a two-year college transitioning from an all boy's military prep school. She had seen many changes at the university, including how the communication classes are taught. "When I first came we were a two-year school and we offered a course called business professional speaking, and that was really for the people that were business majors, for the people that—I mean we had a lot of community people taking college credit" (personal communication, November 2, 2011). As the school blended into a four-year university, the communication department combined two classes into the current version, which is simply called communication. Professor 5's university had an enrollment of approximately 1400 students. She pulled double duty and also taught theatre classes. The theatre and public speaking combination created a unique perspective that was seen when the researcher interviewed Professor 4, who was also a theatre professor.

Professor 5 believes a tender approach to her students helps reduce PSA. She feels that, because the course is required for graduation that many of the students would prefer not to be in the class. She felt that the students' lack of desire to be in the class could cause more PSA than usual. Professor 5 stated "I try to be tender and gentle because I

realize that always at least half of the class hates the class, they don't see any need for it. It's like, 'I'm never going to give a speech as long as I live. I don't need it'" (personal communication, November 2, 2011). She wants the student to be comfortable speaking in front of the class. She feels that if you ask the students what they want to get out of the class 90% of them will answer that they want to be comfortable.

I tell them, you know it's so empowering to feel comfortable in front of people. So, I mean to get them to the point where they're comfortable, you know, whether they actually enjoy it or not, but to also feel that you are holding a crowd in your hands or you are connecting. You know, you are sharing an important idea, something like that. So, you know, that's what we really try to work on. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 5 focuses on the practical aspects of public speaking. What is the most important thing for the student to learn in the class? After learning how to prepare and present a speech they have to learn how to be comfortable in front of an audience and present their ideas in an organized and professional manner. Being comfortable is what Professor 5 is striving for in her introduction courses.

Another way that Professor 5 teaches her students to overcome PSA is to approach the speech as a communicative effort and not a performance (COM Therapy). She does not refer to the method specifically as COM Therapy but instead making the speech audience-driven. She believes making the speech audience-driven relieves any pressure the speaker may feel to perform for the audience. Professor 5 stated:

I don't encourage them to think of it as a performance, you know, and I don't ask them to ever think of playing a role...and so think about that when you're giving a presentation, that it's so important that I connect it, make it audience-driven. You know, try to get the focus off of yourself. "I'm nervous, I'm not prepared, I'm uncomfortable, I'm not going to do a good job." You know, take the focus off yourself and try to put—you need to learn this or you need to know about this, or I hope you understand this. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 5 helps her students view the speech as a dialogue between the speaker and audience as a way to take the pressures that performance brings off the speaker's shoulders. When the speaker is more relaxed he or she is more likely to have less anxiety associated with anticipated performance in front of an unfamiliar audience.

Professor 5 stated that she had her students compare and contrast two speeches they delivered by watching video recordings of each speech. Each student critiqued their speaking ability. This critique made it possible for the student to see what they needed to improve for the next speech while also realizing that they are better speakers than they give themselves credit for. The researcher asked Professor 5 if she felt that videotaping the speeches caused undue anxiety. She did not feel as though the videotaping caused apprehension. She does it so the students see themselves doing things she tells them in her evaluation.

You know, so I think that taping thing really helps because it gives them sort of a guide post or a marker, because I can tell them you're going too fast, and they just don't believe me. But then if they see themselves or say, "you really never looked up, you never had any eye contact with us." And, then it's like, "oh, I did read didn't I." (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Professor 5 made an interesting observation of one practice that does cause more apprehension – grading. She believed that her students were more bothered by her in the back of the room grading them than they were of her videotaping them: "They tell me that they're more nervous knowing that I'm grading...and [if] it's not graded, it's just a little class exercise, and they say those don't bother them. But, when they know I'm back there grading them, they're really worried about it" (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Professor 5 starts each semester with a five minute informative speech. This type of speech is a break from the traditional speech class that starts the semester with a vivid experience speech or a description speech that allows the students to recall a favorite memory. This type of speech does not elicit as much apprehension because the student doesn't have to remember new information or feel the need to memorize the speech. Professor 5 incorporates the brief informative speech right away because she believes it is easy for the student to speak about a topic they are familiar with: "one reason I started with the informative [topic] because I thought, well, you know, it'd be easy for them to talk about something that they know or something that they have interest in, so it's pretty wide open, although I do clear their topics" (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

She then has the students interview one another for their second speech, also an informative speech. The interview speech has been successful in her classes because it takes the pressure off the individual. The students work together to present the findings from the interview in an informative format. Professor 5 stated: "they have to interview a classmate outside of class time, and they have to conduct a personal interview. And also, as part of that interview, they have to talk with their interview partner about what their persuasive topic is going to be" (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Critical incident. Empowering the student is a powerful tool for any public speaking teacher to use. When the student feels empowered and believes in themselves they can do great things in front of an audience. Often, students feel powerless to change their circumstances when they suffer from PSA. They feel trapped to suffer through high levels of apprehension every time they are in front of an audience. Professor 5 believes

that empowering the student to be a successful speaker is the most important thing she has learned during her time teaching public speaking. Professor 5 talked about empowerment on two occasions during her interview. The first time she did so was when she was discussing her belief that students had apprehension when they knew they were being graded. She related the grading issue to empowering the students by saying:

What do you get out of this class outside of a good grade? I want them to be comfortable. I want to be less afraid. And then secondly, I tell them, you know it's so empowering to feel comfortable in front of people. So, I mean to get them to the point where they're comfortable, you know, whether they actually enjoy it or not, but to also feel that you are holding a crowd in your hands or you are connecting. You know, you are sharing an important idea, something like that. So, you know, that's what we really try to work on. (personal communication, November 7, 2011)

Professor 5 learned through her own public speaking experience as a motivational speaker how powerful presenting your beliefs and ideas to an audience can be. She wants all of her students to have that same feeling: "I think what I have learned through some of my public speaking, and certainly through teaching, is that it can be a powerful experience and, 'I want you [student] to challenge yourself and take the courage and the motivation to try to get to that place'" (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Professor 6

Professor 6, a male, has taught at his university since 1988. He came to the university about four years after completing his Ph.D. in communication studies. In many ways, he had some of the most unusual views of any professor this researcher interviewed. He seemed to be disinterested in the PSA topic because he didn't feel there was much he could offer to the researcher since he had "yet to see a student that raises their hand up and then indicates that they're seriously apprehensive and/or when giving speeches demonstrates symptoms of severe apprehension" (personal communication,

November 3, 2011). He did say that when he arrived at the small university he was asked to create the communication department from scratch. This was an exciting endeavor for him because it allowed him to put his mark on the program from the very beginning. He described how he developed the program:

When I first came here it was a mess. There were only two courses they offered in speech; argumentation and debate and fundamentals; and they were both pretty much geared towards getting preachers ready to go out there and hit the pulpit. So, I had to create the program out of nothing, and I was lucky that year at SEA, there was a program on how small colleges and universities could offer decent speech communication programs with limited resources, so I still go somewhere here. I picked up copies of all these syllabi from these varied schools. And I went through and tried to put together a doable set of courses for a small school like us, and it came down to public speaking, group communication, interpersonal communication, organizational. (personal communication, November 3, 2011)

It is from these humble beginnings that Professor 6 developed many of his beliefs regarding PSA. Professor 6 discussed on several occasions his belief that public speaking can only be learned by doing—he can't teach it in the classroom. In the same way, he created the program by doing. He looked for examples from other universities and applied what he learned to create the new classes.

You can't teach public speaking in a course. It's like trying to learn basketball when you're in a class with only one basketball, so today we're going to discuss dribbling. We spent the class talking about dribbling...trying to teach public speaking that way is ridiculous. I could teach about public speaking, but I can't develop it as a skill with 20 students in the classroom and that kind of context. (personal communication, November 3, 2011)

Professor 6 suggested having public speaking students take speaking opportunities outside of class and participate in clubs like Toastmasters to work on their craft in a real life setting. He later compared learning public speaking to learning how to play basketball. He said that when a person gets out on the court and begins learning is when they start to have fun and that's when the real learning takes place: "If you can take a

course [public speaking] at that point, then it would do you some good” (personal communication, November 3, 2011).

Professor 6 said he doesn’t focus much on grades. He believes his low emphasis on grades helps students focus on improving their speaking ability and not having to impress the teacher to earn a certain grade:

I don’t make the public speaking part of the class a huge deal breaker in terms of the grades, because I’m not grading them on improvement, I’m not grading them on ability, I’m just grading them on are you doing it or not doing it, are you giving it your best shot? So, as long as they give me an honest effort I figure everyone will improve to the best of their ability. (personal communication, November 3, 2011)

Critical incident. Professor 6 did not offer a specific critical incident during his interview. He did, however, offer critical insight into his beliefs about teaching public speaking and overcoming PSA. On numerous occasions Professor 6 referred to his belief that public speaking cannot be learned in a formal classroom setting. He said students learn public speaking by doing it outside the classroom—“Toastmasters, the school, the debate team, student government, volunteer charity work, church work” (personal communication, November 3, 2011). He is very practical about how he approaches public speaking and the art of teaching it. He would rather have the students out learning by doing.

Anything where they get on their hind legs and speak is going to develop skills far beyond what we can do in the classroom. And I’m not saying that to put anything down; it’s just giving the resources, the time, the energy and everything I’ve been trying to accomplish. I’m not going to fool them into believing that they’re going to really improve their skills in a classroom like that. Like I said, we just do persuasive speeches. The whole class talks one day, two and a half minutes apiece. They get to watch each other speak and they get a little bit of feedback from me, and that’s about it, and then we’re on to something else. (personal communication, November 3, 2011)

Professor 6's practical, hands-on approach to public speaking seems to have developed from years of pushing students to develop their public speaking skills outside of the classroom. He believes that students would not come to his small university if they suffered with PSA. Instead, they would "look for the anonymity of a large public school, or they're not signing up for speech classes if they can find some way to avoid it" (personal communication, November 3, 2011). If the students with PSA aren't coming to his university he doesn't encounter the problem in his classes and can instead focus on encouraging students to speak outside the classroom every chance they get to improve their craft and prepare themselves for productive careers.

Professor 7

Professor 7 is a male, tenured professor in the school of humanities, arts, and social sciences. He has worked at his current university since the fall of 1988. He teaches public speaking, voice and diction, interpersonal communication, nonverbal communication and persuasion. Professor 7 brings a contagious passion to his teaching. He was very enthusiastic throughout his interview. He had an obvious zest for teaching communication. He frequently talked about pushing his students to prepare them for the real world in every way possible. He also talked about making his students marketable to employers.

Professor 7 provided a unique perspective on PSA that this researcher had not heard before. He painted PSA in a positive light. He believed that PSA, when used correctly, could actually help the speaker, "you don't realize it, but you are alive...this is one of the few times in your life where you have been fully alive and the system is pulsating" (personal communication, November 10, 2011). He felt that a speaker should

take advantage of feeling fully alive and use their senses to make them a better speaker. He stated “and I tell them you have to channel that, that’s all you’ve got to do.” Professor 7 tells his class to speak about things they are passionate about, believing that doing so will help speakers better deal with apprehension they encounter. He stated “I tell them you’re never going to get rid of the anxiety, but it may not be that bad because it puts you in that heightened form that you’re ready to move.” (personal communication, November 10, 2011). In his unique perspective, Professor 7 discussed how he teaches students to confront their apprehension “I tell them, you’ve got—with everything in life is you have to go into the cave and confront the lion. You can never run away from the lion.” (personal communication, November 10, 2011).

Professor 7 reiterated what this researcher heard numerous times during many of the interviews—creating a positive community environment in the classroom is key to reducing apprehension. He urged his students to have fun in the public speaking class. He wanted them to have fun while preparing and presenting their speeches:

I tell them that you have to perceive the course not as a threat but as fun. It is a fun thing. I told them again the other day, none of these people in the class are here to attack you, to be hostile; we’re one big—I told them two days ago, we are a community. And no one’s out to get you. The critiques are just comments to help you so you strengthen your skills. (personal communication, November 10, 2011)

The key, according to Professor 7, is to see the critiques as constructive feedback to help the speaker improve. If the speaker sees the classroom environment in a positive light he or she will be more willing to accept critiques from the teacher and their peers.

Professor 7 brought up the fact that this was the first semester he really focused on meeting one-on-one in his office with the students who made a C or lower on a speech. He made it a priority to bring them in for a discussion of how they could improve their speech before their next presentation:

Now something that I'm doing this semester that I haven't always done with them is I'm calling them into my office-the ones who get C's on speeches. I'm calling them into my office and we have a little conference. This is kind of new for me. In the writing classes, we conference all the time, but this is new, and it has worked out, and we go over the evaluation sheets and I say, "You understand what the problems are?" You know, that it may be organization or apprehension or you don't have eye contact. (personal communication, November 10, 2011)

When asked if he feels that the conferences helped, Professor 7 replied that they had because the students liked him more as a result of feeling more comfortable around him. He felt that the students liking him made a big difference in their classroom performance.

They like me more, and then if they like me more, then the chance is that they'll do better. Because remember I give the grade, and if the anxiety involves me, there can be all kinds of problems. Or if they dislike me, they may as well just drop and take another section. I'm trying that, and it has worked. I've done it with four or five, and they smile when they see me in the hall now. I sense that has worked with them. I think it has worked because they sense that I care. (personal communication, November 10, 2011)

Professor 7's desire for students to feel more comfortable with him ties closely to his belief that a positive classroom environment also helps reduce PSA because the students feel comfortable with their peers and teacher. This gives them the belief that they can take chances without the threat of persecution.

Without actually naming it, Professor 7 referred to a common PSA treatment technique that he believes helps speakers see their apprehension in a different light—COM Therapy, where the speaker sees the speech as a communicative effort instead of a performance. The speaker is merely communicating information to the audience in a

relaxed effort as opposed to performing up to a certain standard everyone expects.

Professor 7 explained it this way, “You’re just telling them a story... You don’t even see them as an audience, you see them as all your friends and you’re sitting around a table” (personal communication, November 10, 2011).

Grades causing anxiety came up as another point of interest during this interview as it did in many of the previous interviews. Professor 7 said grades were a big motivator with many of his students. He used the nursing majors as an example of “being obsessed with A’s.” He made an interesting observation of students successfully dealing with their anxiety so that they would give a better speech and earn the A they so desperately desired: “because you’re desperate for that A, and you will do anything you can” (personal communication, November 10, 2011). He tried to praise his students as often as he could to keep them motivated to earn the highest grades they could by delivering high quality speeches.

Critical incident. Professor 7 had a strong belief that students have to confront their fears head on and learn to deal with them. He learned through his years of teaching public speaking that students cannot run from their fears. He said he talks to them frequently about how competitive the job market is. He is very frank in telling them that they have to stand out in order to be hired. He wants them to understand that the working world is very competitive and is saturated with degreed professionals looking for careers.

I’m trying to make them realize that the criticisms in the class have nothing to do with you, it all has to do with your performance. It’s no attack on you as a person. It’s trying to make your performance better so you can get the interview and be offered the job. That’s my big thrust now; the interview. Every session; the interview, the interview. (personal communication, November 10, 2011)

Professor 7 was so adamant about his students making the effort to reduce their PSA and improve their speaking ability that he used manipulation to persuade them to get up in front of the class. He tells them “you know, everybody wants to be a winner and they want people to listen...this is your opportunity to get up and influence other people and they will to listen” (personal communication, November 10, 2011).

He shared a story of a male student he had who he believed showed many manifestations of PSA. He started off with a failing grade at the very best and worked his way to a solid B in the class by confronting his fear of public speaking. This experience shaped Professor 7’s belief that overcoming PSA comes down to facing your fears head on and believing that you can improve.

I’ll tell you the nice thing – what changed him was not me, but the class. They respected him because he got up and did it. That’s what changed him. He’s still not—he’s no Obama, but this guy does it. He gets up and he’s now become structured and he’ll stand up in front of them and every speech he gets better...this was a student who had the most respect in the class because he confronted the problem and didn’t pull back. (personal communication, November 10, 2011)

Professor 8

Professor 8, the third female communication professor interviewed, has been at her university only one and a half years. She came to her university shortly after completing her Ph.D. in communication. She was hired to teach speech communication classes and direct the nationally recognized debate program. Her previous teaching experience had been as a graduate assistant at a large state school in the Midwest. She originally became interested in communication studies because it allowed her to continue coaching debate at the graduate level. Her general areas of emphasis are rhetoric, social movements, persuasion, and argumentation.

Professor 8 believes in nurturing her students and telling them that they can be good speakers. When asked how she assists students who exhibit PSA, she discussed her coaching style (as a debate coach):

It's funny that there are a ton of successful coaching models out there for how to deal with it [PSA]. Mine is very much of a kind of nurturing sort of role where I do the comforting. You're doing everything great, you know, and doing the emotional support first and then offering one or two very tangible things that someone could accomplish in order to overcome the fear or in order to feel like they're making productive progress in whatever direction they need to...let's take a deep breath and sit down and talk about what the issue is. (personal communication, November 15, 2011)

Professor 8 stated that as a debate coach she is able to develop intimate relationships with her debaters. The close relationship gave her the opportunity to develop a mentoring friendship with her students that she may not have experienced in a traditional classroom setting. When a professor really knows their students they are able to cater to their needs, which in Professor 8's situation was PSA.

Professor 8 incorporated a progressive project into her persuasive class. She taught the progressive project much like an English composition class would be taught. Throughout the semester each student works on one part of the speech at a time. This technique resembles a part-to-whole learning philosophy. As the speaker learns each part of the speech, he or she will put the whole work together in a smooth flowing presentation. Professor 8 describes her progressive project:

I've made it [persuasive speech] so it's a progressive project, and so it's not just they show up on a day without any prior knowledge and have to give a presentation or rather, already now they have submitted a written proposal which they looked up this weekend that suggests what it is that they want to research. What they want to present. And I kind of assess if it's an effective project, is it something that will match what we're looking for...then I sit down with each of the groups on two different occasions to make sure that they're developing and they have all of their questions answered. (personal communication, November 15, 2011)

Professor 8's belief in nurturing her students throughout the process makes her more forgiving of mistakes. As the students progress, she says "there's always the chance to re-give a speech." She believes in reinforcement throughout the semester. She hopes that the progressive project she created will give the students guidelines as they develop their persuasive speeches, which are 20 minutes long.

Critical incident. Through her years of experience, professor 8 has become more aware of the physical and emotional manifestations of PSA. During her early years she spent most of her time with debaters. She is not used to seeing the traditional forms of PSA that other communication professors may experience. Many of her debate students experienced what she called preparation anxiety and beginning of the year, pre-topic anxiety. She felt that once they were confident with their topic and preparation they didn't experience as much PSA. When they did, she nurtured them in a mentoring-type relationship. Professor 8 remembered her early years as a teacher and her troubles identifying PSA:

While I was sort of a timid pre-teen, after being in debate for so long, you lose a lot of the anxiety yourself. And I think that as I progressed through college and started teaching my own when I started graduate school, I wasn't perhaps as aware of how much anxiety most people have related to public speaking. It was something that was sort of surprising to me. And in my first few semesters of teaching, I was told on some evaluations that I was maybe grading too harshly and maybe even unfairly, and part of it, they believed was because I had such a debate background that my standards were too high. And since then, I think that part of me or helping people overcome anxiety or me changing according to that was just a little bit more awareness, because I was so ignorant before. (personal communication, November 15, 2011)

Now, professor 8 tells her students "I'm not looking for perfection." She outlines what she is looking for so that students realize she is not grading them subjectively but rather is looking specifically for certain things in the speech.

The progressive project professor 8 started using in her persuasion class also stems from her newfound awareness of speaker apprehension. Once she realized that students struggled with apprehension she developed the partner speech that allowed students to work together in a supportive environment. It was her hope that working on the persuasive speech piece-by-piece with a partner would help the high PSA student to feel more confident when it came time to present to the class.

Analyzing Critical Incidents

Analyzing the critical incidents above is an important task to complete before concluding the discussion of the interviews. To analyze the critical incidents, the author will refer to Woods (1993), who, deemed critical events to be critical in four ways:

1. *They promote student learning in accelerated ways* – e.g. through students' attitudes towards learning, understanding of the self, relationships with others, acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. This learning involves holistic change.
2. *They are critical for teacher development* – e.g. through pride in their craftsmanship and realization of the self.
3. *They restore ideals and commitment in teachers* – critical events maintain contrary forces. Critical events permit teachers to retain their ideals despite the assaults that might customarily be made on them. In a sense they may act as a coping strategy.
4. *They boost teacher morale* – which can be critical for the profession as a whole. (p. 77)

These criteria were utilized in analyzing the critical incidents gathered throughout each of the eight interviews. Not all of the communication professors referred to a specific critical incident that influenced their teaching philosophies. Instead, the researcher determined that three of the professors were influenced by years of experience that gradually changed the way they viewed students with PSA. Their teaching insights came from a culmination of their time spent teaching and working with students exhibiting symptoms of PSA. Sometimes, critical insights emerge from the teaching process,

demonstrating what the professor learns through their experiences. Cumulative years of knowledge bring insights that are useful to the body of knowledge when shared. Pui-Ian et al. (2005) stated “the purpose of sharing critical incidents...is to promote reflection on our teaching practice and to gain insights into the intricate dynamics shaping the increasingly diverse learning community” (p. 36).

Professor 1 was one of the participants who couldn't share a specific incident that changed his teaching philosophy. He did share some insight that he garnered through his years of experience. He believed that if the student was willing to improve and had the motivation to reduce their PSA they would be successful in becoming a less apprehensive speaker. He believed the speaker had to have a willingness to improve so that they would take on the amount of speaking necessary to see marked improvement. Professor 1's experience is an example of Wood's (1993) first belief that critical incidents promote student learning in accelerated ways. If the student has the right attitude (a willingness to improve) he or she will see marked improvement through their continued effort.

Professor 2's insights into public speaking were developed primarily in very small advanced public speaking courses with eight or fewer students. Because of his small classes he was able to shape the class assignments based on students' likes and personalities. This was his primary critical incident—he customized assignments to make the students feel more comfortable and thus have a better experience. The pride that Professor 2 took in tailoring assignments to fit his student's personalities substantiates Woods' (1993) belief that critical incidents are critical for teacher development.

Professor 3 had an extensive background in group communication. His belief in the benefits of a positive classroom environment led him to place a premium on creating the right environment so that he reduced any apprehension a student may have had because they didn't feel comfortable in front of their peers. Professor 3 believed it was important to squelch any primary tension at the beginning of the semester to establish a positive culture. Professor 3 provides another example of Woods' (1993) insight that critical incidents promote student learning in accelerated ways. By creating an upbeat classroom, Professor 3 established an environment conducive to students overcoming speaking fears associated with being judged by their peers.

Professor 4 shared a critical incident with the researcher, recounting a time when she worked one-on-one with a bright student who, because of severe PSA, had trouble putting sentences together when speaking in public. Through her work with this student Professor 4 learned that when a student has a willingness to improve, he or she can effectively reduce their PSA. She saw the benefits of working one-on-one with a student and being able to tailor the treatment to what that student needs to empower his or her voice. Professor 4 experienced a boost in teacher morale (Woods, 1993) when she worked with this particular student. She stated that she didn't believe she had done much to help him other than encourage him to believe in himself. His ability as a student seems to have encouraged Professor 4 to believe that other students can also improve with one-on-one encouragement.

On two occasions, Professor 5 spoke about empowering her students to be better speakers. She believed that when the students' voices were empowered they would be willing to take chances they otherwise wouldn't have been willing to. As a cancer

survivor she had been empowered to tell her story of survival as a motivation to other people suffering with illnesses. Her experience as a motivational speaker led to her to value the importance of empowering her students. Professor 5's critical insight provides an example of what Woods (1993) discussed as critical incidents restoring ideals and commitment in teachers. After overcoming her disease, Professor 5 used motivational speaking as a coping strategy. Through her own coping she wanted her students to be empowered to use the public speaking forum to make a difference in their own lives.

Professor 6 didn't offer a critical incident. Instead, his insight from 20+ years of teaching experience was that students are not able to learn public speaking in the traditional classroom. Instead, his students were best served learning by doing. He believed they needed to join organizations such as Toastmasters and take advantage of opportunities to speak outside of the classroom. By encouraging students to join Toastmasters, Professor 7 was promoting student learning in accelerated ways (Woods, 1993).

In a similar manner, Professor 7 identified his critical incident as the belief that students had to confront their fears while they speak. He was sensitive of their fears but insisted that they had to confront the "lion in the cave" and learn that they can make it out relatively unscathed. Much of his belief came from the fierce competition he saw for jobs. The students who were willing to confront their insecurities had the better chance to land jobs when they graduated. Professor 7 also referred at one point in his interview to his new practice of meeting one-on-one with poor performing students (C or lower on their speech). He saw the immediate impact these meetings had on his personal relationships with these students. He believed they liked him more because they saw that

he cared. In a way, these meetings boosted his teacher morale (Woods, 1993). He had a greater belief in the teacher-student relationship and how a strong bond could help the student believe in their ability to overcome PSA.

As the least experienced of the bunch, professor 8 was pulling her critical incident from her experience as a debate coach. She said that she became more aware of the signs and symptoms of PSA in her students. When she first began teaching she did not see much PSA because she worked with debaters, who in her estimate, tended to be confident in their speaking ability. As she worked with more public speaking students she became more sensitive to their struggles with PSA. Through her new awareness, she was able to more effectively help them reduce their PSA. Professor 8's critical insight was crucial, as Woods (1993) explained, for teacher development. As she became more aware, she was more sensitive to her student's needs.

Themes

Through a careful review of each interview three common themes rose to the surface: (a) meeting with students individually and establishing a relationship; (b) building community and trust in the classroom; and (c) placing less emphasis on grades. Other themes emerged such as establishing an informal setting and nurturing and praising students. However, these themes were not identified in as many interviews. The three recurring themes demonstrate an emphasis on the best interests of the student. Throughout the interviews, each of the professors demonstrated their sincere concern that their students suffering with PSA reduce their apprehension and become better public speakers.

The theoretical framework used in this study focused on three public speaking manifestations identified by the state-trait distinction: physiological, cognitive, and behavioral. These three are seen in the common themes identified in this study. First, meeting students individually aims to improve the cognitive abilities of the struggling speakers. When professors meet individually with students struggling with PSA, they aim to effectively change the way they think about their struggles by learning more about them than they would in a classroom setting. They are then able to tailor treatment techniques to the student's personality.

Second, building community and trust aims to treat the behavioral manifestations of PSA. When the classroom environment is more supportive of all students, an apprehensive student will feel they can be themselves and take chances because they won't be judged by their peers. Apprehensive students begin to change their fearful behaviors and become more relaxed and less focused on having to perform to a certain expectation of their classmates. Finally, placing less emphasis on grades treats the physiological manifestations of PSA. Knowing that their overall grade depends on how they perform on a particular speech creates a new level of anxiety for a speaker already suffering from PSA. This anxiety can be manifested in an elevated heart rate, sweating, decreased eye contact, and stammering to name a few. Decreasing the importance of grades frees the mind of the student and subsequently decreases the body's reaction to threatening stimuli.

Meeting students individually. Many of the professors in the study felt that working with students individually gave them an opportunity to individualize treatment to fit the unique needs of each student. Kougl's (1980) observations regarding professors

working one-on-one with apprehensive students set the foundation for how individual counseling sessions are seen today. Kough suggested that “by allowing a private, detailed, oral exchange between the student and the teacher... a student can raise questions and problems that would not be brought up in class” (p. 238). Professor 1 stated that he would first ask what was causing the discomfort. After the student told him what was causing his or her apprehension he assured them that PSA was a common problem. If the symptoms were extreme he would meet with them individually in his office because he believed students were sometimes more comfortable meeting in a quiet place, allowing them to be more open with him. He described his meetings:

Now, if I had somebody that had extreme symptoms I would pull them aside and begin a kind of a systematic counseling. What I did was I would draw from the general experience ideas that I have long used in my approach to anxiety reduction. And essentially there what I would do is I would identify that this is a common problem. (personal communication, October 18, 2011)

Professor 7 also believed meeting one-on-one with students made a significant difference in his teaching. He stated that once he began meeting one-on-one with students who made a C or lower on their speech he felt the students liked him better and were more receptive to his suggestions. He believed that when the students liked him more it created a better classroom environment.

Now something that I’m doing this semester that I haven’t always done with them is I’m calling them into my office-the ones who get C’s on speeches. I’m calling them into my office and we have a little conference. This is kind of new for me. In the writing classes, we conference all the time, but this is new, and it has worked out, and we go over the evaluation sheets and I say, “You understand what the problems are?” You know, that it may be organization or apprehension or you don’t have eye contact. (personal communication, November 10, 2011)

Building community and trust. Creating a positive classroom environment garners trust between the teacher and student. When a positive environment exists a student suffering from PSA may be more likely to take chances because he or she feels

safe in the classroom. They feel that their peers are there to be supportive and will not judge them. Because the speech classroom can be a difficult environment for an apprehensive student Koug1 (1980) suggested “our goal must be to persuade them [apprehensive student] that the class environment is practical and supportive” (p. 235). Koug1 also stated that “strategies must address students’ concerns and must serve to create a positive interpersonal atmosphere, structure, and objective standards” (p. 235). Professor 2 was adamant about building trust through a strong sense of community. He gained valuable experience building a community because his advanced public speaking classes were often very small. He strove to create an environment in which students were not worried about being judged:

They gained a lot of confidence and comfort in that class [advanced public speaking]. They’re not nearly as intimidated and actually look forward to it because they feel they can do it because they’ve done so many speeches because they were such small classes that they did so many speeches that they actually have a sense of their own voice and a strength to their voice. They’re not worried about being judged as public speakers. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

Adler (1980) professed that “most instructors are aware of the critical importance of quickly establishing a climate in which students feel enthusiastic about the course and comfortable enough to express themselves” (p. 218). Professors 3 and 4 also had a strong sense of the value quickly creating a positive environment could have for their PSA students. Professor 3 said he spends “a lot of time and energy” creating and nurturing the community in his classes. He talked more directly about how important it is to him:

That’s my big thing is the classroom culture. I’m sorry, I spend a lot of time and energy cultivating that in all my classes, and so I think that has a lot to do with it, whether or not someone experiences apprehension. It’s just, you know, do they feel like they’re being supported? Do they feel like other classmates are listening or active in the evaluation of this speech? (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

He said breaking the tension early on is contagious: “If you want some sort of a communication environment that makes people feel comfortable and more likely to participate, then you have to spend a little bit more time trying to create that” (personal communication, November 2, 2011). Many times, apprehensive students feel they may not have anything valuable to offer to the classroom discussion because they do not feel comfortable interacting with more talkative students. Adler (1980) suggested that teachers incorporate group bragging early in the semester to help quiet (apprehensive) students gain confidence. Adler said group bragging “helps students become acquainted with each other, builds a positive climate, and increases self-esteem” (p. 219). He suggested that each student should share 3 things that he or she is proud of.

Professor 4 demonstrated her commitment to positive classroom culture development when she stated:

I think the most important thing for any public speaking class to do is to first and always throughout the semester cultivate community because when a public speaker feels that he or she has a supportive community in which to be very vulnerable, and public speaking makes you vulnerable. That’s a huge, huge asset. You have to develop a sense of community. And I do it by playfulness and working on vocal and physical exercises that allow them to become aware of the fun of expressing yourself, expressing vocally and physically. (personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Placing less emphasis on grades. Grades causing anxiety was the final common theme found in the interviews. Professors 5 and 7 shared good insight into how grades played a factor in the level of speaker apprehension in the classes. They viewed grades in different ways though. Professor 5 felt that grades negatively affected her apprehensive students. Professor 7 felt that many of his students used the pursuit of an A as a motivating factor to reduce their apprehension so they were able to deliver a higher quality speech and earn the desired A.

The researcher asked Professor 5 if she felt her videotaping of the speeches caused her students more anxiety. She felt videotaping actually helped her students see they weren't as bad as they thought they were. When she was in the back of the room grading, the students showed more apprehension. She stated, "they tell me that they're more nervous knowing that I'm grading...and [if] it's not graded, it's just a little class exercise, and they say those don't bother them. But, when they know I'm back there grading them, they're really worried about it" (personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Professor 7 said grades were a big motivator with many of his students. He used the nursing majors as an example of "being obsessed with As." He made an interesting observation of students successfully dealing with their anxiety so that they would give a better speech and earn the A they so desperately desired: "because you're desperate for that A, and you will do anything you can" (personal communication, November 10, 2011). He tried to praise his students as often as he could to keep them motivated to earn the highest grades they could by delivering high quality speeches.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

Far too many students suffer from communication apprehension in silence. More often than not, this apprehension (specifically PSA) is detrimental to their academic progress and development. Students suffer from varying levels of apprehension ranging from minor issues to debilitating phobias. Adler (1980) discussed this major issue many years ago when he stated “reticent students suffer academically because they are reluctant to speak up in order to clarify misunderstandings and confusion in their coursework. The prospect of approaching the instructor is so intimidating that failing to grasp the course material seems preferable to asking questions” (p. 219). How as communication professors are we able to help apprehensive students overcome their reluctance to take chances in the classroom?

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how communication professors at four-year private universities help students who exhibit public speaking apprehension learn to cope with their anxiety. The researcher used a narrative inquiry design to interview each participant. This researcher believed the narrative inquiry design provided the best opportunity for in-depth exploration of the experiences of these college professors. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described the full benefits of narrative inquiry when they stated “it demands intense and active listening and giving the narrator full voice” (p. 118). This research was guided by three primary research questions:

Research Question 1: How do communication professors help public speaking students understand public speaking apprehension (PSA)?

Research Question 2: What activities do communication professors select in their classroom to help public speaking students manage public speaking apprehension?

Research Question 3: Are there examples of communication professors observing improved PSA in their classrooms?

Throughout this study, the researcher heard stories from the interviewed professors in which they discussed their experiences helping students understand PSA, manage PSA, and improving their public speaking ability. Each of the professors shared insight that can help other communication professors improve their teaching practices working with students suffering from PSA. The professor's insights were valuable in demonstrating to inspiring teachers how balancing students' needs and classroom goals can create better opportunities for students. Pui-Ian et al. (2005) discussed balance when they stated "the art of balancing student needs and classroom objectives is sometimes a delicate one. Professors who continue to wrestle [reflection] with this balance are likely to find they are touching people's lives in powerful ways" (p. 46).

Five of the eight professors shared a detailed critical incident that told of a time when their work with a student led to learning that impacted their future teaching. The other three professors did not offer a specific time when they were meaningfully impacted. However, they talked about insight they gained through years of experience working with students experiencing PSA. The incidents and insights were critical for teacher development in one way or another. As each professor crafted their teaching

theories and practices, they encountered opportunities to learn from the struggles their students endured.

Many of the critical incidents revolved around a better understanding of how to create the right classroom environment (both inside the formal classroom and outside in one-on-one sessions) for overcoming varying levels of apprehension. When the right environment existed, the professors stated that more students believed they would be supported by their teachers and peers. That support was a key factor in them taking more chances and being willing to confront their fear of public speaking and improving their speaking ability.

The researcher saw three common themes emerge from the interviews: (a) meeting with students individually, (b) building community and trust in the classroom, (c) and placing less emphasis on grades. These themes centered on how the student perceived their relationships with the teacher, their peers, and creating an environment the student felt comfortable in. The professors seemed to experience success reducing PSA when their students were willing to take chances they otherwise would not have thought possible. The three common themes realized in this research closely mirror a similar study completed by Robinson (1997). In his study, Robinson surveyed 730 colleges and universities operating a speech department. Of the 307 participating institutions, Robinson identified the following common themes as being used by at least 75% of the departments to reduce PSA:

Seven techniques were reported used by more than 75% of the respondents: identifying students' fears as normal, 88%; encouraging practice of speeches, 87%; establishing a warm climate in class, 87%; selecting familiar topics, 79%; making evaluations of speeches a positive experience, 78%; becoming audience centered, 75%; and encouraging class participation, 75%. (p. 194)

Discussion

Anytime a speaker suffers from PSA, a treatment protocol must be considered. Once the apprehension becomes a problem, the speaker can begin a regimented process of systematically reducing the cause(s) of the apprehension. One way that professors can engage students in PSA reduction is to refer to public speaking as a communicative effort and not the popular performance effort that many think it should resemble. When students view public speaking as communicating with the audience, they are less likely to experience PSA. Viewing public speaking as a communicative effort was first introduced by Motley (1988) as communication orientation motivation (COM) therapy. Motley (2009) suggested that “higher PSA appears to be closely associated with the performance orientation” (pp. 337-338). Professors can help their students by encouraging them to focus their attention on the content of the speech and not how they deliver the speech.

This research demonstrated that using the COM approach to reduce PSA has the potential to be a useful treatment technique for both professors and students in the communication classroom. Ayers, Hopf, and Peterson (2000) recommended COM therapy as a sound treatment technique because “it does not require a trained therapist, it is easy to use, and it requires less treatment time” (p. 37). It is important to note that none of the professors interviewed were trained therapists. They spoke about treatments they learned through trial and error. COM therapy was also useful to their students because they were limited on time in and out of the classroom and the technique was easy for them to administer. They were essentially able to administer simply by encouraging their apprehensive students to view public speaking as a communicative effort instead of worrying about performing up to a certain expectation.

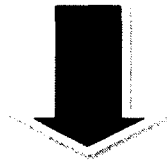
Systematic desensitization (SD) is another PSA treatment that was discussed as a useful technique in this study. Professor 1 referred to his use of SD to treat his students' PSA. He believed his ability to work one-on-one with students to systematically expose them to different aspects of public speaking allowed him to have many instances of success helping students. SD helps the speaker reduce apprehension by systematically exposing him or her to varying aspects of the speech making process. When the student feels comfortable, the professor can then introduce them to more anxiety-inducing stimuli. Riedel (2004) suggested that "a key aspect of SD is the ability it affords someone to mix and match components based on inherent needs of each individual case" (p. 12). Despite its effectiveness as a treatment technique, Robinson (1997) discussed why he believed very few communication departments use SD as a reduction technique: "Only 25% of the departments reported using systematic desensitization as a CA reduction technique that may be due to instructors being unfamiliar with the technique and the proper procedure of execution" (p. 195).

Some experts view apprehension from a communibiological lens, believing PSA is personality based and an ailment that the speaker has little to no control over. Others believe that PSA is based in the state/trait-like family. These experts believe that PSA varies from situation to situation and is brought about by unfamiliarity. Many of the professors interviewed in this study saw PSA as a state/trait-like concern. Professor 1 believed that PSA could be reduced if the student had the willingness to improve. He stated that if the student had a willingness to improve, he or she would take advantage of opportunities to speak. The more they spoke, the more they would gain confidence, and subsequently reduce their level of apprehension. Other professors believed that creating

the right classroom environment helped apprehensive students reduce their level of anxiety. Professor 3 believed that if the classroom environment was negative, apprehensive students would experience more apprehension and be even more reluctant to speak.

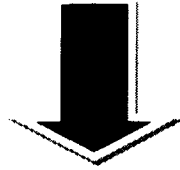
Having a positive classroom dynamic makes a significant difference to the apprehensive student. Several of the interviewed professors talked about how important they believed building a positive classroom environment was to the success of their PSA students. Koughl (1980) suggested that “the teacher’s first task is to begin building a supportive, yet interactive environment. This process begins on the first day with choices about ways to reduce students’ uncertainties and set[ing] the interpersonal tone” (p. 235). Koughl (1980) also recommends “having a detailed syllabus, involving members of the class in discussion, using students’ names, allowing them to sit where they wish, and only calling on students whose hands are raised” (p. 237). The figure below shows the relationship between each of the common themes that surfaced during the interviews. When each of the themes work in cohesion, a better classroom environment is created and students prone to persistent PSA are less likely to experience high levels of apprehension that prohibit them from becoming good public speakers:

Building community and trust in the classroom +

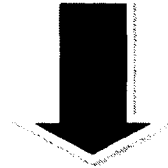


Meeting individually with students who demonstrate PSA symptoms

+



Placing less emphasis on grades =



Reducing PSA,

improving speaking,

and creating a better environment for students to improve as speakers

Figure 4. Thematic Relationships.

In research question 1, the researcher asked how communication professors help public speaking students understand PSA. Throughout the interviews the researcher heard many instances of professors helping students understand the causes of their PSA. When students understood what caused their PSA they were more capable and willing to improve their speaking. Professor 4 shared an example of when she worked with a gifted debater who struggled to verbalize his ideas. He knew what he wanted to say but he wasn't able to get it out in an organized manner when he spoke. She taught him how to breathe correctly and how to relax as he spoke. Once he grasped the concepts she taught

him his speaking finally matched his intellectual capacity and he gave excellent speeches.

Professor 2 discussed how he openly discusses PSA early in the semester so that his classes can have an open discussion about speaking apprehension. He says his students are encouraging to each other and the open discussion puts everyone at ease.

In research question 2, the researcher asked what activities communication professors select in their classroom to help public speaking students manage PSA. Several of the professors spoke extensively of their belief in creating a positive classroom environment. To do this, they had their students do group work. They also attempted to do fun activities that would help the students feel more at ease among their peers. Professor 3 discussed primary tension and how if the teacher didn't create a positive environment the very first day students would mimic negative behaviors because it was the norm. For example, if several students showed a general disinterest in being in the class, other students may feel as though they have to demonstrate the same body language to avoid going against the norm. Bain (2006) believed that the best teachers "do not think only in terms of teaching their discipline; they think about teaching *students* to understand, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate evidence and conclusions" (p. 115).

Professor 7 discussed the importance of the classroom environment. He wanted students to enter the lion's den and confront their fears head on. He emphasized to them how competitive the working world was. He believed his students wouldn't be able to handle the competitive environment if they weren't willing to confront their apprehensions, and those confrontations started with public speaking. Professor 4 started her semester with a vivid imagery speech. The vivid imagery topic allowed the students to recall a memory deeply ingrained as opposed to having to learn new information and

memorize it. She felt that the memorization of new information caused apprehension that was unnecessary early in the semester.

In research question 3, the researcher searched for examples of communication professors observing improved PSA in their public speaking classes. Professor 7 was happy to report that as a result of his one-on-one meetings with low performing speakers, he saw marked improvement in their comfort level with him, and, because of their comfort level with him, he saw fewer outward signs of PSA. Professor 2 talked about one student he saw marked improvement in because he was able to individualize her assignments and slowly build her confidence throughout the semester, tailoring the assignments to her personality. Professor 4 told of the time she worked with a bright debater who had difficulty putting sentences together when speaking in public. After helping him control his breathing in a relaxed setting outside of class, he improved his speaking ability to finally meet his intellectual capabilities.

Recommendations for Professors

Teachers have the ability to make a powerful difference in the lives of students suffering from public speaking apprehension. By nurturing them and creating trust, a teacher can create a belief the student probably didn't have prior to entering the class. When the student feels more comfortable in their environment they seem to be more willing to improve and do what is necessary to realize that improvement. The type of culture present in the classroom sets the tone for how students attempt to seek improvement. In a positive culture, students that are free to make mistakes, learn from their mistakes, and seek lasting improvement through encouragement and nurturing are more likely to see lasting changes in their PSA levels.

First, this researcher believes that teachers should create a positive classroom environment starting the very first day of the semester. Openly communicating so that no one will pass judgment on any one will create a nurturing and open environment in which a PSA student can feel comfortable. Bain (2004) discussed trust in the classroom when he stated “trust and openness produced an interactive atmosphere in which students could ask questions without reproach or embarrassment, and in which a variety of views and ways to understand could be freely discussed” (p. 142). Throughout this research, there were examples of professors creating a positive environment that their students were able to thrive in. They focused on creating a family environment in which the students felt comfortable expressing themselves in a meaningful manner, free from judgment.

Second, reducing the importance of grades in the public speaking classroom is suggested as a way of alleviating some of the apprehension students experience when they feel they have to perform at a certain level to earn the grade they desire. Lin et al. (2003) suggested that a “heavy emphasis on grades is likely to reduce motivation for further learning and may even result in poorer achievement by students who are most motivated by grades (as cited in McKeachie and Svinicki, 2006, pp. 125-126). McKeachie and Svinicki also suggested that one thing teachers “should look for when using grades is how valid the measures to generate them were” (p. 127).

Third, research demonstrates that seeing public speaking as a performance (COM therapy) creates unnecessary anxiety. When the speaker believes the speech is an opportunity to communicate information to the audience they often experience less pressure to perform to a certain level and thus experience less apprehension. As stated previously in the review of literature, Motley (2009) suggested that “most public

speaking audiences are much more interested in understanding the speech than in scrutinizing or evaluating the speaker, and most audiences prefer a casual conversational style over a formal oratorical style (p. 339). COM theory assumes the speaker will be more successful focusing attention on the content of the speech and away from the delivery. The most important outcome in the public speaking class is that students learn how to deliver an organized speech while learning to feel more comfortable presenting their ideas in front of an audience. Professor 6 believed that students should be graded on improvement and not ability.

Fourth, establishing a personal relationship with their professor is crucial to the success a student with apprehension will experience throughout the semester. When they sense that the teacher cares, an apprehensive student is more likely to take chances to improve. Professor 7 stated he perceived his students liked him better once he started to meet with them one-on-one when they were struggling. They saw him in a different setting. Meeting one-on-one allowed him to personalize his advice for each need. When professors establish a personal relationship, their students will be more willing to take chances because of the trust they have for their professors. Bain (2006) succinctly discussed the positive effect of trust in the classroom when he said “professors who established a special trust with their students often displayed a kind of openness in which they might, from time to time, talk about their intellectual journey, its ambitions, triumphs, frustrations, and failures, and encourage students to be similarly reflective and candid” (p. 141). Professor 1 believed a student’s willingness was key to their improvement. He believed when a student was willing to improve, they put in the extra work necessary to reduce their apprehension and become a better speaker.

Fifth, if a teacher can create an enjoyable and imaginative classroom, he or she will create the type of environment that students will thrive in. Many apprehensive students enter the public speaking classroom with great trepidation. When they see that they can have fun creating speeches with their friends they think less often about their anxieties. Professor 4 believed in creating a fun environment that students enjoyed being a part of to reduce the pressure they felt to perform for the audience. She wanted her students to communicate their information to the audience in a professional and organized manner. It is also useful to uphold a nurturing and playful attitude that allows the students to develop at their own pace. Professors can see the nurturing style as a mentoring relationship the student feels supported in. Professor 8 found that mentoring her debate students created an environment that allowed them to improve their apprehension.

Finally, teachers should talk about PSA with their students more often and begin the process of normalizing it. Too often, teachers are reluctant to discuss the subject because of its sensitive nature. Discussing PSA can be embarrassing for students suffering from it and boring for those that have no issues with it. PSA is also a sensitive subject so teachers have to be careful not to make suffering students any more uncomfortable than they already are. Professors can talk about PSA in the syllabus and reserve a specific day during the semester to define PSA, and discuss treatments. It is important for professors to define situational PSA so that all students understand that everyone at some point can suffer from PSA and the subject is important to all speakers. When professors are open about PSA, dialogue will lead to better understanding of what it is and how it can be treated.

Recommendations for Future Research

First, researchers should study how professors in other academic disciplines help students deal with PSA. This study focused only on PSA in communication classrooms. PSA is commonly seen as a communication and psychology discipline. Because it is so widely discussed in the communication classroom students often feel more accepted despite their struggles. What happens in the English, mathematics, biology, or business classroom where the apprehensive student does not have immediate access to the resources necessary to improve their PSA?

Second, another worthwhile study would center specifically on the benefits of treatment techniques in the classroom. How would students benefit from COM therapy in the public speaking classroom? This researcher suggests that future research should focus on what treatment techniques work best and why professors believe certain treatments are more successful than others.

Third, some universities have developed a special class to treat students with PSA. Small universities are often not able to offer such classes because of lack of resources. Robinson (1997) suggested that the reasons for small universities not offering a special PSA class included “the limited size of the institutions and/or departments and CA [PSA] is handled by other services on campus” (p. 190). Future research should focus on whether special PSA classes can be beneficial for small universities.

Fourth, this researcher recommends that future research focus on how skills training can be a useful PSA reduction technique in the classroom. All teachers are engaging in skills training at some level by teaching the foundations of public speaking. Every time a student engages in speaking, he or she is improving their skill level to some

extent. Robinson (1997) reported that “instructors are concentrating on a skills training approach to teach the necessary speaking skills and to help students prepare for the speaking experience” (p. 195). Researchers should openly seek information from experienced professors that will shed understanding on the benefits of skills training.

Fifth, researchers should also interview communication professors at public universities. This research focused on private universities with smaller class sizes (fewer than 25). It was believed that small classes allowed professors the ability to work one-on-one with apprehensive students. It was also believed that professors would have an easier time identifying students with PSA when they were able to personally get to know them. How would a professor apply PSA principles in a larger classroom? What insight would a professor at a public university offer regarding identifying and nurturing a student who showed the manifestations of PSA?

Sixth, future research should focus on transferability. How will students transfer what they learn outside the classroom? If students reduce their speaking anxiety through work in the classroom will their reduced anxiety levels remain once they leave the comforts of the class? Researchers should interview students after they have finished their communication classes and ask them to share their experiences speaking outside their classroom comfort zone. This researcher recommends that future studies focus on a small sampling of communication students that have been identified by professors as having high PSA at one point during their academic careers. The insight gained from these interviews could be rich.

Finally, future research should look at the effect negative experiences have on storytelling. Merriam and Associates (2002) suggested that adequate engagement in the data collection can be accomplished by “collecting data such that the data becomes ‘saturated’” (p. 31). They believe “this may involve seeking *discrepant* or *negative* cases of the phenomenon” (p. 31). Future researchers should focus on interventions that didn’t work. Do professors have stories of interventions that did not work for the student or that caused the student to suffer from higher levels of apprehension than they already had?

Conclusion

Public speaking apprehension has been an important communication topic for many decades. As researchers attempt to find the smoking gun that will cure all forms and levels of PSA, professors contribute valuable classroom anecdotes to the body of knowledge. The experiences these professors share with us provides hope that, with careful planning, a teacher can create an open and accommodating environment that will encourage the most apprehensive of students that they can be good speakers. Behind many successful public speakers are stories of an encouraging teacher who helped them believe that they could reduce their apprehension level and become a more confident and capable speaker. This researcher encourages all communication professors to help students believe in themselves through constant nurturing and guidance. Empowerment and self-realization are potent tools that help anxious students overcome public speaking apprehension. The subject of public speaking apprehension isn’t just for communication professors. It is so important and wide reaching that it should be known by all teachers. PSA affects students in all disciplines. Every academic discipline requires some level of public speaking proficiency. Manifestations of PSA are seen as early as elementary

school. With that, it is important that teacher's education include training on working with apprehensive students. The better equipped teachers of all disciplines are to help students, the better chance apprehensive students have of improving their speaking ability.

This researcher has learned through his teaching experience that making public speaking fun helps alleviate the anxiety many apprehensive students bring to the classroom. He has learned through trial and error to de-emphasize the importance of grades. As with any class, grades are a necessary benchmark of performance. This researcher believes that using speech grades merely as a way of evaluating individual improvement is much more beneficial than grading based on a performance expectation. Students benefit from knowing they are not being judged on their ability because they may not have the best public speaking ability at the moment. However, through practice and a willingness to improve, they may one day have a greater ability to speak at a high level.

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Appendix A

Participation Invite Letter

Dear Dr. McGrath,

My name is Derek Riedel, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. I am seeking your valued participation in my dissertation research—a qualitative study investigating how communication professors at four-year private universities help students, who exhibit public speaking apprehension, learn to cope with their anxiety. This research has been approved by the University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board. The IRB approval number is: 11-10-003. This research is guided by three main questions:

1. How do communication professors help public speaking students understand public speaking apprehension (PSA)?
2. What activities to communication professors select in their classroom to help public speaking students manage public speaking apprehension?
3. Are there examples of communication professors observing improved PSA in public speaking students?

The results of this research may be of benefit to you and your institution in transferability and credibility of findings among a purposeful sample. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, I would like to learn about your experiences and knowledge working with students who have difficulties communicating in public. Narrative inquiry focuses on discovering and understanding critical events. In this case, the inquiry is focused on public speaking anxiety.

Interviews with you are the primary means of learning about your critical events with students and how these critical events have shaped your teaching. I will ensure you have the opportunity to review transcripts and make any corrections and additions you may see fit.

Your participation is voluntary and I thank you in advance. I hope you will choose to participate. I am attaching the informed consent letter to this invitation. If you agree to participate, please return the signed copy of the informed consent in the first class postage paid envelope at your earliest opportunity. I will return a copy of the informed consent signed by me.

Sincerely,

Derek J. Riedel
University of the Incarnate Word

Enclosures

Appendix B

Letter of Informed Consent

1. Title: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING HOW COLLEGE COMMUNICATION PROFESSORS ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH PUBLIC SPEAKING APPREHENSION

2. Conducted By:

Researcher: Derek Riedel, Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership,
Dreeben School of Education, University of the Incarnate Word, 210-829-2761

Advisor: Dr. Dorothy Ettling, Dissertation Director, Doctoral Faculty, Dreeben
School of Education, University of the Incarnate Word, 210-829-2764

You are being asked to participate in a qualitative research study. This form provides you with important information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. In addition, you can stop your participation at any time for any reason by simply telling the researcher. Your decision to cease being a subject will in no way affect your relationship with UIW nor will it in the future.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover how communication professors at four-year private universities help students, who exhibit public speaking apprehension, learn to cope with their anxiety.

4. Guiding Research Questions for the study:

How do communication professors help public speaking students understand public speaking apprehension (PSA)?

How do communication professors select the activities to use in their classrooms to help students with PSA?

How do communication professors help students exhibiting PSA improve their public speaking performance?

5. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Participate in interviews with the researcher to be scheduled at your institution.

6. Time:

Interviews will require approximately 60 minutes of your time. Any follow up interviews, if needed, could require up to 30 minutes.

7. Risks and Benefits:

It is possible that the interviewee upon answering questions may feel uncomfortable which can lead to stress. All possible efforts will be taken to insure your confidentiality.

The potential benefits of the study include deriving a better understanding of public speaking apprehension and how that understanding is used to help students communicate effectively.

8. Confidentiality:

Interviews and any other identifiable data will be recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review your portion of the transcription and correct or amend responses. The recorded data will be kept in a locked and secure location for your protection. After the study has been completed, this recorded data will be destroyed in a reasonable period not to exceed five years.

The results of the study will be consolidated, further protecting the anonymity of your institution. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant.

9. Compensation: No compensation will be provided.

10. Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask. If you have questions later or want additional information, please call:

Derek Riedel Phone: 210-355-8535, Email: riedel@uiwtx.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact:
School of Graduate Studies and Research, University of the Incarnate Word, Phone: 210-829-3157

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name of
Participant: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.