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The Speech Communication Association of South Dakota

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Discourse:

The Journal of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota

Volume 8
Fall 2023

Research Article

Introducing Public Speaking Self-Concept (PSSC): A Novel, Qualitatively-derived Communication Anxiety and Competence Variable

G.I.F.T.S. (Great Ideas Fort Teaching Students)

"Party in the Communication Classroom": Exploring Communication Competence to Raise Social Awareness

Encoding & Decoding: Artfully Modeling Communication

Argumentation for Critical Heterogenous Political Discussions: Constructing a Rebuttal

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Volume 8, Fall 2023

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Discourse: The Journal of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota is seeking original manuscripts for Volume 8, to be published late Fall 2023. Discourse is generalist in scope. We seek theoretical, applied, and pedagogical (Great Ideas for Teaching Students-GIFTS & Coaching Running and Administering Forensic-CRAFT) manuscripts from the various interest areas of communication studies, including rhetoric, persuasion, health, mass media, organizational, interpersonal, and more. Submissions are welcome from either in-state or out-of-state scholars. Authors are not required to be members of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota. Manuscripts are accepted from academics and professionals of all levels in communication studies, education, forensics, and other speech- or communication-related activities. Faculty, secondary educators, and students (i.e., graduate and advanced undergraduates) are encouraged to submit manuscripts.

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TIMELINE

Submissions will be received through April 14, 2023, for Volume 8 of Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD (published in Fall 2023). Manuscripts may be reviewed prior to the April 15 deadline. The anticipated timeline is as follows:

- Accept manuscripts through April 14, 2023
- Peer review process & notification from the editor by June 30, 2023
- Revise and resubmit manuscripts due one month after the editor letter is sent to the first author
- Publication anticipated in November-December 2023

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Introducing Public Speaking Self-Concept (PSSC): A Novel, Qualitatively-derived Communication Anxiety and Competence Variable

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Abstract

Despite numerous quantitative assessments of teaching interventions that have helped mitigate public speaking anxiety (PSA), this common barrier to public speaking persists. In addition, quantitative measures may not be appropriate for all instructional goals, especially with students from across a variety of cultures. To enrich educators' capacity to help diverse bodies of students overcome the challenges presented by PSA, this qualitative study asked students to "Please describe yourself as a public speaker" at the beginning and the end of a freshman-level, general education public speaking class. Thematic analysis identified a two-dimensional pattern within student responses (N = 51) (a feelings-based dimension and a beliefs-based dimension), indicating that students could hold both emotionally-based self-perceptions about their fear or confidence regarding the act of public speaking along with separate, skills-based perceptions about themselves as public speakers. Every student's answer (N = 51) contained one or both types of descriptions, evidencing a novel construct the authors have dubbed public speaking self-concept (PSSC). By the end of the course, the thematic analysis revealed students' heightened ability to report more nuanced descriptions of their self-concepts, which often included positive belief-based descriptions acknowledging their enhanced public speaking skills, even if they still

reported fearful or anxious emotions surrounding speaking experiences. Helping instructors and students understand and accept natural nervous reactions often elicited by public speaking while reflecting on specific, skill-based beliefs can help decrease students' fears and, in turn, could prove key to enhancing the impact of future PSA interventions.

Introducing Public Speaking Self-Concept (PSSC):

A Novel, Qualitatively-derived Communication Anxiety and Competence Variable

A 2015 survey of 1,541 adults from across the United States showed that 28.4 % of Americans still listed public speaking among their top fears—more than the percentage who listed fears of unemployment (23.8%) or dying (21.9%) (Chapman, 2015). Despite decades of research and scores of studies examining instructional methods for decreasing public speaking anxiety (PSA), this malady continues to impact an estimated 30 to 40% of people in the United States, threatening their relational, emotional, and even financial well-being (Richmond et al., 2014). Morreale et al. (2021) reported that continued assessment of public speaking course outcomes promises to enhance communication pedagogy and the communication discipline's contributions to positive student experiences. Furthermore, the enrichment of scholarly understanding of how students' fears are experienced and manifested can foster the creation of novel interventions that may empower instructors to improve student outcomes, not only in public speaking classes but in their professional and civic lives as well (LeFebvre et al., 2018).

The use of public speaking as an instructional tool is widespread throughout the academy, as evidenced by the fact that 60% of introductory communication courses are based on public speaking (Morreale et al., 2023), adding up to an estimated 1.3 million students enrolled in such course each year (Beebe, 2013). While 20% of these students come into the course suffering from some type of serious anxiety associated with public speaking (McCroksey, 1982), the ability to help students reduce PSA is one of the most fundamental strengths of our discipline (Bodie, 2010). In fact, a recent study (Hunter et al., 2014) reported an average 10% reduction in PSA for students upon completion of an introductory communication course that emphasized public speaking. Thus, PSA reduction remains a primary goal of most introductory public

speaking courses (LeFebvre et al., 2020). Furthermore, public speaking assignments are often woven into the curriculum of courses and disciplines outside of communication. As we see an increase in the use of communication-focused instruction across the curriculum, we can anticipate that faculty across disciplines will benefit from additional research focused on PSA reduction.

Since McCroskey's seminal work on "Measures of Communication-Bound Anxiety" (1970, p. 269), communication studies employing primarily quantitative methods have provided an invaluable understanding of the challenges to and potential interventions for improved outcomes of the introductory public speaking course. These studies have examined the impacts of myriad communication variables, including, but not limited to, general anxiety, tolerance for ambiguity, self-control, adventurousness, neuroticism, introversion/extroversion, self-esteem, shyness, and assertiveness (Richmond et al., 2014). Despite decades of success in PSA-reducing pedagogy and research testing best practices in PSA reduction, "(w)e still struggle with a gaping hole where much of our communication education research should be" (Fassett, 2016), and problems related to PSA remain. Since such a large number of quantitative explorations exist, new light can be shed on whether additional variables exist by incorporating qualitative analysis, which provides a grounded approach for a more in-depth analysis of findings than quantitative research alone can provide.

In addition, quantitative measures can prove problematic in eliciting reliable and valid results in samples with people from diverse populations. Simmon and Wall (2016) stated, "We are overdue in productively addressing issues of 'diversity—or the lack thereof—in mainstream communication education research'" (p. 232). Amidst admonitions that "studying CA seems to be a U.S. enterprise" (Klopf, 1997, p. 269), communication apprehension has been studied in a

handful of other countries such as Japan (Klopf et al., 1981; McCroskey et al., 1985; Nishida, 1988) and a number of European countries (Croucher et al., 2015). However, some research has suggested that quantitative measures of anxiety and apprehension may not be appropriate for research with all populations (Levine & McCroskey, 1990), for instance, in collectivist cultures such as Japan (Pribyl et al., 1998). In a thorough review of communication apprehension (CA) literature across cultures, Fayer, McCroskey, and Richmond (1984) lamented the strong cultural biases inherent in these instruments. Therefore, new assessments of anxiety may allow for an improved understanding of these constructs cross-culturally. Consequently, such assessment may advance our ability to help communication educators across diverse institutions and cultures assist their students and the public in overcoming public speaking-related fears.

For these reasons, a call for extended introductory course research includes further modeling of the relationships among PSA-related variables with the ultimate goal of creating, testing, and enhancing more effective interventions to help students overcome PSA and bolster competence (Bodie, 2010; Dwyer & Fus, 2002; Hunter et al., 2014). In recent years, qualitative scholars have explored which specific fears students hold at the outset of a public speaking course (Grieve et al., 2021; LeFebrve et al., 2018; 2020) as well as how those fears change and diminish as a result of completing the course (LeFebvre et al., 2020). The current grounded, exploratory study contributes to these qualitative findings, adding an exploration of how students perceive themselves as speakers at the beginning of an introductory speaking course as compared with how they report their self-perceptions upon completion of the course. After all, "The complex interactions among teachers, students, and the [introductory public speaking] course are difficult to measure and understand, but are probably essential in a thoughtful pursuit of a model which explains course outcomes" (Pearson et al., 2010, p. 71).

To prepare for such modeling, this qualitative analysis seeks to determine whether previously unconsidered variables within or impacting the PSA construct might exist. Qualitative research of this nature may provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' anxiety through the introductory course (Worley et al., 2007). Such methods can allow for the emergence of a rich dataset of subject-produced responses and illuminate new constructs that, later, quantitative analyses can explore, test, and refine.

The purpose of this study was to extend knowledge and understanding of students' views of themselves as public speakers. In doing so, we aim to lay the foundation for testing future interventions to help improve those views and, therefore, student outcomes from public speaking courses. Therefore, this research employs thematic analysis to identify and characterize the ways in which students describe themselves as speakers in open-ended questioning. The following section reviews PSA research as well as a number of variables that have been explored in relationship to the communication anxiety/competence construct. Definitions of these constructs are offered in Appendix A.

Literature Review

Public Speaking Anxiety

While communication anxiety (CA) is a "broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (McCroskey, 1984, p. 13), either real or anticipated (McCroskey, 1977). PSA, the most common form of CA (McCourt, 2007), is more precise, relating to fear or anxiety specific to the public speaking context (McCroskey, 1984). Defined as "a situation specific social anxiety that arises from the real or anticipated enactment of an oral presentation" (Bodie, 2010, p. 72), PSA's symptoms can be relatively fleeting and manageable--sweating, shaking, muscle tension, increased heart rate, and nausea (Bedore, 1994; Nutt & Ballenger, 2003; Witt et

al., 2006). Other sufferers, however, can experience such serious consequences as heart palpitations, dizziness, and general confusion (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Daly et al., 1997).

A worthy objective of public speaking education is to influence students' long-term public speaking experiences by creating learning activities that bring about genuine changes in individual levels of PSA. To ensure valid measurements of this outcome, research has differentiated between two types of PSA: state and trait anxiety. State anxiety pertains to temporary psychological states surrounding individual speaking events, while trait anxiety is specific to public speaking environments (Smith & Frymier, 2006). While most speakers experience some level of (PSA) for a particular speaking occasion, it may also persist as an enduring trait across various public speaking situations, even when no specific event is planned (Spielberger, 1966). Notably, individuals with trait anxiety are not solely anxious about communicating in basic public speaking courses but also experience nervousness in other public speaking situations (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 2004). This means that communication education's impacts on student PSA promise to transcend to positive outcomes in their professional and civic lives. As demonstrated, PSA, whether occurring in state or trait situations, is a complex construct as illustrated through ongoing research and assessment.

Research over the past 50 years has demonstrated a decrease in students' PSA as a result of educational interventions (McCroskey, 1970; Bodie, 2010; Witt et al., 2006; Hunter et al., 2014), and recent findings bolster the robustness of public speaking education's PSA-reducing impacts (Morreale et al., 2021). However, much of this work has employed quantitative measures. A handful of qualitative studies (Nash et al., 2016; LeFebvre et al., 2018; 2020; Grieve et al., 2021) have enriched scholarly understanding of the PSA construct and how public

speaking education can help mitigate it. Nash et al. (2016), for instance, found that the public speaking course could significantly increase students' sense of satisfaction while reducing their fear, indecision, and confusion about public speaking. While PSA literature consistently demonstrates positive impacts on students' feelings towards public speaking instruction for some students, these changes are not consistent for all students, many of whom continue to grapple with PSA.

Communication Competence

Communication competence (CC) "generally refers to the quality of interaction behavior in various contexts" (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, p. 43) or the effectiveness of an individual's communication behavior. One of the primary contexts examined is the classroom and, in particular, the public speaking classroom (Canary & MacGregor, 2008; Rubin et al., 1997; Westwick et al., 2015). Scholars hold differing opinions about how CC should be defined (McCroskey, 1980; McCroskey, 1982a; & Spitzberg, 1983). It has been operationalized in several ways, including objective observation, subjective observation, self-report, and receiver report (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988), but one of the more consistently used measures in research has been self-reported communication competence (SPCC) (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) especially when CC is linked to PSA (Ellis, 1995; Hinton & Kramer, 1998; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; Rubin et al., 1997). Communication education can enhance CC (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). However, in a study measuring the impacts of an online introductory public speaking course on students' SPCC, Westwick et al. (2015) found that the course did not lead to the expected significant enhancement in students' CC; therefore, especially for online students, testing further interventions is merited.

The SPCC/PSA Relationship

Numerous studies have associated student-perceived competence levels with reported anxiety levels, suggesting that students with greater anxiety report lower perceptions of their CC (Ellis, 1995; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; Rubin et al., 1997). Previous research has shown that trait CA, including PSA, is inversely correlated with Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) (Ellis, 1995; Rubin et al., 1997; Teven et al., 2010). “This indicates that people with higher communication apprehension see themselves as less competent communicators” (Teven et al., 2010, p. 267).

The intertwining of these variables raises an interesting conundrum: If SPCC increases for students whose apprehension decreases as a result of an introductory public speaking course, is there a way to enhance perceptions of competence for those for whom PSA is more enduring? It was this question that guided our research. This research was grounded, therefore, the following section of our literature review is placed here, not because of any prior deductive beliefs about additional variables we had expected to encounter in our data. Because these variables became relevant upon analysis of our data; however, for clarity, we will discuss the literature about self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem here.

The terms self-concept (beliefs about oneself), self-efficacy (beliefs about one’s abilities), and self-esteem (positive or negative feelings about oneself) are sometimes used interchangeably, but such usage is erroneous. Self-concept can guide feelings of self-efficacy, or lack thereof, without affecting self-esteem. I may feel that I possess the skills and abilities to tie my shoes effectively, but my self-esteem may not have been impacted by that sense of effectiveness since I was a young grade school child. With regard to a skill so indicative of personal success and satisfaction, such as public speaking, however, a negative impact on self-

esteem might logically accompany high PSA and low CC. Therefore, the following section delineates the definitions and differences among these concepts, which will become key in the discussion of our study's findings.

Self-concept

Historically, quantitative studies established a connection between enhanced self-concept and communication instruction, including public speaking, interpersonal, and small group courses (Brooks & Platz, 1968; Dieker et al., 1968; Furr, 1970; Stacks & Stone, 1984). In 1970, the same year McCroskey first published his work testing the personal report of public speaking anxiety (PRPSA), another scholar was testing public speaking education's impact on self-concept. Furr (1970), who defined self-concept as "an integrated synthesis of all the elements which the individual includes as constituting himself" (p. 26), found that self-concept is relatively stable. He added, however, that it can become malleable in the presence of stimuli such as training, making speech education especially pertinent. Though not all such studies found significant differences in self-concept between pre and post-test responses of first-semester college students enrolled in a speech course, in one study, the control group who were not enrolled in a speech course actually experienced "a sharp drop" in their self-concepts pertaining to communication (Brooks & Platz, 1968, p. 48.)

Self-concept has been studied in specific areas such as foreign language learning (Mercer, 2011), entrepreneurship (Obschonka et al., 2015), and sexual self-concept--"self-perceptions of one's qualities in the sexual domain" (Aubrey, 2007, p. 157). This means that an individual can have one self-concept about their ability as a good foreign language learner and separate self-concepts of themselves as a decent businessperson, and a highly sexual being. Each of these avenues of self-concept, however, may or may not bear on the way that individual feels

about him or herself in the same way as one's self-concept about communication. For this reason, as our data analysis in this paper will show, the variable we observed makes sense as an aspect of self-concept since it regards one element the individual regards as constituting the self. In addition, qualitative studies and more recent research exploring the relationship between communication instruction and self-concept appear to be scarce.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy (SE) refers to a person's beliefs regarding whether they possess the tools necessary to complete an important task as well as the capability to utilize those tools effectively (Bandura, 1997). Like communication competence, SE is also often measured using McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) SPCC measure as opposed to measuring actual communication skills because communicative self-efficacy assesses the "confidence individuals have that they can successfully employ whatever skills they possess to communicate effectively across different communication settings" (Hodis & Hodis, 2012, p. 43). In exploring the types of fears public speaking students experience, LeFebvre et al. (2017) employed a qualitative methodology grounded in social cognitive theory and self-efficacy. They cited Bandura's work (1977), which asserted that fear can result from a perceived lack of control over outcomes while enhancing perceived capacity to achieve the outcomes desired in a given situation can empower a sense of self-efficacy (1997).

LeFebvre et al. (2020) found that, while students remained apprehensive of public speaking after completing the introductory public speaking course, the majority of them reported a different set of fears than they had at the beginning. In addition, these researchers found that the number of fears students reported decreased over the course of the semester, as did the fear's intensity. The scholars report that, although the course may not be able to eliminate some of the

students' fears entirely (e.g., memory glitches, disfluency, or sharing false information), the skill building offered by the course, in addition to the graduated exposure to more challenging assignments were effective at enhancing students' self-efficacy, creating a documented transformation in students' perceptions of public speaking. Conversely, fears regarding elements of the speaking environment that students likely learned to control as a result of their completion of the public speaking course diminished measurably, if not entirely (e.g., repeating information, speaking volume, and making poor judgments during the speech).

One of the ramifications of efficacy research is its consistent affirmation that efficacy beliefs are stronger predictors of behaviors than actual, measured capabilities (Schunk & Pajares, 2005). These findings apply to the positive impacts of public speaking education in that competence perceptions empower more beneficial choices regarding whether, when, and how to communicate with others (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). Among those choices may be one's accepting or refusing public speaking opportunities that may be vital to job placement or advancement. Richmond et al. (2014) found that individuals with higher public speaking self-efficacy are more likely to take advantage of such opportunities and reap their rewards. This finding resonates with Bandura's (1997) assertion that students higher in SE are less likely to be deterred by challenges than those with lower SE.

Self-esteem

Research has established that self-esteem is one unidimensional characteristic of the multi-faceted construct of self-concept (Harter, 1999). "In general, self-esteem is conceptualized as individuals' feelings toward themselves, and it is considered to be largely a product of our perceptions of ourselves in various arenas of life, especially our interactions with others" (Holmstrom, 2008, p. 2). Self-esteem is a global characteristic, while self-concept is specific

based on each unique context (Marsh & Martin, 2011). However, Kumar et al. (2017) asserted that students with higher self-esteem engaged in more mindful behaviors, which had a mediating effect, leading those with higher self-esteem to have lower PSA.

Much of the above-cited research, in addition to research on numerous intervening variables in the competence-anxiety relationship, has been based on quantitative assessment measures. But what can be learned from qualitative analysis of student's open-ended descriptions of their perceptions of public speaking before and after the introductory public speaking course? This study explored students' pre and post-test responses to a single, open-ended request: "Please describe yourself as a public speaker." A gap in the research on public speaking anxiety, dominated by quantitative research, can be filled by applying qualitative measures in testing the impacts of an introductory public speaking course explicitly designed to reduce PSA and enhance SPCC.

A Blended Approach to Impactful Course Design

Many introductory public speaking courses across our discipline infuse anxiety reduction and competency development into their course design and, as a result, have reduced the anxiety of "literally thousands of individuals" (Richmond et al., 2014, p. 106). The course assessed in this study was a multi-section, standardized course (e.g., it utilizes the same text, PowerPoint© presentations and lectures, rubrics, and exams across all sections). A training session was required for all new instructors to "calibrate" instruction and critiques. Part of the training directed all instructors to identify one or two strengths about each student's speech for every constructive criticism or limitation discussed, and to elicit positive feedback and constructive criticism from the students' peers as they critique each other's presentations. All speeches were assigned to be delivered extemporaneously--the most anxiety-producing mode of speaking (Witt

& Behnke, 2006). The course design blended elements of exposure therapy, cognitive modification, and skills training—a different treatment for each "proximal cause" of PSA (Bodie, 2010, p. 86). This blend is "more effective than any single method" (Pribyl et al., 2001, p. 149) at reducing PSA, maximizing the effects and long-term results of treatment (Bedore, 1994).

The instructional plan in the assessed course is three-fold: exposure therapy treats psychological arousal, cognitive modification addresses negative thought patterns, and skills training increases aptitude (Bodie, 2010). The course began with a relatively simple speaking situation followed by increasingly challenging speaking experiences "to reduce reactivity by graduated exposure to speaking situations of greater potential stimulation" (Bodie, 2010, p. 87). Additionally, whenever a student gave a speech or discussed their topic, ideas, or source material with the instructor or other students, they were engaging in this type of "repeated exposure" therapy. The course design also involved elements of cognitive modification, such as that tested by Fremouw & Scott (1979), training students to recognize negative attitudes about public speaking and replace them with positive speaking experiences and strengths-focused feedback. PSA readings, a PowerPoint© presentation, and discussions offered the students a restructured, alternative view of anxiety as a normal and frequent human trait. Students were given opportunities to practice "realistic thinking" (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 2004, p. 81), acknowledging that the problem of anxiety exists and acknowledging one's challenges as a speaker but viewing these challenges through a strengths-based lens. This newly-framed view, along with the instructor's encouraging feedback, offered the student reassurance, allowing for improved attitudes toward speaking anxiety and, hence, toward public speaking. Finally,

competence training inherent to the course builds public speaking skills, reducing communication anxiety (Kelly, 1997) and increasing self-perceived communication competency.

Methods

To extend our knowledge and understanding of students' beliefs about themselves concerning public speaking and whether these perceptions change as a result of completing the introductory course in public speaking, this analysis employed thematic analysis to explore inductively the ways students would describe themselves as speakers when prompted at the outset of a foundational public speaking course, as compared with their descriptions at the end of the course. Two initial research questions were drawn from the literature and were explored through inductive thematic analysis of students' descriptions of themselves in terms of speaking.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do students describe themselves as public speakers?

RQ2: Do those descriptions change upon completion of an introductory public speaking course?

Procedure

To assess these hypotheses, during the first week of classes during a single semester, a link to a questionnaire (entered into a QuestionPro© survey) along with the implied consent letter necessitated for human subject research was emailed to each class instructor, who then emailed the letter with the link to all of their students and announced a five-point extra credit opportunity for those who completed the questionnaire at that time (Time 1), and again during the final week of class (Time 2). The questionnaire requested demographic information, and for the participant to provide a unique identification code of their choice that we be used both times the survey was completed. Because the research team members did not serve as instructors for the course during the term in which the study took place, the students' responses remained

confidential. Upon completion of the time 2 survey, the list of identification codes was provided to the instructors so they could award the extra credit by matching them with the codes their students had given them. Further, the questionnaire contained the statement, “Please describe yourself as a public speaker.” This was the only question asked as part of the data collection and analysis for this particular study.

Participants

As part of a multi-study assessment effort focused on the online context of an introductory public speaking course, eighty-seven surveys were distributed to students enrolled within four online sections of the introductory course at a Midwestern university. Fifty-one students completed the measure during Time 1 for analysis of themes [10 males (19.6%); 41 females (80.4%)]. Of that sample, a smaller sub-sample (n = 20) [3 males (15%); 17 females (85%)] completed the measure during both Time 1 and Time 2 for pre-test/post-test comparison to determine course outcomes. This resulted in a response rate of 56.3% for the initial measure and a response rate of 20.6% for students completing the questionnaire during both Time 1 and Time 2 of the study. We recognize the limitation created by focusing only on the online context of the introductory course; however, the value of the data remains rich and valuable for those focused on reducing speech apprehension and anxiety, regardless of course modality.

Thematic Analysis

To analyze student pre and post-test open-ended responses, the researchers employed Owen’s (1984) three criteria of thematic analysis: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence occurs when “at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning, even though different wording indicated such a meaning” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Repetition is the “explicit repeated use of the same wording” (Owen, 1984, p. 275), and forcefulness is “vocal

inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locations in the oral reports" (Owen, 1984, p. 275).

After becoming familiar with the data, to begin the thematic analysis, the lead researcher individually employed Owen's model to identify recurring themes determined which themes were repeated between and within subjects' answers (e.g., whether those themes were repeated or changed from time one to time two), and assessed the forcefulness of the wording utilized by looking for introductory/explanatory phrases such as "the main thing is…" or "…is what I really think." Typically, according to Owen's method, underlines, capitalization, or bolded letters would also provide forcefulness cues, but the QuestionPro© context for student responses does not allow for such "nonverbal" information, so only verbal forcefulness was assessed. Then, two additional research team members reviewed these themes to ensure they represented the data in a meaningful and accurate way. The team then worked together to ensure these themes had reached a point of saturation. Saturation of themes is observable when the same themes continue to occur and new themes no longer appear (Holton, 2008). We then asked another communication professional to review the data and themes to ensure face validity. Finally, we analyzed differences among Time 1 and Time 2 student responses to look for nuanced trends in the themes between the two timeframes.

Results

In answer to research question one regarding how students described themselves as speakers, two general themes were revealed; these themes often existed in tandem: 1) a feelings-based dimension that includes such things as fear, confidence, enthusiasm, or indifference, and 2) a beliefs-based dimension which includes a student's beliefs about their public speaking skills

(e.g., "I am still too quiet," or "My speeches are well organized."). Appendix B offers a side-by-side comparison of examples of these two types of descriptions.

Feelings-based Descriptions

Some students' descriptions were purely based on their feelings, often negative, toward public speaking. The following student descriptions exemplify the feeling-based dimension present in many students' descriptions:

- "I am fairly confident in my ability to speak in front of other people."
- "I tend to get very nervous when presenting professional material."
- "I try to do the best that I can but usually become very nervous while talking in front of others."
- "I tend to get really nervous and anxious while speaking however [*sic*] I am still able to present. I will sometimes stutter and tend to hurry through my words because of my nerves."
- "I don't enjoy talking in front of people, I never have. I've always been nervous in front of people and it sometimes shows."

Beliefs-based Descriptions

Other students' descriptions were purely based on their beliefs, especially about their skills relative to public speaking. The following student descriptions exemplify the beliefs-based dimension present in many students' descriptions:

- "I think that I am an average public speaker."
- "I believe I am okay in the area of public speaking, but I know I definitely have room for improvement."
- "Inexperienced."

- "I'm very organized, and make good points."

Research question two asked whether students' descriptions of themselves as speakers changed upon completion of an introductory public speaking course. The following section displays and describes the distinctions between their Time 1 and Time 2 descriptions, which are displayed for side-by-side comparison in Appendix C.

Time 1: Intertwined Feeling and Belief Descriptions

In addition to demonstrating that students' self-descriptions were based on two different, yet sometimes parallel dimensions, feelings and beliefs, our analysis also revealed the often-intertwined nature of confidence and competence in students' perceptions of themselves as public speakers, especially during Time 1 at the beginning of the course. It became apparent that many students mistook PSA (their feelings about public speaking) for lack of skill or described their skills as reliant on their feelings and subject to negative impacts due to their nervousness. This finding was evidenced by answers during Time 1, such as the following:

- "I am not good at giving speeches. I always get really nervous before and during it."
- "I don't like to talk in public and I'm not very good at it. I get nervous and that makes me do worse on my speeches."
- "I don't feel like I am a very good public speaker. I get nervous and shakey [*sic*] and can't seem to keep focus."

Time 2: Nuanced Separation Between Feeling and Belief-Based Descriptions

Regarding research question two, which inquired whether students' descriptions of themselves as public speakers would change upon completion the introductory public speaking course, many students who still reported nervousness after the course showed a greater ability to separate the feelings and beliefs dimensions. Thus, students demonstrated having learned that

they could possess both anxiety and competence simultaneously. Responses during Time 2 demonstrated students' stronger capacity for holding the more complex, nuanced separation between feelings, which may have remained uncomfortable, versus beliefs about their enhanced public speaking skills. Examples of these responses included the following:

- "I have always been afraid of public speaking and I probably always will, but this class made me feel more confident and comfortable in my speaking abilities and lowered the tension I usually get before and during a speech."
- "I don't like giving speeches but I am confident in my ability to give them."
- "Shy, but capable."
- "Nervous, yet competent."
- "I get pretty nervous, but I always seem to do I [*sic*] good job. I'm really glad I'm done with this class, but I can tell that I have really gained confidence and ability."
- "I believe I am getting better. I have realized that public speaking is not a large strain on my life. I enjoy public speaking now."

In direct comparisons between students' Time 1 and Time 2 responses, students' growth as a result of the course was further evidenced. For example, the student above who reported during Time 1, "I am not good at giving speeches. I always get really nervous before and during it" said in Time 2: "I do ok, but I still get nervous." A second student stated in Time 1, "I can speak in front of people but I am often very nervous. I can get it done but not very well" and in Time 2 stated "I'm a fair public speaker."

Another student stated initially, "I am not a bad speaker, I just feel an overwhelming sense of nervousness. In fact just thinking of the speeches coming up I have butterflies in my stomach. I do alright [*sic*] when I am giving them although my nervousness shows through to the

audience I believe. I have gotten better with age. So I guess I would say I am adequate, although I do not enjoy public speaking at all." This student's view, upon completion of the course, changed to "I am a decent public speaker, although I am always nervous before the speech starts, I am calm once it starts. I feel I have made some great improvements through the class I took, being able to watch my speeches showed me that in great detail."

Another qualitative example of a student's positive change in skill-related beliefs moved from a pre-test answer of "I believe I am okay in the area of public speaking, but I know I have room for improvement" to the post-test response, "I believe I am a fairly good public speaker, although I do get nervous. My speeches are still fluent and rehearsed." An additional student's self-assessment began with the statement, "I can do it successfully. I get considerably nervous no matter the situation, but I can control my fear and get through it if I have to do it" and changed to the post-test response, "I am a very competent speaker. I get anxious about it, but will do it and succeed if I am prepared." Another student stated during Time 1, "I am not a very confident public speaker and I do not make public speeches." By the end of the semester, the same student stated, "I have improved as a public speaker, there are still some things I need to improve on but I feel as if I am capable of giving a public speech."

The change in the forcefulness of responses such as these indicates that the students' cognitions were successfully modified. The skills training provided during the introductory public speaking course affected the confidence and competence of students, helping them to acknowledge "great improvements throughout the class." Students also learned to manage anxiety and lessen rumination (fears about fears). Many students appeared to be able to pinpoint precisely where, in the process, their fear was greatest, and by the end of the course, many were

able to report that, although some fears remained, they understood that they could still be quite competent speakers.

Discussion

Thematic analysis revealed that two dimensions were present in students' descriptions of themselves as public speakers: one dimension discussed the students' feelings about public speaking, while a second dimension discussed the students' beliefs about their skills as a public speaker. Commonalities among students revealed that most of the responses discussed one or both of these themes. Further, the commonalities showed Time 2 responses appeared to focus more on beliefs and less on feelings than the Time 1 responses, or two add a layer of complexity to their descriptions, allowing for residual feelings of fear or nervousness at the same time as they held beliefs about the strengths they had developed in their speaking skills. Feelings also appeared less negative during Time 2, and beliefs more positive.

Public Speaking Self-Concept

These thematic findings indicate that a novel communication variable containing both a feelings dimension and a beliefs dimension is at play in these student descriptions. This variable appears to be a form of self-concept, in this case, specific to public speaking. We have chosen to label the construct public speaking self-concept (PSSC), which we define as an individual's evaluation of their skills and talents based on the public speaking context. While public speaking may be considered a singular activity, however, it contains a cluster of elements within an individual's overall regard of what constitutes the self. This cluster of characteristics merits further analysis and may illuminate further avenues for PSA mitigation and competence enhancement.

Mitigating public speaking anxiety and helping students develop an enhanced sense of communication competence are both highly meaningful objectives to the learning process

because the introductory public speaking course is designed to improve public speaking for personal development and future employability (Emanuel, 2005). Therefore, the major implications of this research are four-fold: First, PSSC appears to be a potentially spurious or intervening variable that impacts and is impacted by one's experiences as a public speaker. Second, PSSC appears to be malleable and positively impacted by an introductory public speaking course. Third, the malleability shown in students' Time 1 and Time 2 descriptions of themselves as a speaker points to the potential for classroom interventions to further enhance students' PSSC with purposefully designed and tested teaching activities. Finally, the revelation of this new construct may aid efforts to model further the PSA/CC relationship. These implications merit a number of deeper theoretical considerations.

First, with regard to the research differentiating between trait-like and state-like anxiety, instructors and scholars can assess whether students are suffering from one or both types of anxiety at the same time with the relatively simple, open-ended question of how students describe themselves as speakers. The same is true for different types of fears as discussed by Nash (2016), Grieve et al., (2021), and LeFebvre & LeFebvre (2018; 2020). As scholars continue to model and understand the anxiety/competence relationship and how to guide students to enhance their communication confidence and competence, instructors gain a growing repertoire of PSA-mitigating teaching interventions, which can be mapped to a variety of student self-concepts.

Second, Hunter et al. (2014) reported an average 10% decrease in student's PRPSA scores. Because that score represents the mean student outcome, however, it indicates that a number of students experienced smaller PSA reductions. Continued research is warranted to discern teaching methods and interventions that may yield stronger PSA reduction outcomes,

especially for those still experiencing high PSA. Instructors can work toward such outcomes in their own classrooms using the one-question PSSC survey ("Describe yourself as a speaker") at multiple points during their courses without the potential concern of student burnout or lowered validity and reliability that may result from taking a quantitative measure like the 34-item PRPSA multiple times throughout the same semester. This method simplifies formative as well as summative assessment for classroom instructors who would prefer a simple, narrative-based method for determining their students' experiences with anxiety mitigation and competence building. By simply asking their students to describe themselves as speakers, those whose primary motivation lies in pedagogical enhancements can quickly and easily test the impacts of new teaching interventions. These reflections open the door to further, more class-specific, or individual lines of inquiry to guide students directly toward increased focus on the elements of the speaking situation within their control. Hence, aligned with the findings of LeFebvre et al. (2020), such fears can be significantly reduced or even eliminated by weaving the PSSC survey question together with their survey questions, "What is your most intense fear about public speaking? Elaborate on your response as necessary to explain, rather than a simple word" (p. 101). This 3-sentence reflection exercise may provide a stronger real-world indication of students' needs as well as their growth than choosing one, more specific quantitative measure.

In addition, considering PSSC among variables in a model of how Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory relates to public speaking can help scholars elicit new inspiration for efficacy-building interventions. For instance, when Kumar et al., (2017) modeled the PSA mitigation process with respect to the PSA/self-efficacy relationship, they discovered the mitigating effect of mindfulness interventions. Since efficacy beliefs are stronger predictors of behaviors than actual, measured capabilities (Schunk & Pajares, 2005), these findings hold

strong promise for improving student outcomes through new avenues. By discussing PSSC in class, instructors might be able to help students further separate their PSSC into beliefs-based versus feelings-based descriptions of themselves as speakers. In so doing, if students strengthen their positive public speaking self-concepts, they may be empowered toward more beneficial choices regarding whether, when, and how to communicate with others (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988), including whether or not to accept public speaking opportunities that may help them to be hired or gain promotions on the job (Richmond et al., 2014).

Finally, focus on narrative forms of inquiry offers scholarly methodologies that heighten the communication discipline's capacity to treat diverse students and participants more respectfully. In so doing, this type of scholarship enhances our value to assist a larger number of people with their anxiety mitigation and competence-building journeys. Such culturally relevant research methodologies include instrumentation that respects diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study revealed that analysis of students' descriptions of themselves as public speakers contained what appeared to be a single, two-dimensional construct--a previously untested form of self-concept, public speaking self-concept (PSSC). The occurrence of this construct and its two dimensions in a larger sample will be required to generalize about its impact on students and whether, like other forms of self-concept, it shows significant malleability upon introduction of significant stimuli, in this case, teaching interventions in the public speaking course.

In addition, as with any study, there are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results of this particular study. First, participants in this study were

enrolled in online sections of an introductory public speaking course. While previous research has shown similar outcomes between the face-to-face and online sections of the course (Westwick et al., 2015), we cannot say with any certainty that these results would be indicative of students in face-to-face sections of the same course. Any future research exploring PSSC should be examined in multiple course modalities. Further, this work could explore the difference between course modalities. Future studies should also test whether PSSC differs between students who choose online versus face-to-face course delivery and whether the course delivery method impacts PSSC differently than the other. Online public speaking courses are sometimes criticized for teaching students using different speaking contexts than a live audience of over twenty classmates. Open-ended, self-concept questions could help inform studies of communication competence and apprehension differences in face-to-face versus online sections of public speaking classes, asking each student to describe him or herself in the context specific to the course design and the speaking assignments therein.

A second limitation of this study includes the high proportion of women in the sample. It is possible that a more even proportion of males in the sample would have added information that would have required further analysis to achieve saturation of themes. Future research should compare and contrast men's and women's PSSC and the introductory public speaking course's impacts on it. An additional limitation may stem from the rural college student sample, whose experiences may not generalize to audiences of other ages and in other walks of life. For the purposes of studying the impacts of the college introductory public speaking course, this demographic is appropriate, but findings may differ from culture to culture, region to region, or even in more rural versus urban university contexts. Future research should test whether PSSC differs cross-culturally and in more varied university settings and should perform the same

analysis at multiple universities whose courses vary at least slightly. The nature of qualitative research lends itself to serving diverse audiences with greater flexibility and representation.

An additional limitation of the thematic analysis includes the potential for bias introduced by the researcher. Mixed methods research can continue to strengthen communication scholarship grasp on the anxiety/competence construct and how to enhance students' self-efficacy with regard to public speaking. Quasi-experimental studies assigning different pre-test PSSC types as the independent variable might illuminate whether and how this variable might impact the effectiveness of various PSA treatment modalities. Regarding future research directions, researchers should also employ similar, open-ended questions to learn more about students' self-concepts about communication in other contexts. Thematic and content analysis of individuals' communication in contexts external to public speaking might include questions such as "Describe yourself as a member of a small team working on a group project" or "Describe yourself as a communicator when meeting a new person." In such a way, perhaps new elements of those aspects of communication anxiety measured on instruments such as the PRCA-24 (McCroskey, 1982b) and competence will become visible in the same way the feelings and beliefs differences became visible in this study.

Future studies might also separate the two dimensions that emerged within students' responses to the request, "Please describe yourself as a public speaker." Future quantitative testing might include Likert-type and/or semantic differential scales to enable direct, quantitative comparison with other variables. Finally, quasi-experimental research should test teaching activities specifically designed to help students separate their public speaking feelings versus public speaking self-beliefs, such as mind maps describing their feelings and beliefs about themselves and making visible the impact the course has had on enhancing students' sense of

competence in the face of residual fear or nervousness. Perhaps making this separation visible to students through lectures and self-reflection can improve their scores on various measures of confidence and/or competence. In addition, exploring the variety of elements that are encompassed in one's beliefs about their skills and talents with regard to public speaking may yield further educational interventions to enhance students' future public speaking experiences and outcomes.

Finally, qualitative measures such as PSSC studies might expand CA researchers' ability to study the public speaking self-descriptions given by people of different backgrounds and walks of life, including racial and ethnic backgrounds or cultures. Additional qualitative studies might enhance communication education's ability to address diverse perspectives and perform multi-cultural and cross-cultural applications of PSA research.

Conclusion

As McCroskey (2009) stated at the closure of his article *Communication Apprehension: What We Have Learned in the Last Four Decades*, "There never will be enough research on communication apprehension until the effects of high CA can be prevented for everyone in our society and in other cultures" (p. 169). Public speaking anxiety and communication competence have been studied intensely in the communication discipline for over forty years, yet few studies have approached PSA or CC through a qualitative lens. This exploration employed thematic analysis, finding that, especially at the beginning of a public speaking course, some students' fears of public speaking are so tightly intertwined with perceptions of their public speaking abilities that their anxiety might impede accurate appraisal of their skill level and progress. However, in comparing Time 1 to Time 2 students' descriptions of themselves as speakers, this study revealed the foundational speaking course was able to help students separate their feelings

from their beliefs to enhance their experiences with public speaking. As a result of these findings, future interventions may be able to help students further separate the two dimensions of PSSC and begin to rely even more heavily on assessments of their skills than on residual fears in their formulations of their descriptions of themselves as speakers. In this way, a student's self-concept about public speaking could grow more nuanced, integrating residual fears while offering heightened confidence due to the improved skills that result from speech education.

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Appendix A

Definitions of Key Communication Competence and Anxiety Variables Discussed

Communication Apprehension (CA): "Broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (McCroskey, 1984, p. 13), either real or anticipated (McCroskey, 1977).

Communication Competence (CC): "The quality of interaction behavior in various contexts" (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, p. 43) or the effectiveness of an individual's communication behavior. Often measured by self-report measures such as McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) instrument.

Self-Concept: "An integrated synthesis of all the elements which the individual includes as constituting himself" (Furr, 1970, p. 26). Furr found that self-concept is relatively stable. He added, however that it can become maleable in the presence of stimulti such as training, making speech education especially pertinent. In addition, self-concept can differ based on differing areas of concern (e.g., math self-concept, sexual self-concept).

Self-Efficacy (SE): A person's beliefs regarding whether they possess the tools necessary to complete an important task as well as the capability to utilize those tools effectively. Like communication competence, SE is also often measured using McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) SPCC measure as opposed to measuring actual communication skills. This is because communicative self-efficacy assesses the "confidence individuals have that they can successfully employ whatever skills they possess to communicate effectively across different communication settings" (Hodis & Hodis, 2012, p. 43).

Self-Esteem: "In general, self-esteem is conceptualized as individuals' feelings toward themselves, and it is considered to be largely a product of our perceptions of ourselves in various arenas of life, especially our interactions with others" (Holmstrom, 2008, p. 2).

Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA): "A situation specific social anxiety that arises from the real or anticipated enactment of an oral presentation" (Bodie, 2010, p. 72), PSA is the most common form of CA (McCourt, 2007) relates to fear or anxiety specific to the public speaking context (McCroskey, 1984). Defined as PSA's symptoms can be relatively fleeting and manageable--sweating, shaking, muscle tension, increased heart rate, and nausea (Bedore, 1994; Nutt & Ballenger, 2003; Witt et al., 2006). Other sufferers, however, can experience such serious consequences as heart palpitations, dizziness, and general confusion (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Daly et al., 1997). Can be trait-like (personality-based; relatively enduring; across contexts) or state-like (situational).

Public Speaking Self-Concept (PSSC): An individual's evaluation of their skills and talents based on the public speaking context. While public speaking may be considered a singular activity, however, it contains a cluster of elements within an individual's overall regard of what constitutes the self.

Appendix B

Examples of Students' Feelings-Based and Beliefs-Based Descriptions of PSSC

Feelings-Based Descriptions	Beliefs-Based Descriptions
"I am fairly confident in my ability to speak in front of other people." "I tend to get very nervous when presenting professional material." "I try to do the best that I can but usually become very nervous while talking in front of others." "I tend to get really nervous and anxious while speaking however [*sic*] I am still able to present. I will sometimes stutter and tend to hurry through my words because of my nerves." "I don't enjoy talking in front of people, I never have. I've always been nervous in front of people and it sometimes shows."	"I think that I am an average public speaker." "I believe I am okay in the area of public speaking, but I know I definitely have room for improvement." "Inexperienced." "I'm very organized, and make good points."

Appendix C

Examples of Students' Time 1 (Intertwined) and Time 2 (Nuanced) PSSC Descriptions

Time 1: Intertwined Feeling and Belief Descriptions	**Time 2: Nuanced Separation Between Feeling and Belief-Based Descriptions**
"I am not good at giving speeches. I always get really nervous before and during it." "I don't like to talk in public and I'm not very good at it. I get nervous and that makes me do worse on my speeches." "I don't feel like I am a very good public speaker. I get nervous and shakey [*sic*] and can't seem to keep focus."G	"I have always been afraid of public speaking and I probably always will, but this class made me feel more confident and comfortable in my speaking abilities and lowered the tension I usually get before and during a speech." "I don't like giving speeches but I am confident in my ability to give them." "Shy, but capable." "Nervous, yet competent." "I get pretty nervous, but I always seem to do I [*sic*] good job. I'm really glad I'm done with this class, but I can tell that I have really gained confidence and ability." "I believe I am getting better. I have realized that public speaking is not a large strain on my life. I enjoy public speaking now."

"Party in the Communication Classroom": Exploring Communication Competence to Raise Social Awareness

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Abstract

This activity demonstrates communication competence and allows students to observe, assess, and ultimately utilize the model of communication competence to engage with other people successfully. To understand how to engage in communication competence, students must recognize that appropriateness and effectiveness are crucial aspects of their communication. Through the communication competence model, students examine how to achieve effectiveness in their communication by setting goals for specific contexts; they also consider to what extent their goals are achievable given the particular situation. Using a 2014 MTV Video Music Award example, students can analyze why Miley Cyrus allowed a homeless man to accept her award and gave him time to discuss his experience as a homeless person in America to raise awareness about this social issue.

Recommended Courses

- Introduction to Communication
- Communication Theory
- Public or Professional Speaking
- Introduction to Media Studies

Objectives of Activity

By completing this activity, students should be able to:

- ☑ Explain how effectiveness and appropriateness impact communication competence
- ☑ Discuss how appropriate communication is determined by context
- ☑ Assess how to achieve one's goals to be effective within communication
- ☑ Apply communication competence skills

Introduction and Rationale

As students begin to study communication, they understand that meaningful communication varies based on the objectives of the communicators, the relationship between the people involved, and the context of the situation. Students may or may not realize that multiple factors contribute to effective and appropriate communication that can impact the world. This activity demonstrates communication competence and allows the students to observe, assess, and ultimately utilize the model of communication competence to engage with other people successfully. "Communication competence is composed of two elements: appropriateness, which is defined as following the relevant rules, norms, and expectations for specific relationships and situations; and effectiveness, which involves achieving one's goals successfully" (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2019, p. 20). In order to understand how to engage in communication competence, students must recognize that appropriateness and effectiveness are crucial aspects of their communication, including a better understanding of the rules and norms of a given context and setting goals for the interaction. Through the communication competence model, students examine how to achieve effectiveness in their communication by setting goals for specific contexts; they also consider to what extent their goals are achievable given the particular situation. In addition, students analyze their appropriateness through the required, preferred, and/or forbidden rules in that context. After applying the communication competence model to a

specific popular culture reference, students completing this activity can then develop their communication skills further by understanding how knowledge, skills, sensitivity, and ethics factor into communication competence.

Finally, this activity utilizes active learning techniques in the classroom. Active learning activities "involve students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 1). This activity employs active learning through scenarios by having students analyze the example of Miley Cyrus's acceptance speech while also situating them within her perspective. If they won an award for their work and wanted to raise social awareness about an issue that was important to them, how would they attempt to engage in communication competence? Consequently, the activity allows students to identify course concepts and create their own real-world examples that demonstrate communication competence and could be utilized to raise social awareness.

Description of Activity

This activity focuses on Miley Cyrus's 2014 MTV Video Music Award (VMA) win for her song Wrecking Ball. Rather than accept the award herself, Miley allowed a homeless man to accept the award on her behalf. She permitted him to go on stage and discuss his experience as a homeless person in America to raise awareness about this social issue. While this example is from several years ago, it is a great opportunity to discuss communication competence. After the awards show, many viewers wondered whether Miley's actions were appropriate and questioned her motives. Most students are unfamiliar with this example and the conversation generated after the ceremony because it happened in 2014; therefore, they can observe and examine the event to draw their own interpretations. Students can analyze if Miley was appropriate and followed the

rules and norms for the award ceremony and the audience's expectations; they can also consider how award rules and norms have changed since 2014. Additionally, students can attempt to identify Miley's goals and consider to what extent she was effective; because the example is older, the instructor can also further discuss with the class the differences between short-term and long-term effectiveness within communication messages.

Procedures/Steps

Before class, students should read the chapter in their textbook covering communication competence. This information is well explained using pages 17-23 in Rothwell's (2013) *In the company of others: An introduction to communication,* (4th ed.). Instructors should also obtain a video of Miley Cyrus's acceptance speech from the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards and/or the news coverage that followed. When she won the Video of the Year award, Miley allowed a homeless man to accept her award rather than accept the award herself. This gave Miley the opportunity to promote her charity, which seeks to raise awareness about homelessness. Miley allowed a homeless man to speak about his real-life experiences during the ceremony. After the ceremony, Miley continued to promote his speech and message on her social media platforms. This link provides a great description of the popular culture event:
http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/meet-homeless-man-accepted-miley-cyrus-vma-award/story?id=25114619

As a class, introduce communication competence and how appropriateness (explicit and implicit rules) and effectiveness (setting goals) contribute to it. Discuss the three types of goals: content, relationship, and identity. Alberts, Nakayama, and Martin (2019) identify three types of goals: "Content goals describe the concrete outcomes you would like to achieve during an interaction...

Relationship goals refer to your desire to change or maintain your relationship with another... Finally, identity goals describe how we would like others to see us or help us see ourselves" (p. 20). Then, introduce the ABC news video that describes the awards ceremony and Miley's actions afterward. After students view the video, divide the class into small groups and ask them to consider the following questions:

1) What were Miley's communication goals in this example? Consider both the ceremony and her actions afterward in your answer.

2) What were Miley's content goals, relationship goals, or identity goals? Explain why you believe they were that type of goal.

3) What rules are present within this context? Are the rules explicit or implied?

4) Even though Miley did not speak during the ceremony, how did her actions both during the ceremony and after it contribute to her communication goals?

Following their conversations, gather the class back together as a whole to discuss their small group conversations. Create a list of the specific goals that students think Miley had when she made this decision; in other words, why do students perceive that Miley did what she did when allowing someone else to accept her award? Students can discuss and debate whether Miley had content goals in which she wanted to raise awareness about the homelessness crisis or identity goals in which she wanted to change how others perceived her. In addition, make a list of the explicit or implied rules within this context. After facilitating discussion and creating these lists with the class, ask the following follow-up questions:

1) Using the list of goals that you created, do you perceive Miley's goals were effective? Why or why not?

2) Do you perceive Miley's goals were achievable? How has time affected her ability to demonstrate communication competence?

3) Do you perceive Miley's actions/behavior was appropriate in this situation? Why or why not?

Through the answers to these questions, students can better understand how to engage in communication competence. By emphasizing to what extent Miley was appropriate and effective both during the ceremony and afterward on social media, students can recognize the thought process of creating messages with other people. Thus, this activity is a great foundation for students to understand the communication process and to start to become more mindful of the implications of it.

Debriefing

After students have considered to what extent Miley Cyrus demonstrated communication competence, students can also ponder how to expand their own skills in effective communication. Ask students to consider what they would have done if they were Miley and accepting the VMA Video of the Year Award. Students should now imagine that they themselves are a successful band. Divide the class into small groups (i.e. bands) and ask them what they could do to bring awareness to a social issue/cause (it can be any organization/cause they specifically care about). Pose the following questions:

1) How would you learn about the rules in this context to ensure appropriate communication?

2) What would be your goals during an awards ceremony, and how might your goals influence what you say and do?

3) How can you clearly and concisely express the message about the social issue/cause you are trying to communicate?

These debriefing questions focus on how students can achieve the skills needed for communication competence. Through knowledge (knowing the rules), demonstrating the skills you learn (a clear message, for example), sensitivity (such as observing nonverbal behavior), and ethics (having respect and being honest), students can start embodying the skills needed for communication competence. Moreover, rather than being classmates working in a small group, students can creatively envision how, as a band, they can craft effective communication that can raise social awareness about a cause that is important to them. After giving them time to reflect (or perhaps during the next class), have each "band" share their social issue/cause and strategies for raising awareness with the entire class. This debriefing activity allows students to craft effective messages about their social issue/cause and converse with their classmates to raise awareness about social issues/causes that are important to them.

Conclusion

By using a popular culture example featuring a celebrity that students are familiar with, this activity establishes a connection between a musician that the students recognize and a core communication concept. As a result, the students are not just reading the information in a textbook but are actually able to apply the material to a popular culture reference. This often leads to a better understanding of the subject matter since students have viewed communication competence through a specific example. Students in my classes have enjoyed debating Miley's goals with their classmates and analyzing to what extent she raised social awareness through her actions during and after the ceremony. Moreover, because students can create their own

scenarios as famous musicians, this activity allows them to utilize the communication competence model in their own communication endeavors. As Zayapragassarazan and Kumar (2012) argue "Effective learning involves providing students with a sense of progress and control over their own learning. This requires creating a situation where learners have a chance to try out or test their ideas" (p. 3). Since this activity concludes with students situating themselves as a musician who wants to promote a social justice issue, it allows students to learn about communication competence and apply it. Students can then recognize how they can use effective messages to engage in a social cause they are also passionate about in the real world.

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Encoding & Decoding: Artfully Modeling Communication

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Abstract

Drawing objects and concepts, such as cats, trees, love, democracy, and family, is probably the last activity students expect to do in a communication course. Although this sounds like an introductory art activity, creating visual representations provides a nuanced understanding of the encoding and decoding processes. Encoding and decoding are the most hidden and often the most unfamiliar and complex fundamental components of communication for students to comprehend. By engaging in this activity, students translate their decoding process into drawings, which serve as personal artifacts representative of their encoding and decoding. Students come to better conceptualize this cognitive process with these concrete examples and a directed discussion. This activity is applicable across the full spectrum of communication courses.

Keywords: encoding and decoding; definition of communication; communication models

Courses

Any communication course that discusses the definition and models of communication, such as:

- Introduction to Communication
- Public Speaking
- Intercultural Communication

Introduction and Rationale

Communication is a topic many students assume they know a great deal about because they communicate every day (Hawkins, 2008). Communication instructors know there is much more to the discipline than many introductory students realize. One challenge we face, then, is to demonstrate the complex process of communication in such a way that students can understand the difficulty of effective communication. Engaging in this activity, grounded in active learning, addresses this challenge.

Two concepts that deserve more in-depth attention are encoding and decoding. Encoding "is the process of translating ideas, feelings, and thoughts into a code" (Beebe, Beebe, & Ivy, 2022, p. 10). Examples include "vocalizing a word, gesturing, and establishing eye contact" (Beebe et al., 2022, p. 10). The opposite of encoding is decoding: "the process of interpreting ideas, feelings, and thoughts that have been translated into a code" (Beebe et al., 2022, p. 10). In other words, decoding occurs "when the words or unspoken signals are interpreted by the receiver" (Beebe et al., 2022, p. 10). Although encoding and decoding are conceptually presented in communication courses, both require a more in-depth explication to enhance student comprehension. This process seems simple, but the variabilities in interpretation and translation that transpire during encoding and decoding can lead to minor or gross misunderstandings

between the sender and receiver. Encoding and decoding transpire mentally and, therefore, are the most invisible and often the most unfamiliar and complex fundamental components of communication. While communicating, individuals translate their thoughts into a symbol system, which they then share with others. Upon reception of the encoded message, individuals translate and interpret the symbol system into thoughts. We suggest the following activity to provide a practical understanding of encoding and decoding.

Through this activity, students develop a clearer understanding that as an act of translation, encoding/decoding involves a person's interpretive lens, which develops both within and through socio-cultural-historical experiences. More specifically, this activity (a) enhances students' understanding of the process of audience analysis and its significance, (b) demonstrates the arbitrariness of consensually agreed-upon symbol systems and meanings, and (c) provides several concrete examples of the complexities of the model of communication while simultaneously (d) providing a concrete example of how to speak across difference.

Objectives of Activity

By completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Define encoding and decoding.
- Explain the encoding/decoding processes of translation and interpretation.
- Recognize how socio-economic and cultural factors influence the encoding/decoding processes.
- Identify how the encoding/decoding processes can lead to different understandings.
- Apply their deepened comprehension of the encoding/decoding processes to activities like audience analysis.

Description of Activity

This activity is conducted early in the semester after students learn about the definition and model(s) of communication. More specifically, the activity should follow scheduled reading that covers the communication model(s) if addressed in the course text(s). It is also helpful to provide students insight into your background, revealing information that aligns with audience analysis demographics. To complete this activity, each student needs a sheet of paper and a writing utensil. The instructor needs access to a document camera or a chalk/whiteboard.

Procedures/Steps

Begin by defining communication and its related concepts using the course text(s). The following are suggestions/examples used in an intercultural communication class:

a. Communication: The symbolic process whereby "reality" is constructed, maintained, repaired, transformed, and struggled over (Carey, 2009). Terms like reality or lived experience might need to be conceptualized for introductory students unfamiliar with their usage in communication-based courses.

b. Symbol: "a sign, artifact, word(s), gesture, or nonverbal behavior that stands for or reflects something meaningful" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2022, p. 23).

c. Meaning: The "interpretations that we attach to a symbol…can cue both objective and subjective reactions" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2022, p. 23).

After defining the key terms, review the evolution of the model(s) of communication. Define and explain the fundamental components: (a) sender/receiver, (b) message, (c) channel, (d) receiver/sender, (e) noise, (f) feedback, (g) environment/context, (h) encoding, and (i) decoding. Excluding this lecture component, the activity takes about 30 minutes to complete.

The first step is the creation of the student's representational art. Direct the students to take out their paper and a writing utensil. Instruct the students that you (the instructor) will encode five thoughts into five symbols/words. After hearing each, the students should decode it as a drawing on the paper according to what they believe you meant in the encoding process. They are not allowed to use any words in their art. To alleviate anxiety about the quality of their drawings, assure the students that their artistic abilities are not significant for this exercise. The words you convey to them should move from those that represent the concrete and highly consensual to those that are abstract and ambiguous/contested. For example: a. Tree (concrete/high consensus), b. America (concrete/ambiguous), c. Love (abstract/high consensus), d. Democracy (abstract/ambiguous), and e. Family (abstract/contested). The instructor should also prepare drawings that represent their encoding of each symbol to compare with the student's work in the next step.

Step two involves the students revealing their art while simultaneously identifying comparisons to the instructor's. Observe their work as they draw, selecting whose work per word to display for the class. Upon completion, ask the students you identified if they are willing to share their drawings. Then, have the selected students either project their art using a document camera or redraw their work on the chalk/whiteboard. Ask them to discuss why they chose to represent how they decoded the word with the drawing they shared. Inquire of those students who drew similar images to raise their hands. Follow up by asking if anyone has represented the word differently. If there are, ask them to share their drawing. Follow the students' discussion by sharing your drawing. Discuss how your drawings represent the reason(s) why you translated each thought into the words you selected, referring to the concepts used for audience analysis. Broaden the discussion of your reasoning to be an interactive dialogue with the students about

the socio-cultural-historical contexts and personal experiences that influenced your interpretative process, which led to your drawings. Highlight the possible differences between their experiential interpretative lens and yours that led to differences in the drawings.

Beginning Public Speaking students typically understand audience analysis and adaptation as concepts but struggle with the application. This activity highlights the profound significance of audience analysis by demonstrating to the students why speeches should be primarily encoded how the audience would encode the message. As introductory speakers, students slide into encoding the speech message using *their* symbol systems. Audience analysis should guide students to encode more closely to how the *audience* would encode the speech, enhancing their decoding process and message uptake. Although the audience analysis concept may be mentioned at this time, often, this activity is recalled during the discussion of the concept in a later class.

Modifications to this activity may be necessary to meet diverse student needs. For instance, to facilitate a blind or visually impaired student's participation, we enacted the following modifications: The student described the term to her aide, who then created the drawings on her behalf. As students presented their art, the aide verbally described each to the student. Afterward, the student indicated she successfully participated and reaped the benefits of the activity with these modifications. The authors have not encountered other limitations that would impede students from completing this activity.

Debriefing

Follow the drawing exercise with a debrief session in which you dialogue with the students about how the activity demonstrates the numerous ways to encode and decode—translating thought into symbols—by discussing why this knowledge should guide a person

when crafting and listening to messages. Highlight the importance of learning about the other to understand their communication choices. Also, explain how communication with others is enhanced through engaging their lifeworlds by analyzing the socio-historical-cultural context in which they are embedded. In doing so, convey that communication does not transpire in a vacuum, nor does everyone share how we encode a message. Push further by discussing with students what influences might have guided the representations they drew. Then, inquire if the message's effectiveness is enhanced by encoding into symbol systems representative of their perspective or that of the audience. This activity directs students to realize that the significance of audience analysis and cultural understanding is that it enables the sender to encode the message as the audience would decode and uptake it.

Appraisal

Active learning emphasizing engagement is vital to student success (Smith, 2015). Definitions of involvement "point to the opportunities for students to be actively connected to their education, to engagement, and to mattering" (Smith, 2015, p. 219). The success of this activity is dependent on student participation. As Smith (2015) contends, "the sense that the group or others are depending on you for something facilitates involvement, belonging, and engagement" (p. 234). This activity surprises students as they do not anticipate drawing in a communication class. Yet, the benefits of this activity are manifest in the visual representations the students produce. Through sharing these visual representations, students see and thus understand the differences resulting from those factors that influence the encoding and decoding processes. This lays the foundation for later possible discussions that further nuance the encoding and decoding process (e.g., denotative and connotative meaning, listening, role of cognitive schema) and additional, but related concepts like the role of audience analysis, culture, etc. Since

this activity is completed early in the semester, often on the first content day and/or during the first week of class, the expectation is set that student participation is not only necessary, but students depend on one another in this learning environment. For instance, this activity can only be successful if students and the instructor are willing to share their drawings. Doing so sets the stage for engaged participation.

Conclusion

We recommend asking students at the end of class if they found this activity helpful. Many students indicate that this activity helps them enhance their understanding of the encoding and decoding processes. Additionally, they claim that seeing their colleagues' drawings, which are often different from their own, helps them to understand how even concrete symbols, like "tree," can be decoded differently. Although students may initially feel intimidated by having to draw or think that drawing simple objects is "silly," this activity sparks curiosity as the terms get more abstract. Students begin to wonder how drawing these terms links back to the definition and model(s) of communication. During the discussion, many students highlighted how helpful the visuals of this activity are to understanding communication and its encoding and decoding processes. As such, this is a beneficial activity for many introductory communication courses.

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Argumentation for Critical Heterogenous Political Discussions: Constructing a Rebuttal

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Abstract
This activity seeks to explain to undergraduate students how to craft a proper attack and defense in argumentation and debate, persuasion, or political communication courses. The activity teaches students 1) the parts of a basic argument structure and 2) how to construct a rebuttal using a basic argument structure. Students will argue against their true political typology by selecting an opposing typology from the Pew Research Typology Quiz. Broadly, this exercise is designed to encourage students to engage in dialogues with people who disagree with their political positionality. Specifically, the activity accomplishes this by teaching students the value of basic argument structure in political discussions and is an extension of Zarefsky's work on teaching the practice of argumentation. Additionally, it incorporates recent scholarship on how post-pandemic online learning has impacted higher education and political polarization. As such, this activity can be used for in-person or online asynchronous modalities.

Courses
Argumentation and Debate
Persuasion
Political Communication

Introduction and Rationale

The following activity is designed to help students construct the rebuttal portion of debates in argumentation and debate, persuasion, and political communication courses. Broadly, this exercise is designed to encourage students to engage in dialogues with people who disagree with their political positionality. The outcome of this activity should leave the students affirming their existing beliefs with stronger, valid argument structures, questioning learning more about the beliefs of other positionalities, or changing their positionality as warranted by a valid argument structure for this new position. In sum, students should learn that having a logical argument that includes a claim, warrant, and evidence is a valuable tool for both defending their positions and having critical, respectful engagement with other positionalities.

In today's polarized political environment, equipping students with the means to engage in heterogeneous political discussions is essential. Through debate, students of argumentation can confirm existing beliefs, change their views, or better understand the opposition to deliberative decision-making. For example, Fassett and Atay (2022), in their scholarship that after spending nearly two years learning via Zoom, students are now more prone to pernicious

biases (p. 1). From Fassett's pedagogical insight, I use Zarefsky's (2019) textbook, *The Practice of Argumentation*: *Effective Reasoning in Communication*, as an example to build this activity to challenge students to deliberate on their pernicious biases.

In argumentation scholarship, additional practical exercises that connect argumentative and rhetorical theory to debate scenarios are needed. In short, Zarefsky's textbook excels the current standard for teaching argumentative structures, but it, like all texts, is imperfect. Zarefsky does provide activities that connect theory to practice. Zaresfky's text is thus useful for shortening the disconnect between theoretical written concepts and deliverables in communication education exacerbated by the pandemic (Rosetto and Martin, 2022, p. 4). However, these activities do not allow students to engage in discourse with those who disagree. Current argumentation pedagogical scholarship lacks recognition that students should be taught how to debate with heterogeneous, diverse groups. This methodological view of building student engagement is informative to analyzing the relationship-building between student and teacher and how public speaking should teach through the instructor's example of how students can best communicate with those different from them or their counterpublics (Fabian, 2019, p. 191). So, each step of the activity I have outlined here addresses three issues with Zarefsky's current approach to teaching how to attack argument schemes.

The first issue with Zarefsky's approach is that he discusses what claim, warrant, and evidence are without adequate attention to how crucial a strong warrant is. This activity is designed to show the linkage of the warrant as a license from claim to evidence. Specifically, this activity recommends attacking the warrant in subordinative and coordinative attacks. Second, Zarefsky does not discuss identifying the weakest point of an argument scheme. This activity asks students to identify the weak point and why that part of the argument scheme is invalid. Third, Zarefsky (2019) discusses what subordinative, coordinative, and multiple argument schemes are in introducing what arguments are but does not elaborate on how these structures can be used in an attack (p. 198). I advocate for students to use these argument scheme types as choices in the attack.

Oral performance classes provide a public forum for students to discuss topics about social identity that may otherwise be left unheard. Harris (2021) offers the perspective that communication educators have the opportunity to "rebalance" public discourse by encouraging students to listen to other viewpoints before crafting their responses (p. 442). Students become advocates for change in how we talk about our differences as they are equipped to use respectful, structured decorum. By completing this activity, students are prepared to enter heterogeneous communities and are engaged, deliberative citizens.

Objectives of Activity

Students should be able to:

1. Practice ethical argument construction.

2. Become thorough evaluators of argument structures.
3. Identify claims, warrants, and evidence in argument structures.
4. Strategically select attack options for argument structures, including subordinative, coordinative, and multiple.

Description of Activity

This activity has three parts. The first step is for the student to take the Pew Research Typology quiz to determine their typology. Second, students should argue against their typology by selecting another one that opposes their own. Students should choose *one* issue to argue for or against from the position of their opposing typology. Students should write a contention or main point paragraph that could theoretically be a part of a larger speech. This contention should be written using a claim, warrant, evidence argument structure to rebuttal their true political beliefs. Third, and finally, students should take a survey ranking the argument validity of their classmate's contentions anonymously. This activity should be concluded with a discussion of whether, by arguing against their beliefs, students affirmed, changed, or remained the same in their beliefs on the issue they chose.

Procedure/Steps

Note: The steps in this section should be completed online regardless of course modality. If this is an in-person course, students should do this portion online before the class meets in person.

Students should preferably take the Pew Research Center Political Typology Quiz individually in an isolated environment.

Students should attempt to write a speech supporting a Pew Typology position that differs from the result they received from taking the test. For example, the “Outsider Left” might write a speech advocating for the “Ambivalent Right.”

Students should select *one* issue that they disagree with their chosen opposition about.

Students should then argue against themselves on this issue. They should do this by constructing a rebuttal contention to their typology from the positionality of their typological opposition. Students should *not* put their names on their contention draft. It should be explained to students that a “contention” is essentially a main point within a speech.

Once students have finished writing, they should share their contentions for anonymous review. Contentions should be submitted anonymously through Google Forms. Students should identify by the name of the typology the contention is written from the position of. To ensure submission, students may screenshot confirmation of their response submission and submit it to their LMS

submission portal. The instructor should set this assignment's due date at least two class meetings before the in-person discussion or, for online sections, a week before the discussion board is due.

The instructor will then import Google Form responses into a Qualtrics form that allows students to rank the contentions on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. The instructor should post this Qualtrics survey for students the day after the due date for the contention submission. The submission of this survey should be due, at minimum, the day before the in-person class meeting or a day before the discussion board is due for online modalities.

Instructions for this Qualtrics survey should read that while reviewing contentions; students should evaluate the contention not for their agreement or disagreement with the issues presented but for the strength of the argument structure.

The completion of writing the contention and reviewing another student's contention should be followed by a discussion addressed in the section titled "Debrief" below.

The total activity time for in-person discussion is 20-25 minutes.

Debriefing

Note: This can be posted as a discussion board for online modalities.

Students should be asked by the instructor, "Did your position change, stay the same, or become stronger? Why and how?"

Lastly, the instructor should close the activity by explaining to the students that the primary takeaways were as follows:

1) To allow students to critically re-evaluate their political positionality by attempting to argue for the other side.

2) To allow students to evaluate arguments for validity without allowing personal bias to control their evaluations solely.

3) Show students how and why some arguments are more effective than others by listening to how students rank others' argument structures.

Appraisal

Strengths:

This activity allows students to examine their political beliefs critically by learning valid argument structure. Due to its anonymity and the requirement to argue from the student's

opposition viewpoint, the activity accounts for the possibility that classes might be largely homogeneous.

Weaknesses:
This activity requires that students put aside their biases when ranking arguments. Though they are instructed to rank the argument and not their agreement with it, they still might allow bias to skew results.

Conclusion
This activity addresses students' political positionalities by giving a systematic structure of steps to follow in selecting what arguments to attack and how. Students of diverse backgrounds are honored and given tools to argue their positionality and liberated from the weak, hegemonic discourse that cannot withstand their argumentative critiques by expressing their political views and providing a structured argument for those views.

References

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Appendix (if applicable)

Handout aid for writing the contention

Step 1: Identify the parts of the primary argument scheme for your positionality. (Parts include:

Claim, warrant, and evidence).

Explanation:

Claim- This is your assertion in response to the controversy at hand.

Warrant- This is a statement that links your claim to your evidence. It provides validation for why the evidence supports your claim.

Evidence- This is a fact, statistic, or testimony that supports your claim.

Step 2: Identify weaknesses in each part of each contention's argument scheme: claim, warrant, and evidence. Reference what makes each part weak from the above instructions. For example:

Claims are weak when: They do not adequately support or contradict the premise of your main argument.

Warrants are weak when: They do not justify why you are using the source (evidence) for your claim.

Evidence is weak when: The source lacks credibility or verifiability.

Step 3: Identify if you want to attack just one or multiple parts of the argument scheme. There are 3 types of attacks Subordinative, Coordinative, and Multiple.

Example:

Subordinative: You attack one part. For example, just the warrant.

Coordinative: You attack two parts. For example, the warrant and evidence.

Multiple: You attack all aspects. For example, the claim, warrant, and evidence.

Step 4: Write your response about why the parts of the argument scheme you chose from above are weak. Do this for each contention.

Step 5: Write a question for your opponent that points out the weaknesses you identified in Step 4.

Example:

Contention 1: I chose a subordinative attack on the warrant.
I identified the warrant was weak because…
So, my question is: Why do you cite the evidence of Y when your justification for your claim of X does not result in Z?