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An exploratory study of the relationship between communication apprehension and personal construct theory in the context of a public speaking fundamentals course

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION
APPREHENSION AND PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF A
PUBLIC SPEAKING FUNDAMENTALS COURSE

A Thesis

Presented to the
Department of Communication
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Linda Wilkins

December 1987

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Table of Contents

Chapters	Page
1. Introduction	1
Literature Review	3
Personal Construct Theory	3
Communication Apprehension	8
Treatment for Communication Anxiety	13
Systematic Desensitization	13
Communication Skills Training	16
Cognitive Restructuring	19
Cognitive Complexity and Communication Apprehension	24
A Public Speaking Fundamentals Course	28
Communication Apprehension in a Public Speaking Fundamentals Course	30
Personal Construct Theory and the Public Speaking Fundamentals Course	32
Purpose of the Study	37
2. Methodology and Procedures	44
Subjects	44
Instruments	44
Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA)	45
Initial Anxieties and Goals Questionnaire (IAGO)	45
Anxiety Self-Statement Rating	46
Goal Self-Statement Rating	47
Student Inventory Sheet (SIS)	49
Reflective Anxieties, Attitudes, and Goals Questionnaire (RAAGQ)	51
Anxiety Post Self-Statement Rating	51
Attitude Post Self-Statement Rating	52
Procedures	54
Pretest	54
Posttest	54
Instrument Validation	55
3. Results	57
4. Discussion	64
Hypothesis 1	64
Hypothesis 2	65
Hypothesis 3	67
Hypothesis 4	68
Implications	69
Limitations	73
Recommendations for Future Research	75
Appendix A	77
Appendix B	78
Appendix C	79

Appendix D

80

References

81

Chapter 1

Introduction

Many psychologists, philosophers, and educators agree that individual self-concepts develop, in large part, through perceptions gained from communicative transactions. If the nature of the transaction changes, perceptions can change, and self-concept can be altered. Self-concept combines with many influences including cultural heritage, environment, and past experiences to form the basis of an individual's unique communicative and behavior patterns.

There is general agreement with Phillips (1980b) that there are people in this world who have a great deal of difficulty with communicative transactions involving others because they lack necessary skills, are fearful of communicating, see no advantage in communicating, and/or have self-concepts which preclude communicating. If a person has difficulty communicating, for whatever reason, communicative anxiety is likely to develop.

Different settings or contexts for communicative acts produce different levels of anxiety for an individual. Perhaps the most stressful context for most people is public speaking--when an individual speaks in front of a large group of people. Public speaking anxiety has been the focus of much discussion and research by communication professionals in recent years. Much of this effort has been

directed at attempting to identify people who are highly anxious in public speaking situations and to develop methods of helping these people control their anxiety.

Diagnosing public speaking anxiety requires a precise understanding of the disfunction's manifestations, causes, and the situations in which it occurs. In addition, the dysfunction must be perceived as a significant problem by the anxious individual so that the individual will be motivated to participate in a treatment program.

Almost all colleges and universities have basic public speaking courses and, for many students at these institutions, successful completion of the basic speech course is a requirement for graduation. A goal for these courses, obviously, is to make students better public speakers--the implication is that students' excessive speech anxiety must be eliminated or controlled.

Although much research has been conducted within the public speaking course arena, little focus has been put on how the student interprets the environment during the process of public speaking. The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of the changing process of students' anxieties, attitudes, and goals during their participation in a public speaking fundamentals course. Assumptions underlying this investigation will be based on George Kelly's perspective put forth in the Personal Construct Theory (1955).

Literature Review

Personal Construct Theory

While many theories in the development of cognitive psychology recognize the individual as a thinking/feeling entity, most emphasize an isolated view of either the cognitive or emotional aspect of development, failing to make clear how the two relate. Problems surface when the cognitive and emotional elements are united during a change. Personal Construct Theory (PCT), however, provides an integrated view of how an individual uniquely processes an event based upon the individual's own previous assumptions. Moreover, how the individual perceives an event can be subject to change. Emotion becomes just another construction during change.

PCT was developed by George Kelly (1955) to help individuals know and understand their world. When individuals interpret their strategical positions of events, they have an unlimited wealth of options from which to choose. The options can range from claiming to be victims of the real nature of things to assuming total responsibility for one's behavioral choices. Kelly stated that the freedom gained from the control exercised in the construction process depended upon the extent to which the events from one's prior assumptions were construed,

anticipated, and then directed (Kelly, 1955).

The Personal Construct Theory is formally stated in one fundamental postulate: "Persons' processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which they anticipate events" (Kelly, 1955, p.46), and it is elaborated by eleven corollaries which will be presented and discussed later in this review.

While the universe may be real, each individual's perception of reality varies in relation to that individual's own construction system. Experiences are construed in ways limited only by the individual's interpretive systems (Landfield and Leitner, 1980). Kelly employed the metaphor "man-the-scientist" in his design to emphasize that individuals have their own theories about the world, as well as their own expectations.

In order to predict, explain, and understand their world, persons erect systems of personal constructs or cognitive "templates" through which they interpret events. To represent an event by means of a construct is to make an inference. It is to construe the event in such a way that it could happen again. According to Kelly, a construct is fundamentally a bipolar dimension of judgment (e.g., good/bad, intelligent/stupid, interesting/dull). These constructs are systematically organized and interconnected, permitting inferences to be drawn and anticipations concerning future events to be made. Only a certain range

of events will "fit" for anticipating. Construing is channelized by anticipation, not by the given nature of the events (Mancuso & Adams-Webber, 1982).

Constructs are the discriminations which individuals make, not the labels attached to them. Naturally, no two events or people are identical; it is only the individuals' abilities to construct which allow them to see repetitive themes in their environment. The use of constructs creates patterns of similarity. Discriminations isolate and/or associate events into patterns. According to Kelly, these patterns lead to segmenting one's reality, and it is these interpreted segments of the past that are used to predict future events.

In this process of construction and reconstruction, the person actively tries to encompass his inner and outer worlds, psychologically, by means of personal dimensions of awareness anchored by contrasts in meaning and at different levels of verbal awareness. These dimensions of awareness, or personal constructs, are formed by the processes of differentiation and integration; that is, the ways in which events are similar and different from others. The person experiences his life by noting series of events from which he abstracts the recurring themes and their contrasts. This dual process of abstracting and

contrasting defines construing....a process which may encompass what we know as feelings, values, and behavior (Landfield & Leitner, 1980, p.5).

Kelly emphasized the interrelated inclusiveness of the Personal Construct System. Understanding one's world is a transformation from the individual's interpretation of past experiences and observations, so new ideas, experiences, and observations continually challenge and elaborate the personal construct system. This system consists of superordinate and subordinate constructs (i.e., prioritization); the superordinate constructs have more implication and a wider range of convenience than their subordinate constructs. This pyramidal structure also may be used as a rationale for making choices; the most superordinate constructs are the most relevant, but all are interrelated. "This evolution of personal constructs into a personal construct system allows the construer to minimize incompatibilities and inconsistencies" (Landfield & Leitner, 1980, p.8).

Individuals try to understand the world by eliminating chaos, or they move in the direction that will provide greater meaning and greater possibilities for anticipating events. When the individual is faced with a novel experience, he may have difficulty applying a relevant construct since initial construing is done through permeable

constructs. The impermeable constructs reject various elements of the event on the basis of their newness. In cases where any or all of the situation is anticipated with dread or uncertainty, the most common reaction to a situation of this nature is avoidance. The individual may choose to avoid the novel event because it may force the application of a "template" that does not fit into the construction system.

Since knowing all about the universe and everything within it is impossible, Landfield and Leitner (1980) contend that invalidation and reconstruction are a part of each person's life. While avoidance adds no benefits, "the experience of being 'wrong' is educationally as important as the experience of being 'right'" (Bannister & Fransella, 1986, p.77). Educational growth is not just the accumulation of data, but the organizing and developing of an increasingly complex structure of related concepts.

According to Bannister and Fransella (1986), the direction in which an individual moves will seem to elaborate his construct system. This elaboration may take the form of definition (validating elements which have already been construed) or extension (reaching out to increase the range of the construct system by exploring new areas that are only partially understood). This does not suggest that the process is always successful. "We can over-define to a point where we suffer the death of ultimate

boredom, circling in a ritual manner around the same area, or we can over-extend the system and suffer death by ultimate chaos" (Bannister & Fransella, 1986, p.13). Nevertheless, change always is an alternative and it is relevant to the accuracy of the individual's anticipations. Since individuals are continually changing, they cannot be categorized or labeled into stages. Development implies progression toward an end product. PCT maintains only meaningful change, with the individual changing from moment to moment. According to Kelly, the changes occur rapidly or slowly in relation to experience.

With PCT it is possible to gain a meaningful picture of a person's construct system. Interacting with another person does not imply that the construct systems are the same, only that one can form a meaningful picture of the other's understanding of an event and, therefore, understand how to help change or otherwise influence the other's construing.

Communication Apprehension

One of the major obstacles faced by many students in public speaking fundamentals classes is communication apprehension. Such apprehension can vary in form and in level of intensity.

Although communication apprehension (CA) has constituted a major concern to social scientists for the

past 20 years, widespread agreement concerning what constitutes communication apprehension has not been established.

Perhaps the most active CA researcher in the speech communication discipline has been James McCroskey (1977, 1980, and 1984). McCroskey (1984, p.13) has defined communication apprehension as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons." According to McCroskey (1984), communication apprehension can be conceptualized as being on a continuum which ranges from trait characteristics to state characteristics. Traitlike CA is a relatively enduring personality type orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety of contexts. Statelike CA, on the other hand, is a relatively enduring personality type orientation toward communication in a given type of context.

Glaser (1981) described the global construct of communication apprehension and avoidance involving anxiety predispositions toward a complex communication problem. Reticence, communication apprehension, shyness, social anxiety, and unwillingness to communicate all claim unique orientations under the multidimensional broad construct of communication apprehension and avoidance. Glaser noted overlapping of symptoms and causes: "Communication apprehension and avoidance is multidimensional in nature and

contains cognitive, behavioral, and physiological discomfort that interact to produce varying forms of this complex communication dysfunction" (Glaser, 1981, p.321).

Burgoon and Hale (1983a) support the view of multiple distinctions in predispositions toward communication apprehension, and label the global construct as communication reticence. Burgoon and Hale acknowledge the overlapping of the predispositions as follows: "...they share in common the affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations of anxiety about communicating, avoidance of social encounters, reticence with interchange and negative attitudes towards aspects of the communication process" (Burgoon & Hale, 1983a, p.238). According to Burgoon and Hale, communication apprehension is a multifaceted construct, in which the mode of communication, personality type, and attitude toward communication all are contributing factors that trigger various antecedents attributed to the communication apprehension syndrome. Reticence along one dimension does not equal reticence along another dimension.

Kelly (1982) states there may be few behavioral manifestations of differences between the four major constructs of communication apprehension, reticence, unwillingness to communicate, and shyness. The overlapping similarities, according to Kelly, may appear due to several factors operating simultaneously. "Individuals differ in regard to their level of anxiety about communication, to the

situations that elicit that anxiety, in the amount of avoidance they exhibit, and in the statements that they make about themselves and communication" (Kelly, 1982, p.112). The individual's anxiety and predispositions to situations in which they are presented are interrelated. Significant problems could develop by labeling as if the predispositions were independent of one another. The mislabeling and misidentification problems could be worse than the anxiety problems.

Biggers and Masterson (1984) concurred that there are many obstacles facing the conceptualization and operationalism of the anxiety construct. The independent variable (situation) and the dependent variable (anxiety) are the key issues. The situation, in operational terms, is a unique organization of persons, things, and actions as perceived by the organism. The situation is difficult to manipulate and measure due to the complexity of the variables involved. According to Biggers and Masterson (1984), a person with high trait apprehension will experience more anxiety across situations than will a person with lower trait apprehension because more importance is placed on the situation.

Since emotion is the primary reaction to any stimulus, it may be possible to describe communication situations in terms of emotions elicited by them. The situation becomes a significant factor of influence to the highly apprehensive

individual, according to McCroskey and Beatty (1984).

Behavior is not the central criterion appropriate for determining the validity of an anxiety trait. Rather behavior is the product of interaction of predispositional traits and responses to aspects of a given situation in which the behavior is to be performed.... (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984, p.79).

The construct of trait communication apprehension functions as a predispositional characteristic toward future events partly as a result of a particular combination of an individual's past emotional experiences. It is not uncommon for an individual to conceive an entire novel event in a negative manner simply by reflecting on one negative aspect of the situation. However, Brownell and Katula (1984) reported that a person's anxiety level changes over time in a given situation. In public speaking fundamentals research, Brownell and Katula found that subjects reported higher levels of anxiety immediately prior to or during the first two minutes of the speech experience. "People often have increased speech anxiety because they have not realized that, when handled properly, it is a momentary experience" (Brownell & Katula, 1984, p.248). It would seem likely that any association or attachment of the semantic label 'apprehensive' with a beginning speech student suffering from a fluctuating sensation of novel anticipation could

develop into a vicariously learned situation of dread which could develop into anxiety predispositions for other speaking experiences.

Beatty, Behnke, and McCallum (1978) view communication apprehension as an anxiety trait. Anxiety is not a stable trait, but varies in levels and intensity from situation to situation. In the case of beginning speaking apprehension, levels and intensity are determined, at least in part, by the anticipated speech performance.

Treatment for Communication Anxiety

Treatment methods for the various syndromes of communication anxiety predispositions can be classified into three major areas: systematic desensitization, communication skills training, and cognitive restructuring behavior therapies.

Systematic Desensitization. Systematic desensitization is based upon the principle of "reciprocal inhibition" (Wolpe, 1958). Since it is impossible to be relaxed and tense at the same time, by pairing aversive stimuli with relaxation, anxiety will be reduced. Teaching people to be relaxed in the presence of anxiety over a period of time further enhances performances by inhibiting the anxiety response (Glaser, 1981). While there are studies clearly reporting the success of individual programs offering systematic desensitization to reduce anxieties associated

with public speaking (Hoffman & Sprague, 1982; McCroskey, Ralph, & Barrick, 1970; Meichenbaum, Gilmore, Barnard, & Fedoravicius, 1971; Paul, 1965; Pedersen, 1980), there is evidence that it is likely to be effective for only those anxieties of dysfunctional communication resulting from the conditions of response inhibition. It does not appear to be useful to those people who, for example, lack communication or social skills, or those who have misconceived perceptions of themselves, the situation, or their capabilities. It does not appear to be useful to those, as investigated by Friedrich and Goss (1984), who are not motivated to use the skills they have acquired through the years.

Glaser (1981) noted inconsistency in the results of systematic desensitization treatment programs given for public speaking anxiety. Glaser stated that the difficulty is in the interpretation of the results of treatment using only the self-report measure as the dependent variable. According to Glaser, systematic desensitization is a laboratory treatment and may not provide a generalization to other real life communication situations. Kelly (1982) and Glaser (1981) questioned the limited subject selection criteria used for placing candidates into the systematic desensitization treatment programs.

Auerbach (1981) suggested that the systematic desensitization program makes implications to the person that "your fear shows your head is defective, so we will

give you mental exercises to fix it (Auerbach, 1981, p.107). In addition, Auerbach suggested that the success or failure of the systematic desensitization mode of treatment depends, for the most part, on the therapist's personality, language, and the length of time spent with the subject individually.

Although many studies indicated improvement with the systematic desensitization program, there is conclusive evidence that it works better in combination with other modes of anxiety-reducing treatment. The individual is benefited by the presence of others (Paul & Shannon, 1966). Group desensitization treatments were superior to both individual insight treatment and the attention-placebo program. However, Paul found the most improvement within a group that experienced the combination of the group desensitization treatment followed by group discussion. Glaser (1981), along with Meichenbaum (1977), also advocated combination of treatments. Recent trends in cognitive restructuring used in conjunction with systematic desensitization assume that if a person can relax in the face of aversive stimuli, while replacing the negative self-statements with positive self-statements, the person's level of anxiety will decrease as she or he gains more control of the situation.

In a 1982 survey conducted by Hoffman and Sprague which examined the various treatment programs operating at

universities, the majority of those responding revealed that they utilize a combination of treatment methods. No combination of treatment methods was preferred. However, over half reported using some form of systematic desensitization as one of the components.

Communication Skills Training. Anxiety can result from lack of speaking skills or from fear grounded in insufficient speaking experience (Neer & Kircher, 1984). Removing or alleviating the anxiety for these people will do nothing more than reduce the incentive to gain more skills by allowing an unskillful performance which results in negative payoffs and a return of the anxiety (Phillips, 1984). A little healthy tension is an asset to the performance of any speaker. Performance tension, according to Phillips (1980a), gets the individual into the mindset for a quality performance. Stage actors and athletes consider this characteristic to be an important component in a skillful performance. Only when the skills exist is it feasible to remove the anxiety.

Phillips (1984) explained the concept of "reticence" as a condition of communication avoidance due to inadequate communication skills. These people know what they know and what they know is that they cannot communicate effectively. A treatment program to alleviate reticence was proposed by Phillips. He believed that a reticent person could have problems in (a) identifying situations in which

communication could make a difference, (b) defining his/her communication goals, (c) analyzing persons and situations, (d) selecting ideas and putting them into logical sequence, (e) choosing appropriate words to express the ideas, (f) speaking clearly enough to be understood and with appropriate nonverbal communication, and (g) accurately perceiving the level of success achieved and making adaptation in communication in the case of failure to achieve goals (Phillips & Sokoloff, 1979). Treatment for the reticent must go beyond the alleviation of anxiety (Phillips, 1984). In programs which focus on instruction, goal setting, behavioral rehearsal, in vivo assignments, and feedback, improvements have been observed by the trainers, the students, and outside observers (Metzger, 1976).

In a study reported by Kelly (1984), some incongruencies in the conceptualization of problems within the public speaking context of communication skills were pointed out. Most research places the focus of the problem on internal anxiety that produces outward manifestations of behavioral disruptions. "Anxiety about or difficulty with public speaking can be the result of internal anxiety-producing behavioral disruptions or behavioral disruptions due to lack of skills" (Kelly, 1984, p.192). Kelly further delineated the problem of skills deficiencies, stating that the cause-effect of these outward manifestations could be one or a combination of many

relevant variable(s). Argyle (1981) identified eight of the relevant variables which could present behavioral disruptions to the speaker. These are: (a) the ability to perceive another accurately; (b) the ability to take the role of another; (c) the ability to communicate one's attitudes and emotions nonverbally; (d) the ability to provide others with clear reinforcement and reward; (e) the ability to plan goals and modify behavior as necessary while pursuing those goals; (f) the ability to send signals that accurately present one's role, status, and other aspects of identity; (g) the ability to analyze situations and their rules in order to adapt behavior; and (h) the ability to make utterances that fit into the orderly sequence in interaction.

Phillips (1980b, 1984) maintained that the principal causal element of reticence is inadequate communication skills knowledge. Communication involves subprocessing areas requiring three distinct abilities: (a) the ability to conceive a message that is adapted to the audience and situation, (b) the ability to carry out the plan as it was intended, and (c) the ability to evaluate one's own performance to make modifications in the plan for future attempts.

The effectiveness of skills training as a treatment of public speaking dysfunctional communication has not been well established. Kelly (1984) suggested that the focus has

been too narrow and has not looked beyond the reduction of anxiety into other aspects of skills training.

Although it seems clear that skills training does produce reductions in speech anxiety, it is unlikely that just because an individual feels less anxious and is observed to be less anxious that he or she is an effective public speaker. Skills training must focus on other behavioral components of public speaking that are related to effective performance (Kelly, 1984, p.202).

Cognitive Restructuring. Assuming that most apprehensive people have the basic skills necessary to function competently but suffer from irrational negative self-statements, cognitive restructuring focuses on having the subject take control of the situation. Self-control represents a conscious decision to achieve a desired outcome determined by the individual. Cognitive restructuring involves identifying irrational self-statements, evaluating the situation, delaying impulsive actions through conscious thought and language, and replacing the irrational self-statements with rational self-statements that are appropriate for the situation and in accord with the predetermined goal. Cognitive behavioral treatments have been developed to assist individuals in overcoming the habits of illogical reasoning without fear of devastation

caused by irrational beliefs or expectations. This type of behavior modification treatment is based on the rational emotive therapy (RET) principles of Ellis (1980). The popularity and effectiveness of this type of treatment and its variations have been confirmed in communication and psychology journals. Comparing the RET treatment to no treatment in the area of public speaking apprehension, Trexler and Karst (1972) showed clearly how effective this mode of treatment can be.

A similar treatment which directs the individual in managing cognitions by cultivating more positive self-statements is the cognitive modification program developed by Meichenbaum (1977). The monitoring of an individual's internal dialogue through self-observation indicates which negative self-statements need to be replaced with positive self-statements. Generally, increasing the individual's repertoire of positive self-statements expands the scope of possibilities for managing effective communication. This form of management helps the individual manifest positive behavior by developing more facilitative self-talk (Glogower, Fremouw, & McCroskey, 1978; Gross & Fremouw, 1982; Meichenbaum et al., 1971).

It has been demonstrated that skills training, systematic desensitization, and cognitive restructuring all are successful, but only when the cause matches the treatment. The clinician's optimal goal is to match the

client with the effective therapy for the effect (Meichenbaum et al., 1971). However, Brownell and Katula (1984) suggest that treatments rarely address the individual communication malady. In addition, the conditions might improve without treatment.

The problem remains--if the predispositions are distinct constructs, they are not interchangeable. Using the wrong treatment on the communication dysfunction or mislabeling a predisposition might make conditions more debilitating (Cleavenger, 1984). According to the survey conducted by Hoffman and Sprague (1982) and Foss (1982), universities do not tailor the treatment to the individual problems of the students. If a student has been designated as apprehensive in the public speaking fundamentals class, it is possible that several conditions may be operating at once. Labeling or categorizing the student at that time may complicate the predispositions beyond repair (Kelly, 1984). "Unless a student perceives a problem and considers it important, it is unlikely that s/he will be a motivated participant in a treatment program" (Kelly, 1982, p.102). In many cases, the treatment program that is used by universities is designated only by the skills of the clinician available (Foss, 1982).

Evaluating the conditions of communication dysfunctions is a complicated issue and can present major problems. Exploring relationships between predispositions and

behaviors argues for the use of more than one measurement of communication apprehension (Burgoon & Hale, 1983a). Differences are revealed among the various measures in terms of a number of characteristics, audiences, motivations, etc. (Daly, 1978a). Although the overt manifestations of communication apprehension often appear as similar avoidance behavior, this anxiety can be a result of one or several communication dysfunctioning causes (Glaser, 1981). "Since speech trait anxiety represents a predisposition to experience anxiety in communication settings, perhaps a better way to assess such tendencies is to measure individuals' state responses in several communication situations and over a considerable time period" (Beatty, Behnke, & McCallum, 1978, p.189).

Cognitive Complexity and Communication Apprehension

In a study involving memory and information processing, Garromone (1984) found that a person may attend to and encode only aspects of information that are particularly relevant to judgment, goals, and/or decisions the subject expects to make. Zajonc (1960) attributed this activation of specific cognitive structures to intensity and relevance of the individual's goal. Roloff and Berger (1982) noted an assumption that could be made when considering the process of social cognition or how people think about people. Social cognition involves the thought process that is focused on human interactions. Assuming that people are motivated to understand their environment, they will remove uncertainties by making generalizations. Communication constitutes behavior represented by these thoughts. Experience sharpens the detectors and one's awareness, and expands one's repertoire by adding additional constructs or elements of impressions which compare likenesses and differences in an inclusive manner. Research reported by Powers, Jordan, and Street (1979) indicated that this experience has a significant impact upon individual decoding behaviors relative to other communication attempts.

Additional impact on a person's decoding behavior, according to Delia, Clark, and Switzer (1979), is a person's

general interest in people. It then becomes reasonable to assume, according to the findings of Mayo and Crockett (1964), that if one has an interest in an area, more time is spent focusing on that area of interest. Thus more complex sets of relationships are developed among constructs, which in turn develops the ability to differentiate among social cognitions. This ability is accompanied by a high degree of interconnectedness among the constructs. The individual is able to discriminate persons, objects, and events within the environment more clearly without generalizations or stereotyping. The individual, in other words, might ascribe multiple meanings to an interpersonal construct due to the acquisition of a broader communication repertoire.

One who possesses a broad communication repertoire, the requisite skills to choose among available communication options in a particular situation, and the ability to implement selected communication behaviors effectively is a competent communicator, according to Lustig and King (1980), O'Keefe and Sypher (1981), and Powers, Jordan, and Street (1979). Rubin and Henzl (1984) define communication competence as an impression formed about a communicator by other people. Competence (like credibility) can be manifested in behavior such as communication skills, knowledge, and motivation. "Cognitively complex persons are more skilled at taking the other's perspective and,

therefore, should be more effective in sending and receiving messages" (Rubin & Henzl, 1984, P.264).

The ability of a cognitively complex person to manage apprehension more easily than a cognitively simple person can is well documented in the communication journals. The cognitively complex person has less communication apprehension than does a cognitively simple person (Tichenor, 1981). Cates, Clark, and Dodd (1984) reported that cognitively complex individuals suffered less apprehension and were less dogmatic than the cognitively simple subjects. Leadership dimensions were evident and significantly stable among cognitively complex subjects (Weiss & Adler, 1981). People with highly developed social perspective-taking skills are more effective in adapting persuasive messages to recipients. According to Clark and Delia (1977), the cognitively complex person has more highly developed social perspective-taking skills. The cognitively complex person is more flexible and has more ease in shifting, correcting, and adjusting trait attributions (Hale & Delia, 1976). A more cognitively complex individual is better at adapting to the demands of the changing social situation than is the less complex individual (Rubin & Henzl, 1984). Green and Sparks (1983b) suggested that the highly apprehensive person identifies with low personal competency and has little or no ability to identify

appropriate social behaviors in him/herself or others.

Expanding one's cognitive complexity is not limited by one's intelligence. Grover (1981) contends that intelligence is a process. "There is no real IQ inherent in the person, but only a variety of functions which may be measured in different ways...and yields various IQs that are susceptible to varying degrees of modifications" (Grover, 1981, p. 71). Hayes (1978) reported that there are 48 functions or variables that can be interrelated to constitute "speech experience." Schroder, Driver, and Streufert (1967) suggested that it is not only "what" (content) one learns, but equally relevant is "how" (structure) one learns. During the information processing of dimensional values, a person's interrelationships vary from one level of integration to another; low to high, high to medium, not always reaching either extreme, and not at any regular intervals. Only at the high level can the individual demonstrate discrimination between stimuli within dimensions while adapting to complex, changing situations. Barriers such as excessive arousal or anxiety may have negative effects upon the individual's relationships. According to Schroder, Driver, and Streufert (1967), the complexity of the structure affects the ability to deal with information. Emotion may be the mechanism that reduces complexity.

Schroder et al. (1967) also acknowledged that the individual's structuring systems are unique. Not all structures (content areas) of a person's space are processed at the same structural level. Individuals have unique speeds at which their processing structures fluctuate. There are differences in what the individual is assumed to have learned or not learned. This uniqueness presents an argument against any type of universal treatment for communication apprehension.

A Public Speaking Fundamentals Course

Typical of a basic university public speaking course is the Public Speaking Fundamentals course at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). This course is a requirement for most undergraduate students at the University. Students take the course not only to fulfill a requirement but also for a wide variety of other reasons, including self improvement.

In the Public Speaking Fundamentals course, students learn and practice the basic principles of the process of extemporaneous public speaking. This is accomplished through reading and discussing the textbook, The Art of Public Speaking by Stephen Lucas (1983); through lectures, related classroom activities, speech preparation and rehearsal; and through actual speech delivery with audience feedback. Each student designs, outlines, rehearses, and

presents four speeches for evaluation. The final grade, typically, is based on 60 percent for public speaking performance and outlines, and 40 percent for the midterm and final examinations.

According to the Public Speaking Fundamentals Syllabus, there are five suppositions underlying the basic principles of the course.

1. The supposition "that people are choice makers is essential to their being intentional communicators." (Darnell and Brockriede, Persons Communicating, 1976, p.15).
2. Unlike computers, human beings somehow program--and re-program--themselves; then they can directly control their own choices and behavior by means of the program and internal feedback circuits.
3. "...A basic fact: there are but two ways of affecting others or of attempting to change others or oneself. One is physical force, the other is communication." (Thayer, Communication and Communication Systems, 1968, p.83).
4. "People cannot get inside each other's brains to operate the control systems there and those control systems are what cause behavior." (William T. Powers,

Behavior: The Control of Perception, 1973, p.271).

Thus all communicative 'controlling' of other persons must be indirect, e.g., by persuading--but not 'motivating them.' Motives are "already in residence" rather than being transferable.

5. "The dominant function of communication for all living systems is adaption." (Thayer, 1968, p.33).

Communication Apprehension in a Public Speaking Fundamentals Course

The public speaking fundamentals course is a Freshman-level class and is often a student's first experience with formal public speaking. With any novel situation comes the initiation of new types of problems (Neer & Kircher, 1984). This observation was supported further by Miller (1978): "A new kind of problem leads to uncertainty. This uncertainty can be costly. When you commit your resources to a course of action, you will almost always have to give something up... (become vulnerable)" (Miller, 1978, p.13). The costs of not being able to communicate effectively in the fundamentals class are costly, suggests Adler (1980). Those students who are not able to communicate effectively, or those students who are apprehensive, surrender the perceptions by their peers of social attractiveness while appearing less competent and

more out-of-control in the situation.

Research has found that the relationship between communication apprehension and communication effectiveness in public speaking consistently appears to be a negative one--when communication apprehension increases, effectiveness decreases (Freimuth, 1976; Page, 1980). It is reported, also, that apprehensive students are less likely to be seen as leaders (Richmond, 1984). Without previous experience, however, few perceive themselves as competent in this area of communication.

Lucas (1983) reported a 1973 survey of 3,000 American people in which 41 percent stated that the fear of speaking in front of groups was their greatest fear. So great is this fear to so many, Phillips (1984) contends that our society suffers a considerable loss. Often a person facing a speaking opportunity chooses to remain silent, believing that more will be gained by remaining quiet than by experiencing a negative outcome. Society loses the benefit of the individual's message.

It is possible for instructors of the Public Speaking Fundamentals course to become aware of apprehensive students by observing their behavior and/or by listening to confessions of anxiety predispositions toward verbal communication when the students are expected to perform in front of the class. The major behavior characteristic of a

student who is suffering communication apprehension is the desire to avoid communication (McCroskey, 1977a; Richmond, 1984). Such students become noticeable by rarely raising their hands, usually sitting in the back or far sides of the classroom, avoiding small classroom situations, and often missing school on required speaking days. It is not unlike an apprehensive student, according to Richmond (1984), to drop the class during the first three weeks to avoid the situation altogether. Nonetheless, a large number of those students who remain in the class, for whatever reason, have significant negative anxiety predispositions toward communication. Communication apprehension has a variety of effects, but the universal effect is communication avoidance to varying degrees (Stacks & Stone, 1984).

Personal Construct Theory and the Public Speaking Fundamentals Course

According to Kelly (1955), it is not enough to describe and categorize behavior. Those students enrolling in public speaking fundamentals share many constructs such as "studenting" but also differ in many constructs, including those related to apprehension. Understanding comes not from calling those students with excessive anxiety "handicaps," "Sp Eds," or "apprehensives," but considering them thinkers, perceivers, and learners. If this is done, the process that

is leading the person to engage in behavior that detracts from effective public speaking can be studied and, if differences between the person's constructs and the constructs of those students who do not have excessive public speaking anxiety are discovered, the person can be helped to help himself or herself bring about change (Bannister & Fransella, 1986).

Personal development and/or change is not a matter of collecting more and more data. The Personal Construct Theory views the individual on a time line, changing from moment to moment from the time he or she is born.

Students enrolled in the public speaking course are reacting to that environment as they see it, at that time. These reactions can and do change. The major goal of the course should be to allow those reactions to become more positive to public speaking experiences.

How can students' constructs concerning apprehension and the public speaking course be revealed and categorized? One way might be application of the eleven corollaries to Kelly's (1955) basic postulate of Personal Construct Theory which was discussed earlier in this thesis.

Kelly's (1955) eleven corollaries and how they could apply to the basic public speaking course are as follows:

1. Construction Corollary. A person anticipates events by construing his or her replication. Speech class one is

not speech class two. Students enrolling in public speaking fundamentals class might construct replications of previous speaking experiences, either their own or those of their classmates.

2. Individuality Corollary. Persons differ from each other in their construction of events. Although two beginning speech students claim to be apprehensive about the speaking events, it is not necessarily because they have had the same past experiences, but because they have placed the same interpretations on their past experiences.

3. Organization Corollary. Each person characteristically evolves, for his or her convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs. Two instructors may construe a student as "apprehensive" as opposed to "confident." However, for the first instructor, "apprehensive" may be related in the system to "unskilled" and/or "unexperienced." In the second instructor's system, "apprehensive" may be related to "cognitively distorted."

4. Dichotomy Corollary. A person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs. When students anticipate public speaking constructs, they have an affirmative and a negative pole. If they anticipate being "uncomfortable," they are contrasting it with a situation in which they were "comfortable."

5. Choice Corollary. Persons choose for themselves that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which they anticipate the greater possibility for the elaboration of their system. A student will try to move away from confusion and toward understanding. If a student is overwhelmed by the public speaking situation, it is likely that he or she will try to avoid it until forced by graduation requirements. If the student does not experience the anticipated dangers, the link between these constructs may be weakened and then that construct within the system is modified.

6. Range Corollary. A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only. To construe the event of public speaking would be perceived as possible only to those who had applicable constructs available to them within their personal construction system. Constructs involving "outlining," "audience feedback," or "delivery" would fit into the range of public speaking constructs.

7. Experience Corollary. A person's construction system varies as he or she successively construes the replication of events. A student's personal construct systems are not a collection of trivia; they are an interpretation of what the person has learned from home and school, from goals and values, and from the personal theory being put to the test.

8. Modulation Corollary. The variation in a person's

construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie. Introducing public speaking to students involves associating this level of communication with constructs which are permeable to students. Conversations with friends, non-verbal communication, and intrapersonal communication are permeable constructs which can be used to make sense out of the new event (public communication) which confronts them.

9. Fragmentation Corollary. A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other. A student may be very anxious about presenting a speech and may desire to drop the class. If the superordinate construct of good/bad student is more permeable and the student perceives himself or herself to be a good student (i.e., attends classes, gets A's, follows directions), the student will follow through with the assignment operating under conflicting constructs. The benefits from public speaking may become a superordinate construct to the anxious student.

10. Commonality Corollary. To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his or her processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person. Within the environment of the public speaking class, the

student who perceives himself or herself to be apprehensive can be identified by an observer by the similarities and differences of the various "patterns" or behavioral manifestations of apprehension.

11. Sociality Corollary. To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he or she may play a role in a social process involving the other person. If the instructor can form a meaningful replication of the student's construct system, it is possible to relate to them, to inspire them, or to change them.

Purpose of the Study

The idealistic goal of an instructor in the basic speech class is to help each student find ways of "becoming" an effective public communicator. However, it is not uncommon for students beginning the course to anticipate it with "dread." Anticipation can range from very little anxiety to immobilizing fear. It is possible for this anxiety to interfere with the student's thought processes and prevent the "becoming." It has been the goal of many communication instructors to eliminate, reduce, or manage this dysfunctional anxiety. This does not appear feasible without first knowing what the student's perception of public speaking is and how he or she anticipates this communication situation.

Communication apprehension is a complex construct. Attempts at isolating, identifying, categorizing, and ranking it have found participants lost in a sea of semantic variables. As a result, the hierarchical "maps" of this construct vary according to each researcher. The unique personal nature of the problem of communication apprehension must be accepted as stated by the individual, albeit problematic, as a reliable knowledge claim.

If how the student learns is as relevant to the student's learning process as the knowledge that is learned, the student's attitudes, individual goals, and anxieties will influence significantly the degree of development during the semester. If a student claims to have a negative attitude toward public speaking, learning public speaking skills might be anticipated with dread or avoided. When these obstacles are presented and confronted, the student is more likely to anticipate the public speaking experience in a more realistic manner.

Personal growth and change is not a matter of collecting more and more information. Change occurs when persons broaden (construct loosely) their view of reality in order to reconstruct it on a more complex level, or narrow (construct tightly) their view in order to minimize apparent incompatibilities. The ideal learning occurs by operating between appropriate tight and loose construing, since change

in one is necessary for the maximum benefit of the other. However, it may require a construction system of sets and subsets in this area to allow continued flexible construing. Without this flexibility, those students are permanently positioned on either end of the continuum and may face obstacles in elaboration of public speaking constructs.

When students can partially construe only, they become anxious. Bannister and Fransella (1986) state that this "emotion" is our experience of, or resistance to, change. Anxiety is not a separate factor inside them. Kelly (1955) states there is no "level" of anxiety. Students can become anxious when the implications of completing the task or assignment become obscure. Those students who initially anticipate the class in a negative manner may not be able to visualize various factors in the process of delivering a speech. They may not be able to visualize themselves as confident and effective public speakers. In other words, their anticipations might be misrepresented. It would seem critical to become aware of the content and structure of the students' construction systems in order to ascertain the "void" necessary to begin the learning process in this area. This implies the need for the class to be nonthreatening so they will attempt to remain in the class, and prescriptive so they can visualize each step clearly.

There are many assessment instruments currently utilized to measure communication apprehension. However, almost all of these assessment instruments are self-report questionnaires. Daly (1978b) reports at least 25 self-report instruments used to measure aspects of communication apprehension. Although the validity has not been proven conclusively, the instrument used most often in the journals today is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) described by McCroskey (1984).

According to McCroskey, the PRCA measures what he defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1984, p.91). It does not, however, measure the anticipated rewards of public speaking (Page, 1980). Anxiety is not always bad, and some anxiety in public speaking is desirable (Phillips, 1984). Kelly (1955) stated that anxiety represents the awareness that one's construction system is not equipped to handle the events ahead. "It is, therefore, a precondition for making revisions" (Kelly, 1955, p.498). Novel experiences present opportunities to experiment with new behavior patterns, using behavior as the "independent variable." New patterns of behavior then become part of a continuing personality (Mancuso & Adams-Webber, 1982, p.6). It does not seem as relevant to know what level of anxiety is present at the

time an individual confronts a new experience as it is to know how the individual interprets and structures the new data to form new behaviors.

The PRCA is one measure of communication apprehension. However, Kelly stresses that people are concerned primarily with understanding their own natures and the nature of the world around them. They test that understanding by making choices which enable them to visualize the immediate and long-term future. Anxieties can obscure this visualization. Public speaking students' available constructs and their methods of organizing their construct systems are unknown to an instructor at the beginning of a course. If Kelly's Personal Construct Theory is accepted, it seems necessary to ascertain how a student anticipates the public speaking course to determine how he or she construes.

The most logical method of extrapolating this information is to ask the students to respond to open-ended questions concerning their attitudes, anxieties, and goals. Kelly's first principle is, "if you don't know what is wrong with a patient, ask him, he may tell you" (Bannister & Fransella, 1986, p.57). Asking the students to describe how they anticipate the public speaking class would produce relevant descriptors concerning the content and structure of the construct systems. Responses would be descriptors which

could be considered "positive" or "negative" depending upon the language. Descriptors such as "dreadful," "terrified," or "devastated" would be considered negative. On the other hand, descriptors such as "excited," "look forward," "enthusiastic" would be considered positive.

Part of learning public speaking is learning how to manage the apprehension present in speech situations. It has been noted that the PRCA measures the level of apprehension. If the public speaking fundamentals class is effective, PRCA scores should decrease, but only to an "optimal" level, after the experience of the class. In addition, increasing students' constructs about public speaking and practicing the skills should have the effect of making open-ended self-report perceptions of anxieties and attitudes more positive, again to an "optimal" level.

In light of this discussion, several issues with regard to communication apprehension and the basic public speaking fundamentals course are raised. The present study attempts to shed light on some of these issues. Specifically, the purposes of this study are: (a) an attempt to operationalize Kelly's Personal Construct Theory with respect to beginning public speaking students' communicative anxieties, attitudes, and goals; (b) determination of the relationship, if any, between Kelly's Personal Construct Theory and the standard measure of communication apprehension, the PRCA;

and (c) determining the influence of participation in a basic public speaking course, a student's age, sex, performance or speech grades, and final course grade on the student's communicative constructs and on the student's level of communication apprehension as measured by the PRCA.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are presented:

1. There will be a decrease in the level of apprehension as measured by the PRCA from the beginning to the end of the semester for all students as a group.

2. Those students who make initial negative anxiety, attitude, and goal self-statements will score higher on the PRCA than will those students who make initial positive statements about themselves.

3. There will be a significant relationship between the type of anxiety, attitude, and goal self-statements made by the student as measured by the PRCA. That is, the level of apprehension will change less for those who initially make positive statements about themselves than for those who make initial negative statements about themselves.

4. Initial level of apprehension, type of self-statements, sex, age, and speech grades are predictive of level of apprehension at the end of the semester as measured by the PRCA.

Chapter 2

Methodology and Procedures

Subjects

Subjects were 69 undergraduate students enrolled in the basic public speaking fundamentals classes taught by the author at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Subjects were enrolled in classes during the spring semesters of 1985 or 1986, and their ages ranged from 17 to 62. Most of the subjects were enrolled in the basic speech course to satisfy a requirement for graduation. Two students were absent on the day of posttesting.

Instruments

The data were collected in an ex post facto manner in a naturally occurring classroom situation, and two instruments were used to collect data. The first instrument was the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension. The second instrument, designed by the instructor, consisted of three parts: (a) the Initial Anxieties and Goals Questionnaire, (b) the Student Inventory Sheet, and (c) the Reflective Anxieties, Attitudes, and Goals Questionnaire.

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA)

The PRCA is a self-report measure of social communication anxiety. The form used in this study, the PRCA-25 (see Appendix A), consists of 25 statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people. The respondents reply by indicating the degree to which each statement applies to them. While most self-report questionnaires of social communicative anxiety are equivalent and assess a similar construct, the PRCA had the highest average correlations with all other measures in a study reported by Daly (1978b). According to Daly, the self-report measures of social communicative anxiety can be divided into three groups: (a) performance anxiety, (b) communication anxiety, and (c) social anxiety. The PRCA was selected for this study because it taps into the construct of communication apprehension or predispositions toward verbal behavior. This associated most closely with Kelly's (1955) notion of anticipation.

The reliability of all the forms of the PRCA is very high, usually above .90 (McCroskey, 1977b). According to McCroskey (1984), there is overwhelming evidence for the predictive validity of the measures; however, this remains a controversial issue.

Initial Anxieties and Goals Questionnaire (IAGQ)

The IAGO is a self-report questionnaire consisting of two items concerning the subjects' initial anxieties and goals as they anticipated participating in the public speaking situation (see Appendix B). The subjects were encouraged to discuss the two open-ended questions in as much or as little depth as they desired.

Anxiety Self-Statement Rating. Prior to evaluating the students' initial anxieties self-statements, the criteria discussed below were selected for establishing a negative rating or a positive rating. Kelly claimed that anxiety is that awareness that events with which one is confronted lie mostly outside the range of convenience of one's construct system. When a student can only partially construe the public speaking process; i.e., the process of transforming a person who has never been in front of a group into a practiced orator, the student becomes anxious. In addition, when any implication of this process is obscure, the student may become anxious. Anxiety of this nature may be an obstacle which would invalidate positive public speaking anticipation, or validate negative public speaking anticipation.

In this mindset, responses expressing only partial construing of the content/delivery speech process were to be rated as "negative." Examples might appear as: "I worry about others' judgments," "I have self-embarrassment," "I

might look foolish," "I am concerned with my delivery," and "I am afraid of strangers."

Kelly stated that an individual may use many construction systems which are not compatible with each other. Constructs are situated within a hierarchy of sets and supersets. The student may have a construct set of anticipating growth in the class but also a superset construct of anticipated failure. A student responding in this way was to be rated as "negative." For example: "This class would probably do me good but I'm scared to death" and "Although it might be interesting, I know I'll fail."

According to Kelly, without anxieties our psychological processes could not adapt to the constantly changing environment. Anxiety is the precondition for making revisions. Students responding with anticipations of overcoming anxieties, or stating they had no anxieties at this point, were to be rated as "positive." Their construct systems were ready to become more comprehensive. Examples include: "I know learning these skills will improve my performance at work" and "Although I feel nervous, I feel this class will help me overcome..."

Goal Self-Statement Rating. The Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) is particularly salient at the point when individuals make choices about the future. Individuals anticipate events by developing constructs which are

elaborations of their overall intrapersonal systems. Construing is done in such a manner as to attempt to bring more understanding to one's reality.

Student responses which state goals of overcoming inadequacies (of self) perceive a reality of a handicapped or insecure person anticipating public speaking. Their anticipations of the public speaking event construe a negative image of "self." Constructs such as, "lack of self-confidence," "lack of certainty," or "lack of self-assurance," indicate an undeveloped construct system with which to enter a public speaking experience. An undeveloped construct system in the area of public speaking sets the stage for feelings of failure during the public speaking event. Therefore, responses to the goals IAGO question such as "I want to gain self-confidence," "I want to overcome nervousness," and "I want to lose this self-uncertainty" were rated as negative.

On the other hand, if students expressed a desire to increase public speaking skills or talents, or expressed application of future skills in their careers and everyday life, they appear ready to elaborate their construct systems more comprehensively. Such elaborations can give rise to feelings of success during the public speaking experience. Goals such as the following were rated as "positive:" "I want to gain knowledge and have experience in public

speaking," "I want to improve my listening habits," and "I would like to improve my persuasion skills for my job as salesperson."

The Student Inventory Sheet (SIS)

The SIS consisted of nine items of demographic information (see Appendix C). This self-report questionnaire also provided one open-ended item, the Attitude Self-Statement Rating, on which the subjects were asked to express their attitudes about public speaking in general. The rationale underlying a positive or negative rating to this item was established as follows.

"A person's processes are psychologically channeled by the ways in which they anticipate events" (Kelly, 1955, p.46). Individuals have their own view of the world, the world as the individual sees it or does not see it. Construing can be done tightly or loosely, Kelly (1955) defined a tight construct as one which leads to unvarying predictions, whereas a loose construct is one which leads to varying predictions but which can, nevertheless, be a continuing interpretation. When asked about their attitudes toward public speaking in general, those student responses which expressed personal anxieties or inadequacies were to be rated as "negative." Their view of the world of public speaking is constricted by their limited range of

convenience of too tightly or too loosely woven constructs in the public speaking area. Attitudes such as the following might be rated as "negative." "Any public situation makes me nervous," "I'm not good at getting up in front of groups," and "Public speaking makes me sick."

If students stated the necessity of the class but expressed their inadequacies or anxieties, the students are construing incompatible constructs, or some portion of their construing is obscure. This type of response also was to be rated as "negative." Although students who make such responses may realize the value of the class, anxiety appears as a superconstruct and may hinder additional construing. Attitudes such as the following were to be rated as "negative": "I'm scared but this is a required class," "This might be a good class, but if it wasn't required, I would drop it," and "I am enthusiastic, but terrified."

Conversely, if students are anticipating by means of propositional constructs, they expect their view of the situation to change along with their attitudes. Their attitudes are working hypotheses, not rules. The following responses were to be rated as "positive": "I think once we get into the book, I will feel better," "I have no problems with the class," "I am comfortable," "I think it will be a learning experience."

The Reflective Anxieties, Attitudes, and Goals Questionnaire (RAAGQ)

The RAAGQ is a self-report questionnaire consisting of three open-ended items in which the subjects were asked to reflect upon the changes in their anxieties, attitudes, and goals as a result of the public speaking class (see Appendix D). The subjects were allowed maximum latitude in their responses to these items.

Anxiety post self-statement rating. The process of construing is extending beyond the known point; thereby, it is a method for transcending the obvious to what has not been known before. This is not an automatic process, it is a creative process. The only way this can work is for the individual to invest totally in the anticipation, the commitment to making the experience happen, assessing the outcome, and reconstruing evaluation of the total cost with no guarantee of eventual accomplishment or validation of anticipated events.

If at the end of the semester, the student could evaluate his/her construing by expressing personal growth, it was rated as "positive." Responses such as the following were to be rated as "positive" since they express a decrease in public speaking apprehension. "I feel more comfortable," "I have built self-confidence," and "I know how to handle my nervousness."

Similarly, positive ratings were to be given to

responses expressing fewer anxieties in front of groups. "I feel less afraid in front of the class," "I can speak in front of the group with ease," and "I have less fear in front of people."

Even if responses suggested an awareness of existing apprehension, but growth in another area demonstrated an elaboration in their construct system, they were rated as "positive." "I am not nervous overall, but some at the beginning of my speeches" and "I feel more comfortable but still nervous" are examples of such statements.

However, those responses that stated "none" or could see no way in which they changed were to be rated as "negative." They have not yet begun construing in this area.

Attitude posttest self-statement rating. An individual's attitude designs his/her behavior. If the behavior suggested change or elaboration of the construct system, a "positive" rating was to be inferred. Responses such as the following were to be rated as "positive" since they have been elaborating a more comprehensive construct: "I have gained self-confidence," "I see why people enjoy it," "I rather like doing it," and "I feel confident in my skills."

However, responses suggesting emphasis on lingering fears or self-awareness were to be rated as "negative." For

example, "I still feel awkward" and "I know everyone is staring at me" are negative.

Procedures

Data gathering occurred in two phases. The first phase consisted of those questionnaires requesting information from the subjects on the first day of the new semester (pretests). The second phase involved the information sought on the last day of regular class (posttests). Speech grades and test grades were collected during the natural course of the semester.

Pretest

Subjects were asked to respond to the PRCA, IAGQ, and the SIS on the first day of the new semester. The purpose of these three questionnaires was to ascertain how the students were anticipating their participating behavior in the upcoming speech class. The students were informed that the responses would be kept confidential; however, they were told that the responses would affect how the class would be taught with respect to students who felt apprehensive about being there.

Posttest

On the final day of class, the subjects were asked to respond to the PRCA and the RAAGQ again. The purpose of these posttest questionnaires was to investigate the change,

if any, in the subjects' anxieties and attitudes toward public speaking. The subjects also were asked if their goals had been reached and/or what else they had hoped to obtain from the class.

Instrument Validation

Three raters, two graduate students and one associate professor from the department of Communication, independently rated student anxiety and goal statements according to the criteria described above. All three raters were familiar with the Personal Construct Theory and had previous teaching backgrounds. Two of the raters were experienced in teaching the public speaking fundamentals course.

Prior to the investigation, the three raters established the criteria that were to be used to discriminate responses into "positive" or "negative" categories. All ratings were done independently.

All responses on the IAGQ, SIS, and RAAGQ were separated into nameless remarks and were read aloud without voice inflections to the raters to avoid bias. The three raters assigned the items into one of the two classes, (a) "positive" statements or (b) "negative" statements. For 96 percent of the statements, all three raters made the same ratings. For the four percent in which there was

disagreement, the statements and criteria were discussed among the raters until rating consensus could be reached.

Hypotheses one, two, and three were investigated using an analysis of variance with the PRCA as the dependent variable. Further investigation was conducted using a priori orthogonal comparisons. The predictors were the negative and positive responses of the IAGQ, the SIS, and the RAAGQ.

How apprehension as measured by the PRCA correlated with attitudes, anxieties, goals, sex, age, speech grades, and total class grades was investigated by employing a stepwise regression (for hypothesis four). The predictors were the scores on the IAGQ, SIS, and RAAGQ, along with the age, sex, and grades of the subjects.

Chapter 3

Results

Hypothesis one stated that there would be a decrease in the level of apprehension as measured by the PRCA from the beginning to the end of the semester. A three-between (anxiety, attitude, and goal) by one-within (test) analysis of variance was performed to analyze this and subsequent hypotheses. The test variable had two levels (pretest and posttest). The difference between pretest and posttest was significant; thus supporting this hypothesis, $F(1,59) = 24.145$, $p < .001$ (Table 1).

A priori orthogonal comparisons were made for each of the groups using the Tukey-Kramer method. Table 2 presents the cell means and standard deviations (SDs) for the PRCA pretests and posttests for the total sample ($N = 67$) and for groups. Differences between the pretests and posttests and the F values are shown for the total and for each of the groups. There was a significant decrease in scores from the pretest to the posttest for the total and for each of the groups, with the exception of those giving positive responses to the anxiety statement.

Hypothesis two stated that there would be a significant difference in the level of apprehension for subjects who initially made negative statements about themselves versus

Table 1
Three-Between (Attitude, Anxiety, and Goal) by
One-Within (Test) Analysis of Variance for
Initial Groups on the PRCA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Attitude (A)	479.265	1	479.265	2.083	.154
Anxiety (B)	996.726	1	996.726	4.331	.042
Goal (C)	24.440	1	24.440	.106	.746
A x B	37.135	1	37.135	.161	.689
A x C	58.172	1	58.172	.253	.617
B x C	4.383	1	4.383	.019	.891
A x B x C	31.486	1	31.486	.137	.713
S/ABC	13577.189	59	230.122		
Test (D)	1496.637	1	1496.637	24.145	<.001
A x D	29.326	1	29.326	.473	.494
B x D	104.307	1	104.307	1.683	.200
C x D	101.136	1	101.136	1.632	.206
A x B x D	14.830	1	14.830	.239	.627
A x C x D	142.807	1	142.807	2.304	.134
B x C x D	27.827	1	27.827	.449	.505
A x B x C x D	11.435	1	11.435	.184	.669
D x S/ABC	3657.148	59	61.986		

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of PRCA Pretest and Posttest Scores for Subjects Grouped by Negative or Positive Anxiety, Attitude, and Goal Statements (N = 67)

Group	N	PRCA Pretest		PRCA Posttest		Diff.	F
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Anxiety							
Negative	47	84.25	12.13	70.06	11.11	14.19	76.44*
Positive	20	68.70	11.85	64.55	14.54	4.15	2.74
Attitude							
Negative	41	84.80	12.05	70.98	11.16	13.83	63.25*
Positive	26	71.42	12.93	64.38	13.34	7.04	10.39*
Goal							
Negative	46	82.80	13.27	69.04	12.37	13.76	70.26*
Positive	21	72.62	13.06	67.05	12.60	5.57	5.26*
Total		76.61	13.95	68.42	12.38	11.19	67.72*

* $p < .05$

those who made positive statements. This hypothesis was tested using a priori orthogonal comparisons. Table 3 shows the differences between the means for the subgroups for both the pretest and the posttest. Each of the differences was significant except for the anxiety and goal groups on the posttest.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the difference between the PRCA pretests and posttests will be greater for those students rated negative on the anxieties, attitudes, and goals self-statements than for those rated positive. An analysis of variance of interaction effects revealed no significant interactions; thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported (Table 1). However, there was a tendency for this to be true as shown by a comparison of the mean differences (Table 2). Lack of significance may have been due to sample size and the large amount of variance in subject scores.

Hypothesis 4 suggested that the initial level of apprehension, type of self-statements, sex, age, and speech grades would be predictive of PRCA scores at the end of the semester. This was investigated using a stepwise regression analysis with PRCA posttest as the criterion and the other variables as predictors. The only significant predictor was the PRCA pretests which correlated .59 with the posttest and accounted for approximately 34 percent of

Table 3
Mean Differences Between Negative and Positive Groups
on the PRCA Pretest and Posttest

Group	Mean Difference			N
	Pretest	Posttest	Total	
Anxiety	15.5553*	5.1379	10.5346*	47 & 20
Attitude	13.3818*	6.5910*	9.9864*	41 & 26
Goal	10.1853*	1.9959	6.0906*	46 & 21

Note. The first N in each case applies to the negative group and the second N to the positive group.

* $p < .05$

the variance. The addition of the remaining predictors accounted for only 5.6 percent of the remaining variance.

A related stepwise regression was done using the semester grade for the class as the criterion and the previously listed variables as predictors. Only speech grades two and four were selected. These correlated .76 with the final grade and accounted for approximately 57 percent of the variance. The addition of the other variables accounted for only 3.7 percent of the remaining variance. Intercorrelations of the variables are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Intercorrelations of PRCA Scores, Speech Grades, and
Attitude, Anxiety, and Goal Groups

	PRCAPRE	PRCAPOST	SPCH01	SPCH02	SPCH03	SPCH04	GRADE	ATTPRE	ANXPRE	GOAL
PRCAPRE	1.000	.590	-.125	-.155	.038	-.140	-.201	-.488	-.505	-.354
PRCAPOST	.590	1.000	-.187	-.155	.073	-.095	-.174	-.260	-.214	-.073
SPCH01	-.125	-.187	1.000	.734	.442	.530	.602	-.115	.031	.122
SPCH02	-.155	-.155	.734	1.000	.507	.566	.669	-.085	.028	.111
SPCH03	.038	.073	.442	.507	1.000	.661	.547	-.139	-.063	.132
SPCH04	-.140	-.095	.530	.566	.661	1.000	.673	.030	-.013	.075
GRADE	-.201	-.174	.602	.669	.547	.673	1.000	-.047	.020	.029
ATTPRE	-.488	-.260	-.115	-.085	-.139	.030	-.047	1.000	.446	.381
ANXPRE	-.505	-.214	.031	.028	-.063	-.013	.020	.446	1.000	.428
GOAL	-.354	-.073	.122	.111	.132	.075	.029	.381	.428	1.000

Note. Negative correlations with PRCA scores is because a high score indicates a high level of apprehension.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Hypothesis 1

It should be noted that there were two significant findings based on the data supporting hypothesis one. First, for the overall group, PRCA scores decreased significantly from pretest to posttest. This result is consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g., McCroskey, 1984) and supports hypothesis one that the overall level of apprehension can be lowered by the experience of the speech class.

The second finding showed that for those students with initial negative or positive attitudes, negative or positive goals, or negative anxieties, PRCA scores decreased from pretest to posttest. For those students with initial positive anxieties, there was no difference in PRCA pretest and posttest scores.

These results suggest that completion of the speech fundamentals course has a positive effect in terms of lowering apprehension, as measured by the PRCA, for those students who personally could benefit from such a lowering. However, for those students who enter the course with a positive mind set toward anxiety, that mind set is maintained. This finding is consistent with Kelly (1955).

If the course is successful, those students who come into class perceiving few, if any, anxieties should maintain their positive construct system; each step of the public speaking process should reaffirm the students' previous positive constructs. For these students, apprehension initially should be at an optimal level; to lower that apprehension likely would make these students less effective public speakers.

Hypothesis 2

Examination of the responses of those students who made negative self-statements about their anxieties and goals toward public speaking at the beginning of the semester, reveals that they scored higher on the PRCA than did those who made positive self-statements. According to Kelly, "anxiety is the recognition that the events with which one is confronted lie outside the range of one's construct system" (Kelly, 1955, p.509). When novice students become aware through interpretation that they can only partially construe the events they are about to encounter, they perceive their construct system to be inadequate. It is not so much that one suffers anxiety, but how this anxiety will be organized into the construct system that is important to the Personal Construct Theory.

By the end of the semester, however, this difference was no longer significant. According to Kelly, anxiety is

the precondition for making revisions and the time to make alternative goals. After the experience of the speech class, the student is better able to construct the event of public speaking class without misrepresentation and the anxiety is then reduced. Goals such as "I just want to live through this class" take on a more realistic projection. The student is capable of applying the positive speaking experience to "life roles." Public speaking is no longer outside the range of convenience.

The results indicate that those students who made positive self-statements maintained the reduced level of apprehension. The class served as a validation of their working hypothesis of the public speaking class experience. It would be hoped that students who made positive self-statements initially would continue to maintain this confident perception throughout the semester. This could be accomplished when students construe replications of various aspects of the public speaking experience which have previously been reaffirmed.

Examining the responses of those students who made negative self-statements about their general attitude toward public speaking at the beginning of the semester reveals that they scored higher on the PRCA than did those who made positive self-statements. These findings are consistent with Kelly; individuals have varying levels of awareness. Attitudes, values, and meanings are attached to one's life

through the interpretation placed on events at which one has been present. One's interpretation is relative to one's level of awareness. These results suggest that those students who made negative self-statements about public speaking may have little awareness about the process of this level of communication (i.e., similarities to other levels of communication and differences from other levels of communication).

It was noted that the difference between positive and negative attitude self-statements was still significant at the end of the semester but to a lesser degree. This also is consistent with Kelly; change in individuals is governed by the permeability of one's superordinate constructs. Attitudes are more resistant to change than are anxieties and goals. A person is a process. At different stages in that process, various experiences influence the way the construct systems move or change. Reorganization and reprioritization of one's attitudes may take more than a basic public speaking fundamentals class.

Hypothesis 3

Those students who initially made negative self-statements showed a greater tendency to lower their PRCA scores during the semester than did those students who made initial positive statements, however, the difference was not significant. It is possible that the difference may

have been significant if there had been more equal sample sizes,

Consistent with the Personal Construct Theory, anxiety is not a separate factor inside an individual. It is the unknown aspects of events which provokes anxiety. It is anxiety that adds impetus or resistance to change, revision, and alterations. According to Kelly, this is a constantly changing environment. Without anxiety or fear, individuals would not be able to adjust or adapt to their changing environments. Individuals design their construct systems by making choices relative to their level of consciousness and/or self-awareness. For the most part, individuals construct in ways which most successfully move away from anxiety.

Those students who approach public speaking class with negative anxieties, attitudes, and goals may tend to change more because their preconditioned states warrant revision. They may become aware of the necessity to alter their construct systems.

Hypothesis 4

The results of the investigation using a stepwise regression analysis with the PRCA posttest scores and the final grades as the criteria produced two findings. First, using the PRCA posttest as the criterion, it was found that of all variables tested, the PRCA pretest was the only

meaningful predictor of the PRCA posttest. Secondly, using the final grades as the criterion, the only meaningful predictors for the final grade were the grades for speech two and speech four.

These results suggest that age, sex, anxieties, attitudes, and goal statements do not account for significant variation in PRCA scores or final course grades.

Implications

The results of this study show that, overall, students who "experienced" the public speaking fundamentals class under this instructor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha reduced their level of apprehension toward public speaking events.

Those students who initially enrolled in these classes with high apprehensions and/or negative predispositions either dropped the class early in the semester or decreased (but did not eliminate) their apprehension. Those students with high apprehensions and/or negative predispositions who chose to remain in the class confronted the public speaking classroom situation with all of the anticipated concerns. Based on the findings of this study, it would seem that while avoiding perceived anxiety-producing communication situations is commonplace, those who have chosen to confront the classroom events have already anticipated the risk

involved in changing their present construction system of public speaking. Those students who remain in class have begun forecasting the outcome of the classroom by construing from their past experiences; sometimes, far beyond their past experiences. It is not their expectations they question, but their personal adequacy to fulfill them. The students confront the construing process, negotiating not only in the present situation with all those involved, but with those who have gone before them and who have taught them the language skills which they bring into the situation.

It was evident as a result of this study that those students who enrolled in public speaking fundamentals class with low apprehensions and/or positive anticipations toward public speaking situations did not change their attitudes during the semester. The fact that they were able to validate their low apprehension and/or positive anticipations implies that the experience of the public speaking class enables them to continue to maintain flexible construing. It is likely that those students who anticipate in a positive manner are able initially to construe the overall public speaking process very loosely, making varying predictions. Tight constructs are formed concerning the students' personal interpretations of speech preparation necessary to validate positive working hypotheses of the speaking assignments. Continued interpretation in this

manner elaborates their construct systems in a positive way

According to the evidence produced as a result of this study, those students who initially claimed negative anxieties, attitudes, and goals scored significantly higher on the PRCA pretest than did those students claiming positive anxieties, attitudes, and goals. By the end of the semester, the PRCA posttest scores of those initially claiming negative anxieties and goals were no longer significantly different from those initially claiming positive anxieties and goals. The only significant difference that remained was in the PRCA scores of those students initially claiming negative attitudes toward public speaking. Although the results indicated a slight lowering in the scores, the overall reduction was not significant. The implications lead to positive meaningful changes in the students' attitudes toward public speaking experiences. According to Kelly, the end of the class does not suspend the process of "becoming." There is no end product of development; it is a continual process. Though attitudes may be more resistant to change than anxieties, the relevant issue is the direction in which attitudes are changing. The classification of an attitude at any level is only temporary.

The results of this investigation indicated a tendency for a greater decrease in the pretest and posttest PRCA

scores for those students who initially reported negative self-statements than for those who initially reported positive self-statements. Although this tendency was not statistically supported, it might have been a result of the unbalanced cell sizes. Further testing could support or refute these findings.

According to the results of hypothesis four testing, when the public speaking fundamentals course is taught in this manner and by this particular instructor, there is no single variable that could predict the success of the students' construct processing. Using the PRCA posttest scores as the criterion, it was found that the PRCA pretest was the variable that showed the greatest relationship. Using the final grade as the criterion, the best predictors proved to be the grades on the second and fourth speeches. No other variable tested accounted for such a large portion of the outcome. Individually, the variables of age, sex, anxiety statements, attitude statements, or goal statements did not predict the PRCA posttest scores or the final grade. In the class where two informative and two persuasive speeches are presented, it is likely that as the students experience each step of preparation for a particular kind of speech, construing the entire process becomes easier the next time. They no longer only partially construe the requirements for each type of speech or their own adequacies in fulfilling those requirements. The

students can anticipate the speech process by interpreting the validation or invalidation of their hypothesis of their presentation and its evaluation. This outcome is consistent with Kelly; misrepresentation and partial construction can result in anxiety, and anxiety is the precondition for change. Without this precondition, one does not see the need for change.

Limitations

The student sampling in this study and the disparity between the number of subjects in groups presented restrictions in the testing. The number of students with initial positive attitudes toward public speaking were relatively few. Because this class is also a requirement for graduation in particular colleges, it is difficult to determine if this sample would be representative of the general population. As a result, generalization of the findings should be done with caution.

The self-report questionnaires posed significant limitations. In addition to the usual problematic conditions of the self-reports, data collected ex post facto question the validity of the responses. Moreover, language and question construction of the instrument used for this study had not been tested previously. As discussed in an earlier chapter, public speaking apprehension is a complex area experienced uniquely by each student. Students enter

speech class from all walks of life and with varying degrees of awareness, language skills, interest, and motivation. Using an open-ended questionnaire to such a varied group at the beginning of the semester presents a plethora of semantic and ego uncertainties to the students and increased obstacles for the raters. For these reasons, more precise design of the instruments would be desired.

The process of rating in this study posed difficulties. The responses presented the raters with too much subjectivity. The raters in this case had little disparity, but their education, background, and interests were quite similar. Using additional numbers of raters with varied interests and educational background might present more discrepancies.

Interpretation of these results would be difficult to generalize without further investigation conducted with other instructors. What effect does the instructor's communicative attitude have on the students' attitudes, anxieties, and goals?

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study support the "experiencing" of the process of the public speaking class. How students anticipate the class has an impact on their attitudes toward the speaking situations throughout the semester. Methodological recommendations for future studies of public

speaking apprehension would include increasing the number of instructors surveyed and insuring ample random sampling of subjects who anticipate public speaking positively. Such studies, conducted longitudinally and cross-sectionally, would provide insight into the anticipations of novice public speakers.

It is recommended that future research investigate the possibilities of changing the initial questionnaire series. Following the previous research of Kelly (1955), an alternative to the open-ended questionnaire could be designed to include a measure of construct comparison. Aligning the questionnaire to follow the pretested bipolar construct system in the area of public speaking might elaborate the value and range of the Personal Construct Theory in this area. Allowing the students to reply by comparing how their attitudes, anxieties, and goals are like various constructs, and yet different from others, would provide more control of the responses. Also, other dimensions could be added for insight into the students' initial attitudes, anxieties, and goals. At the end of the semester, having acquired more elaborate construct systems of language and experience of public speaking throughout the semester, the students would be more qualified to supply their own "alike" and "different" constructs of public speaking and self-evaluations of their emotions.

It is recommended, also, that future research examine

the anticipation of public speaking instructors, preclass and postclass. Future studies may discover distinctive behavior patterns in teaching that would be related to the development of more positive student attitudes toward public speaking.

The results of this study indicate that it might be appropriate to examine further the principles of George Kelly for the purpose of syllabus design in the speech fundamentals classes of colleges and universities.

Appendix A

Personality Report of Communication Apprehension

Directions: This instrument is composed of 25 statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking:

A = strongly agree, B = agree, C = are undecided, D = disagree, or E = strongly disagree, with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Work quickly, just record your first impression.

1. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance I feel very nervous.
2. I have no fear of facing an audience.
3. I talk less because I'm shy.
4. I look forward to expressing my opinions at meetings.
5. I am afraid to express myself in a group.
6. I look forward to an opportunity to speak in public.
7. I find the prospect of speaking mildly pleasant.
8. When communicating, my posture feels strained and nervous.
9. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
10. Although I talk fluently with friends I am at a loss for words on the platform.
11. I have no fear about expressing myself in a group.
12. My hands tremble when I try to handle objects on the platform.
13. I always avoid speaking in public if possible.
14. I feel that I am more fluent when talking to people than most other people are.
15. I am fearful and tense all the while I am speaking before a group of people.
16. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I speak before an audience.
17. I like to get involved in group discussions.
18. Although I am nervous just before getting up, I soon forget my fears and enjoy the experience.
19. Conversing with people who hold positions of authority cause me to be fearful and tense.
20. I dislike to use my body and voice expressively.
21. I feel relaxed and comfortable while speaking.
22. I feel self-conscious when I am called upon to answer a question or give an opinion in class.
23. I face the prospect of making a speech with complete confidence.
24. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
25. I would enjoy presenting a speech on a local television show.

Appendix B
Initial Anxieties and Goals Questionnaire

Name _____

Date _____

What anxieties, concerns, or apprehensions do you have about being enrolled in this public speaking fundamentals class at this time?

My personal goal for this class is . . .

Appendix C
Student Inventory Sheet

Name _____ Age _____

Class Standing (circle one): FR SO JU SE OTHER

Academic Major: _____

Career or Professional Objective: _____

Hobbies, Special Interests, Enthusiasms, Skills, Areas of Knowledge:

Jobs Previously or Now Held: _____

Previous Public Speaking Courses or Training: _____

Something Unique About Myself: _____

My Attitude Towards Public Speaking at this Point is: _____

Appendix D

Reflective Anxieties, Attitudes, and Goals Questionnaire

Name _____

Date _____

How have your perceptions of your fears, anxieties, and concerns in regard to public speaking changed as a result of this class?

What do you feel you have gained as a result of this class?

What do you wish you could have gotten more of in this class?

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