COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION:
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRCA-24

By:
Karri C. VanDeventer

RECOMMENDED:

APPROVED:
Dean, College of Liberal Arts
Dean of the Graduate School
Date
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By
Karri C. VanDeventer, B.A.

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined individuals' lived experience with communication apprehension (CA). CA has been explored extensively over the past 35 years by researchers seeking psychological explanations for communication phenomenon and employing the premise that CA exists as a "trait-like" characteristic of personality or as a relatively permanent behavioral disposition. Grounded in a constructionist epistemology, this study presumes that meaning is created, maintained, and transformed through communication with others. From this perspective, CA is an individual's evaluation of anticipated or occurring communication events, based upon his/her prior experiences interacting with others in specific situations. Though CA researchers acknowledge this situational basis of communication apprehension, it has been largely overlooked in past research given the reliance on the "trait-like" perspective. To gain insight into people's actual experiences when filling out the PRCA-24, this research utilizes in-depth conversational interviews to examine the situational specificity of the most popular CA measurement instrument, the Personal Record of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24).
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Chapter 1:

Literature Review

Statement of problem

Communication apprehension (CA) became a primary interest because of my extensive background in the performing arts. Initially, I was interested only in dealing with the complexities of CA as related to performing or “stage fright.” Through the review of related literature, however, I found that stage fright was one among many situational aspects of CA including public speaking situations, meetings, groups, and interpersonal interactions. Additionally, considerable emphasis has been placed on the Personal Record of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24) as a measure of a person’s level of CA. The PRCA-24 is a quantitative measurement instrument designed by James McCroskey (1970) to measure CA. CA is defined by McCroskey (1977) as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 78). This definition seemed both lacking and frustrating to me. How was it possible that one number could accurately represent a person’s level of CA across groups, meetings, interpersonal interactions, and public speaking situations?

When I considered my own experiences with stage fright, I was immediately conscious of numerous performing experiences in which my anxiety levels were higher or lower given the context of the performing experience. I could not imagine one number being representative of my vast experiences with stage fright, much less being representative of my anxiety across all four situations measured by the PRCA-24.
Nonetheless, out of curiosity, I took the PRCA-24. Filling out the instrument was even more frustrating than I had anticipated. For each statement, I was asked to record my first impression, but I found it virtually impossible to record any impression given that I accessed more than one experience upon reading each statement. For example, when asked to respond to the following: “I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions” (McCroskey, 1982b), I immediately thought “it depends.” I have experienced this same ambiguous and even disconcerting response with other measurement instruments in the past, but this instance was particularly astonishing given that my score did not remotely reflect my experiences. Soon after this recognition, a colleague asked me to participate in her research project on compulsive talking. She was using a series of quantitative measurement instruments, two of which McCroskey was involved in developing, to explore high verbalization within a cohort of graduate students. Interestingly, my score on one of the instruments represented an extreme low, meaning that, supposedly, I do not have a propensity toward the measured behavior. Both my colleague and I, along with the other cohort members, were surprised by my score because it did not accurately represent my past behaviors. It was at this point that I began to see some merit in further exploring people’s experiences with filling out the PRCA-24. I began to question the use of the single score generated by the instrument as accurately representing people’s experiences and was interested in the complexities of CA that I found difficult to reconcile when filling out the instrument.
History of CA

Communication apprehension (CA) is one of the most widely studied communication variables in the discipline (Levine & McCroskey, 1990). McCroskey (1977) has been instrumental in developing and studying the concept as currently defined. McCroskey is also highly regarded for his development of the PRCA-24, a self-report instrument designed to measure CA as a “trait-like” variable. The PRCA-24 is the most popular measure of CA (Levine & McCroskey, 1990) and is used by virtually every study that incorporates CA as a variable. McCroskey (1978) reports the following five theoretical propositions associated with CA research: (1) “People vary in the degree to which they are apprehensive about communication with other people” (p. 193), (2) “People with high CA seek to avoid communication” (p. 194), (3) “People with high CA engage in less communication than do less apprehensive people” (p. 196), (4) “When people with high CA do communicate, their communication behaviors differ from those of people who are less apprehensive” (p. 196-197), and (5) “As a result of their communication behavior, high CA’s are perceived less positively by others than are less apprehensive people” (p. 197). These five theoretical propositions are helpful in further differentiating CA from other similar variables.

Distinguishing CA from related concepts, including stage fright, audience anxiety, reticence, unwillingness-to-communicate, predispositions toward verbal behavior, and shyness, is important in understanding CA. McCroskey (1982a) defines stage fright as “representing CA in the public speaking context” (p. 139) and as “a subset of the broader
construct of CA” (p. 140). That is, stage fright is confined to public speaking situations, which represent only one of many CA contexts. Alternatively, audience anxiety is defined as “fear, tension, and disorganization in front of an audience” (Buss, 1980, p. 165, as cited in McCroskey, 1982a, p. 144), and while this definition seems to be identical to stage fright, there is one distinction: audience anxiety encompasses both the public speaking and the meeting contexts, while stage fright includes only the public speaking context.

McCroskey (1982a) clarifies the relationship between CA, reticence, and unwillingness to communicate when he explains that:

Reticence is concerned with people who do not communicate effectively; unwillingness to communicate is concerned with one of the reasons that people may not do so (i.e. they do not want to); and CA is concerned with one of the reasons that people may be unwilling to communicate. (p. 141)

McCroskey views CA “as one of the elements that may lead an individual to be reticent” (p. 140) because “CA relates to communicative incompetence stemming from anxiety or fear” (p. 140), but he does not believe that CA is the only or even the most important factor in defining reticence. McCroskey notes that unwillingness to communicate is concerned with “the unwillingness of an individual to communicate with others” (p. 141), and that reasons for a person’s unwillingness to communicate encompass many variables only one of which is CA. Low self-esteem, introversion, and alienation are among the other variables considered to contribute to being unwilling to communicate. McCroskey attempts to clarify his distinctions between these three variables when he states that
unwillingness to communicate holds an "...intermediary position between CA and reticence..." (p. 141).

According to McCroskey (1982a), a predisposition toward verbal behavior (PVB) is essentially a willingness-to-communicate. PVB encompasses the notion of "people behaving in a consistent manner across communication contexts in terms of the amount they talk" (p. 141). McCroskey explains, however, that PVB is not the opposite of reticence and differentiates between the two variables by saying, "while reticence is concerned with the quality or competence of communication, PVB is concerned only with the amount" (p. 142). McCroskey states that PVB relates to CA much like the unwillingness-to-communicate construct in that PVB "should be viewed as a construct holding an intermediary position between CA and reticence" (p. 142). McCroskey refers to shyness as a construct that possesses no definition or property that distinguishes it from other related constructs. He believes that the term shyness has been used inconsistently in the literature and cautions readers against the notion of understanding shyness as a "unique construct" (p. 143). Indeed, McCroskey notes that "all writings in the area of shyness I [McCroskey] have examined are amenable to translation to the constructs of reticence, PVB or unwillingness to communicate, or CA..." (p. 143)

In sum, McCroskey (1982a) sees stage fright as representative of the public speaking context of CA, and audience anxiety as representative of the public speaking and meeting contexts of CA. He considers unwillingness-to-communicate and PVB to represent reasons why someone may or may not be communicatively apprehensive, and he notes that reticence, the broadest construct, encompasses communication competence
in reference to both positive and negative attributes. Finally, McCroskey views shyness as non-definitive and believes that the term has been used ambiguously to represent a wide variety of other related variables including CA, reticence, PVB, and unwillingness to communicate, in past research.

*Development of the PRCA-24*

As stated previously, the PRCA-24 is one of the most popular quantitative measurements of CA (Levine & McCroskey, 1990) and is used in most studies of CA. In his early research on CA, McCroskey (1970) developed a series of PRCA measurement instruments, including the PRCA-College, a 20 item scale that resembles the current PRCA-24, the PRCA-Seven and the PRCA-Ten, both of which were used to measure students’ CA in the respective grades indicated, and the PRPSA or Personal Report of Public Speaking Apprehension. In 1978, McCroskey added five new items to the existing PRCA-College or PRCA, as it had come to be known, “in order to increase face validity of the PRCA…” (p. 201). This new version of the PRCA consisted of 25 items.

In 1982, McCroskey responded to heavy criticism that the PRCA included “a disproportionate number of items relating to public speaking when the instruments purport to tap trait-like communication apprehension across communication contexts” (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984, p. 92). In response to this criticism, McCroskey, (1982b) restructured the PRCA into a 24-item test reflective of four contexts. Those four contexts include groups, meetings, public speaking situations, and interpersonal dyadic interactions and were chosen as representative of the widest set of circumstances in which CA is typically experienced (McCroskey & Richmond, 1980). McCroskey (1985)
notes that the four represented contexts in the PRCA-24 were not presumed to be exhaustive of other contexts in which CA could be experienced; rather they were simply “representative of common communication situations” (p. 167) based on his (1980) prior research of contextual communication taxonomy. The PRCA-24 consists of four sets of six statements, and each set corresponds to one context. Each set consists of three negatively worded statements and three positively worded statements to reduce potential response bias (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984). Individuals are asked to rate the degree to which each statement applies to them on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (McCroskey, 1982b).

A variety of studies have demonstrated the validity and reliability of the PRCA and the subsequent PRCA-24. The PRCA has been shown to be reliable (McCroskey, 1970; 1978) and to have predictive and construct validity (McCroskey, 1978), and the PRCA-24 has been shown to be reliable as both a state and trait-like measure of CA (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984). The statements included in the PRCA-24 have been shown to have content validity (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985), and the instrument has been shown to be valid both as a measure of overall trait-like CA and as a measure of CA in each of the four respective contexts (Levine & McCroskey, 1990).

In 1970, McCroskey defined and labeled CA as a variable and developed the first of several PRCA measurement instruments in response to a recommendation from the Ad Hoc Committee on Evaluation in speech communication formed by the Speech Association of America. The committee noted that “problems in speech communication pedagogy may result from students’ inhibitions rather than their inability” (p. 269). At
the time, McCroskey defined CA as "a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (p. 270). Because past research had only been focused on communication anxiety in a public speaking context, McCroskey sought to develop a more inclusive definition to represent communication anxiety in more than one context including small groups, public speaking, and interpersonal interactions.

Upon labeling CA as a variable, McCroskey (1970) developed several measures of CA "as part of a continuing research program investigating the effects of systematic desensitization on communication apprehension" (p. 269). McCroskey chose to create a self-report instrument with a Likert scale for the following three reasons: 1) "such scales are easy and inexpensive to administer" (p. 270), 2) "they can tap a variety of communication contexts at one time" (p. 270), and 3) "Likert-type self-report scales, when properly developed, normally are highly reliable" (p. 270). The first three scales were developed for three different age groups to measure CA as defined, and the fourth scale was developed to measure CA only in the public speaking context.

The PRCA-College was administered to 1,434 college students over a period of one year and showed "internal consistency reliability estimates (odd-even)" (p. 272) to be from .92 to .94 and test-retest reliability to be .83. The instrument was again administered, with a few minor changes in wording, to 2,479 college students and showed the internal consistency reliability estimate to be .93. McCroskey goes on to say that the "procedures employed in the development of the instrument are suggestive...of face validity" (p. 274), but that "determining validity on the basis of correlations of the PRCA-College with other measures was discounted because of the absence of other
measures of high enough quality to serve as criterion variables” (p. 274). The PRCA-Ten was given to 123 tenth graders and yielded an internal reliability estimate of .88, and the PRCA-Seven was given to 72 seventh graders and yielded an internal reliability estimate of .87. No test-retest reliability estimates were obtained for these two measures at the time of publication. The PRPSA was administered to 945 college students, and yielded an internal reliability estimate of .94 and a test-retest reliability estimate of .84.

McCroskey concludes this study by saying:

In every case results obtained for the instruments have been consistent with theoretical expectations, [but] while these instruments have been satisfactory for the purposes for which they were designed [to measure CA among college students], future users of the instruments (particularly PRCA-Ten and PRCA-Seven) should carefully evaluate the results they obtain to determine whether reliability and unidimensionality are maintained. (p. 277)

Studies of the Validity of the PRCA

In 1978, McCroskey examined the predictive and construct validity and the cross-situational consistency of the PRCA. In the first half of the study, McCroskey examines the predictive validity of the PRCA and states that “the best indicator of the validity of a measure is the degree to which it can produce empirical results that are consistent with predictions based on theory related to the construct which the measure purports to tap” (p. 193).

McCroskey explains that at the time of this publication, theories related to CA were not yet fully developed. Consequently, he explores the five major theoretical
propositions that had emerged from existing CA literature. For the first proposition, “people vary in the degree to which they are apprehensive about oral communication with other people” (p. 193), McCroskey presents evidence from his own research on college students along with several studies examining the distribution of PRCA scores of senior citizens, elementary and secondary teachers, and Federal employees as supportive of this theory. For the second proposition, “people with high oral communication apprehension seek to avoid oral communication” (p. 194), McCroskey presents a series of studies supporting the predictability of avoidance behaviors by high apprehensives based on PRCA scores. The studies were supportive of the notion that people with high PRCA scores choose situations including housing, college classes, occupations, and groups, in which minimum communication is required. McCroskey finishes this section of the study by advocating “a strong indication of predictive validity” (p. 196) for the PRCA.

In the third proposition, “people with high oral communication apprehension engage in less oral communication than do less orally apprehensive people” (p. 196), McCroskey briefly mentions six studies that support this notion, and then cites a study in which low apprehensives were shown to self-disclose more often than high apprehensives. From these references, McCroskey again concludes that predictive validity of the PRCA is strongly supported. The fourth proposition, “when people with high oral communication apprehension do communicate, their oral communication behaviors differ from those of people who are less apprehensive” (pp. 196-197), is supported by McCroskey through the presentation of a series of studies. Two studies are noted in which high apprehensives, as compared to low apprehensives, provide less
relevant comments regarding the topic of discussion, and McCroskey cites his own research in which high apprehensives displayed more tension than low apprehensives in small group settings. Other studies cited as supportive of this fourth theory include evidence of high apprehensives using “more rhetorical interrogatives (i.e., you know?, you see?, okay?) in their interaction with other people” (p. 197) than low apprehensives, and evidence that high apprehensives are less productive in brainstorming sessions than low apprehensives. McCroskey concludes this section by, again, indicating support of predictive validity of the PRCA. McCroskey does caution, however, that there is a need for further research on this particular proposition.

In the fifth proposition, “As a result of their oral communication behavior, high oral communication apprehensives are perceived less positively by others than are less apprehensive people” (p. 197), McCroskey cites numerous studies resulting in empirical evidence showing that “the perceived leadership ability of high apprehensives in a small group setting was substantially lower than that of individuals with lower communication apprehension” (p. 197). McCroskey concludes this section on theoretical propositions by affirming that the propositions “underlying the construct of oral communication apprehension” (p. 198) are supported by research using the PRCA to predict certain behaviors, and that all of the evidence presented provides strong support for predictive validity of the PRCA as a measurement instrument.

In the second half of McCroskey’s 1978 study of the validity of the PRCA, he explores the construct validity of the PRCA by examining the relationship of CA to other variables including introversion, self-esteem and self-acceptance, verbal reticence, and
general personality. Specifically, McCroskey states “if a theoretically related variable is found to be uncorrelated, or another variable if found to be extremely highly correlated with the PRCA, there would be reason to suspect the validity of the instrument” (p. 198). In his exploration into introversion, McCroskey notes that introversion should be moderately related to CA, since introverts typically withdraw from social contact, but not highly related to CA, since many characteristics of introversion are not theoretically representative of high CA. Support was cited for a moderate negative correlation (-.36) between extroversion and CA. When comparing CA to self-esteem and self-acceptance, McCroskey references studies in which the correlation between the variables is significant (-.48 between the PRCA and self-esteem and -.52 between the PRCA and self-acceptance) when both variables are employed as unidimensional measures, and further support is shown for the relationship between the PRCA and self-esteem when self-esteem is employed as a multidimensional variable (multiple correlations ranging from -.54 to -.72).

At the time of this study, McCroskey believed verbal reticence, as defined by Lustig (1974), the author of the verbal reticence scale, to be “clearly similar to the definition of the construct of oral communication apprehension” (p. 199). A study employing both the PRCA and the verbal reticence scale yielded a significant positive correlation (.74) between the two measures. Subsequently, McCroskey (1978) compared the PRCA to a personality instrument used to measure 16 different personality variables. Nine of twelve directional hypotheses regarding the relationship between CA and general personality characteristics were shown to be statistically significant, and “the observed
multiple correlations between the sixteen dimensions of the personality measure and the PRCA was .72" (p. 199). McCroskey remarks that the correlation is "in the range which should be expected, indicating that while the there is a substantial relationship between general personality and the PRCA, there remains substantial variance which the two do not share" (p. 199-200).

The remaining portion of McCroskey's 1978 study of the validity of the PRCA was dedicated to providing evidence that, barring any type of intervention such as clinical treatment or classroom methods, the scores obtained from the PRCA are relatively enduring over a period of time indicating that CA is trait-like variable. Because the PRCA seems to measure "a relatively stable construct of oral communication apprehension" (p. 201) McCroskey argues strong support for "the validity of the PRCA as an index of oral communication apprehension" (p. 201). Finally, McCroskey reports the addition of five new items to the existing PRCA, making it a 25-item instrument, in order to increase the face validity. These items were added in response to criticism that the instrument disproportionately represented the public speaking context of CA.

In response to criticism regarding the content validity of the items on the original PRCA, McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, and Plax (1985) explored the content validity of the items on the revised instrument, the PRCA-24. Specifically, the authors note that results of previous studies by Porter (1981) and Parks (1980) "raise a question as to the representativeness and generalizability of the content of the items on the instrument [the PRCA-24] as indicators of the broad-based, trait-like orientation which communication apprehension is presumed to be" (p. 166). The authors examined the correlation between
PRCA-24 scores and scores on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) (Rathus, 1973), and the authors examined the difference between the above correlation and the correlation of “PRCA-24 scores and scores on predispositional measures of communication apprehension for which representative items are included on the PRCA-24” (McCroskey et al., 1985, p. 167), namely the subscores measured by the PRCA-24 and a series of partial scores including three of the four contexts measured by the PRCA-24.

McCroskey et al. chose the construct of assertiveness as the criterion variable to be measured against the PRCA-24 for the following three reasons:

1) It is a clear, recognized communication context. 2) It is a context in which communication apprehension is highly likely to be stimulated. 3) An individual’s predisposition to be apprehensive in assertive communication situations is not directly assessed by the PRCA-24. (p. 168)

The results indicated that PRCA-24 scores were correlated with RAS scores (.70). Moreover, results revealed that the correlation between PRCA-24 scores and PRCA-24 subgroup scores ranged from .77 (public speaking) to .88 (meetings), and that the correlation between the PRCA-24 subgroup scores and the partial PRCA-24 scores “which omitted that context” (p. 170) ranged from .56 (public speaking) to .76 (meeting).

And, finally, the authors reported that the correlation between RAS scores and PRCA-24 subgroup scores ranged from .52 (public speaking) to .61 (dyadic), and the intercorrelations among PRCA-24 subgroup scores ranged from .40 (dyadic/public speaking) to .69 (groups/meetings). The authors of this study argue that these results
provide strong support for the content validity of the items used in the PRCA-24. Additionally, McCroskey, et al. (1985) remark that

The incidental observation that the individual subscores representing presumably distinct communication contexts contribute little unique variance (no more than 4-6 percent) to the PRCA-24 total scores is highly suggestive that the items on the measure are tapping a generalized, trait-like response to communication. (p. 171)

In 1990, McCroskey and Levine explored the psychometric properties of the PRCA-24 because “such knowledge is essential for distinguishing between valid and invalid uses of a given measure” (p. 63). The authors also sought to find a high level of correspondence between their own conceptualization of the CA construct and the psychometric properties of the PRCA-24 so as to obtain “valid results [that can] be interpreted as theoretically meaningful” (p. 63). Specifically, the purpose of this study was “to test three rival measurements of the PRCA-24” (p. 63) including a linear, unidimensional model, a Guttman simplex model, and a second order factor structure model. McCroskey and Levine note that the original design of the PRCA-24 “implicitly hypothesized a second-order factor structure” (p. 62) but that the second order factor structure had never been “explicitly delineated in such terms nor [had] it been subjected to a direct empirical test “ (p. 62). This study was conducted in response to mixed results of exploratory factor analyses of the PRCA-24, which potentially indicated that the instrument had an unstable factor structure. This instability in factor structure “would challenge the validity of the PRCA-24 and would lead [researchers] to question the results of prior research in which the scale was used” (p. 62).
McCroskey and Levine report that “virtually all previous research has treated the PRCA-24 as a unidimensional scale” (p. 63) support for which requires that the instrument be tested for internal consistency and parallelism. As McCroskey and Levine explain, “if the data meet both criteria of internal consistency and parallelism, one may have some confidence that [the] measure fits a linear, unidimensional model” (p. 64). Despite support for reliability and inter-item correlations on all but one item with “a separate measure in a manner consistent with that of linear, unidimensional scales” (p.68) thereby establishing parallelism, the unidimensional model was rejected because “the internal structure of the scale…deviated substantially from that which was predicted by the unidimensional scale” (p. 68). The authors explain further that “since the offending deviations were distributed across a majority of items, these discrepancies could not be reconciled with the exclusion of a few items” (p. 68).

The Guttman Simplex model was considered in this study because “results of exploratory factor analytic techniques testing the dimensionality of the PRCA-24 often yield[ed] divergent solutions” (McCroskey & Levine, 1990, p. 64). McCroskey and Levine state that the explanation for the divergent solutions could be that “the responses to the PRCA-24 form a Guttman simplex” (p. 64), which means that “responses to individual items may be related nonlinearly to CA” (p. 64). Specifically, The Guttman simplex model would indicate that “the four subscales may tap different levels of CA, not different types of CA, producing a step-like function” (p. 64). For example, apprehensiveness in dyadic situations would suggest that the person is apprehensive in all four contexts, but apprehensiveness in meetings would only suggest that the person is
also apprehensive in public speaking situations. Similarly, a person who indicates apprehensiveness in group situations would also indicate apprehensiveness in meeting and public speaking situations, but not in dyadic encounters. The test results, however, supported only one of four criteria required in establishing evidence for a Guttman simplex.

As noted earlier, McCroskey (1990) originally conceptualized the PRCA-24 as having a second order factor structure in which each of the four subscales measured CA in one context independently of the remaining contexts. However, the four subscales “were also designed to be combined into a global measure of trait CA” (p. 65). Testing for a second order factor structure is similar to testing for the linear, unidimensional model in that “empirical support…can be obtained from the use of confirmatory factor analyses” (p. 65); however, “both the first- [the four subscales] and second- [overall CA] order factors must fit [the data]” (p. 65) by showing internal consistency and parallelism. In order to provide for “a high likelihood of generalizability to the population” (McCroskey & Levine, 1990, p. 66), the authors replicated this study three times following original tests.

Results from the original and first two replications indicated that the PRCA-24 has a second order factor structure. The final replication, however, did not support a second order factor structure. Nonetheless, McCroskey and Levine believe that the empirical support evidenced in this study coupled with 1) the “current conceptualization of CA delineated by McCroskey (1984)” (p. 70), 2) data supporting the instrument’s construct validity, and 3) the belief that the second order factor structure model “can
account for the apparent instability evident in the results of exploratory factor analysis” (p. 70), provides sufficient evidence of the PRCA-24 having a second order factor structure. The authors conclude, however, with the following two advisory precautions:

1) …the factor structure of the PRCA-24, in a given sample, should no longer be tested with traditional (exploratory) factor analysis. Rather, subsequent researchers desiring confirmation of their use of the measure should seek to confirm that the second order factor structure fits the data from the samples, [and 2]) it is advisable to reduce the PRCA-24 to 20 items and to refrain from using items 1, 10, 17, and 24. These latter items proved problematic in each of the three data sets found to be consistent with the second order factor model. (p. 71)

In sum, studies by McCroskey and his colleagues have established that the original form of the PRCA has predictive and construct validity. Predictive validity rests on studies showing results consistent with five specific “predictions based on theory related to [CA]” (McCroskey, 1978, p. 193). Construct validity was determined by comparing CA to related variables such as introversion and verbal reticence. Correlational data suggested that CA is a distinct variable similar to but separate from other related variables. In response to criticism, McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, and Plax (1985) examined the content validity of the PRCA-24. On the basis of correlations among PRCA-24 scores, RAS scores, PRCA-24 subgroup scores, and PRCA-24 partial scores the authors concluded that the PRCA-24 is, indeed, “tapping a generalized, trait-like response to communication” (p. 171) as originally proposed. Finally, McCroskey
and Levine (1990) tested three rival measurement approaches in exploring the PRCA-24's psychometric properties. Results supported both a unidimensional model and a second order factor structure model; however, the authors chose to reject the unidimensional model in favor of a second order factor structure model. In terms of widely accepted statistical standards, McCroskey has established that the PRCA-24 is a valid instrument. Nonetheless, a few caveats are worth noting: 1) the predictive and construct validity tests were conducted on an instrument that is no longer widely used; 2) in these various studies, high apprehensives were compared to low apprehensives; the "normals" or moderate apprehensives were not included in analysis; and 3) evidence for the PRCA-24 both as a unidimensional model and a second order factor structure model was cited, yet the authors chose the latter.

The Trait vs. State Dichotomy

The original conceptualization of CA was as "a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984, p. 79). Based on this definition, CA was assumed to be a predispositional and characteristically stable personality trait (Beatty, Behnke, & McCallum, 1978). Upon further research, however, a situational or state CA orientation was recognized. State CA was defined as "a transitory condition varying in intensity and fluctuating over time" (p. 188). Though most of the CA research to date, including McCroskey's work, cites this trait/state distinction, McCroskey (1982a) notes that "the original conceptualization of CA lacks sufficient clarity and specificity for continued use" (p. 136), leading him to reconceptualize CA as a continuum with trait CA on one end and state or situational CA on the other. McCroskey points out, however, that
neither end of the CA continuum is likely to exist because “to view all human behavior as emanating from either a trait-like, personality orientation of the individual or from the state-like constraints of a situation ignores the powerful interaction of these two sources” (p. 146). McCroskey proposes that aside from the dichotomous trait or state ends of the continuum, there are four types of CA: trait-like, generalized context, person-group, and situational or state-like CA. Though this continuum is not generally employed in subsequent work in CA, differentiating among the four proposed points on the continuum is useful in citing discrepancies among researchers’ usages of the terms “state” and “trait” when examining CA as a variable.

McCroskey (1982a) defines “trait-like CA” as “a relatively enduring, personality-type orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety [italics added] of contexts” (p. 147) and reiterates that the PRCA-24 is designed to tap this type of CA. McCroskey delineates “generalized context CA” “as a relatively enduring, personality-type orientation toward communication in a given type [italics added] of context” (p. 147). The concept of generalized context CA acknowledges that some people may be apprehensive in one context, such as public speaking, but not apprehensive in other contexts, such as in groups or meetings. McCroskey believes that “to the extent that a trait-like orientation toward communication actually exists, an appropriate measure of that orientation should be at least somewhat predictive of orientations within generalized contexts” (p. 148). McCroskey also characterizes “person-group CA” as relatively enduring but comments that it exists only in response to “a given person or group of people [italics added]” (p. 148). He continues by saying that
“this type of CA is presumed to be more a function of the situational constraints introduced by the other person or group than by the personality of the individual” (p. 148-149). Finally, McCroskey identifies “situational CA” as representing “the reactions of an individual to communicating with a given individual or group of individuals at a given time [italics added]” (p. 149). This type of CA is “the most state-like of the types of CA” (p. 149) and “is not viewed as personality-based, but rather as a response to the situational constraints generated by the other person or group” (p. 149). According to McCroskey, “measurement of situational CA has received little attention in the previous research” (p. 149), but he maintains that there “appears to be a very satisfactory tool for this purpose” (p. 149; Spielberger, 1966; Richmond, 1978). McCroskey refers here to Spielberger’s (1966) state anxiety measure, which assesses generalized state anxiety, but not state anxiety experiences in communication.

In their research on the relationship between trait-like CA and accumulated state anxiety experiences, McCroskey and Beatty (1984) examine CA “based on assimilation theory, Mischel’s (1973) perspectives of traits, and Zuckerman’s (1976) modification of trait-state anxiety” (p. 79). Their position is “that the construct of trait communication apprehension should function as a summary of an individual’s communication state anxiety experiences as well as a predisposing trait” (p. 79). They maintain that if an accumulation of state anxiety experiences is correlated with trait-like CA, then the PRCA and measures of a single state anxiety experience should have at least a low correlation, and that “the combination of state anxiety scores obtained in a variety of communication settings should account for a significant and meaningful portion of the variance in PRCA
scores” (p. 80). The specific research questions addressed in this study are: “(1) Does the PRCA correlate with state anxiety responses to meeting, small group, dyadic, and public communication tasks? and (2) Does the combination of these state anxiety measures account for PRCA scores?” (p. 80). McCroskey and Beatty note that if these questions can be answered affirmatively, there is evidence that CA is a trait-like variable. If the answers are negative, however, the trait-like perspective would be invalid.

Results indicated that PRCA-24 scores correlated significantly with state anxiety experiences related to each of the four PRCA contexts (PRCA with public speaking, \( r = .54 \), PRCA with meeting, \( r = .52 \), PRCA with group, \( r = .28 \), and PRCA with dyadic, \( r = .25 \), all significant at the .05 level). Results also showed “a multiple regression equation account[ing] for 47.40% of the variance in PRCA-24 scores with state anxiety scores” (p. 82) for the combination of the four contexts. Based on the correlations presented, McCroskey and Beatty make the assumption that CA, as a trait-like variable, represents an accumulation of a person’s state anxiety experiences. McCroskey and Beatty conclude their study with the following statement regarding CA measurement using the PRCA-24: “Although the PRCA-24 may not always relate to single observations of specific behaviors, the present study demonstrated a statistically significant, and more importantly, a meaningful theoretical relationship to anxiety actually experienced in communication situations” (p. 83).

Though McCroskey (1982a) proposed his reconceptualization of the CA variable in terms of a continuum, because the original CA conceptualization (1970) lacked “sufficient clarity and specificity…” (p. 136), he continues to treat CA in subsequent
research as being either a trait or a state (e.g., McCroskey & Beatty, 1984). In 1984, McCroskey and Beatty stated that they were measuring “accumulated situational CA.” However, if situational CA, as defined by McCroskey (1982a), is “the reactions of an individual to communicating with a given individual or group of individuals at a given time [italics added]” (p. 149), then it appears problematic to attempt to measure an accumulation of experiences that are limited to a given time. It appears as though McCroskey and Beatty’s “accumulated state CA” appears to be either person-group CA or generalized context CA, as described by McCroskey in his reconceptualization. Thus, there remains considerable confusion as to McCroskey’s purpose in reconceptualizing CA, if subsequent research including his own does not utilize the reconceptualization.

*Uses of the PRCA-24*

PRCA-24 scores are typically used by researchers for three reasons: first, to categorize individuals according to their CA score prior to intervention techniques to reduce CA (e.g., Beatty, Behnke, & McCallum, 1978; Ayres, Hopf, & Edwards, 1999), second, to compare average group CA scores under various experimental conditions (e.g., Winiecki & Ayres, 1999; Renshaw, 2002), and third, to correlate CA with other variables (e.g., Carrell & Wilmington, 1998; Dwyer, 1998). The original reason for using PRCA scores, as noted by McCroskey (1970), was to differentiate among individuals whose communication behaviors suffered as a result of inhibition rather than inability. Based on this original reasoning, the PRCA-24 is often used to categorize individuals according to their CA score prior to intervention to reduce CA.
There are two issues concerning this initially intended use. First, McCroskey suggests that people whose PRCA-24 scores exceed the mean by one standard deviation constitute high apprehensives, and second, he suggests that treatment programs such as systematic desensitization (McCroskey, 1972) and cognitive restructuring (Fremouw & Scott, 1979) are useful in reducing CA in such individuals. McCroskey (1982a) elaborates by saying that with normally distributed scores,

The researcher can be reasonably assured that the people classified as “high” are truly different from those classified as “low.” These two groups are the ones that theoretically should manifest differential behaviors related to the measure. Those in the middle [68% of the population], the “normals,” actually may have no consistent pattern of behavior, particularly if the measure is a personality-type measure. The middle scores most likely will indicate that this [CA] is a facet of personality not highly associated with the behavior of these individuals. Other personality elements, or situational constraints, may completely dominate their behavior to the exclusion of this particular personality variable. (p. 152)

McCroskey continues by saying that “for such people the [CA] variable may be irrelevant, and their behavior may be controlled by the situation and/or other personality characteristics” (p. 168). If situational factors or other personality characteristics can affect moderate apprehensives “to the exclusion of this particular [CA] personality variable” (p. 152), there is no apparent reason why high and low apprehensives should not also be affected by these same factors, especially given that plus or minus one
standard deviation is an arbitrary dividing point between normals and high and low apprehensives.

A second problem associated with using PRCA scores to differentiate high apprehensives from normals and low apprehensives is one McCroskey himself makes clear:

While this procedure is excellent for research involving comparatively large samples and based on aggregate data analyses, such a procedure is far too subject to measurement error to be applied to single individuals. Judgments about individuals should never be based on a single score or any scale. Rather, such a score should be one of many factors to be considered. This is particularly important for people to recognize when developing or implementing intervention programs designed to alter high or low CA. (McCroskey, 1982a, p. 152)

Clearly there are many possible sources of measurement error, but if "other personality elements" and "situational constraints" may be factors dominating the CA of normals, it is not unreasonable to suppose these may also be sources of measurement error in the procedures that continue to be commonly applied in identifying high apprehensives for intervention.

The second and third purposes for which PRCA-24 scores are typically used is to compare average group CA scores under various experimental conditions and to correlate CA with other variables. Kellerman (2001) notes that "means of different individuals' responses are among the most commonly reported statistics in communication journals...[and that] communication scholarship relies heavily on the analysis of the
means of different individual responses” (p. 367). Kellerman investigates the
“assumptions underlying the employment of group means” (p. 367) in research literature
with the purpose of exploring “whether different individuals’ outcomes should be treated
as equivalent to different outcomes of individuals” (p. 367). Kellerman’s main point is as
follows:

Individuals may have different response distributions because either their central
tendencies or the variation in their responses over time differ. When individuals
have different underlying response distributions, they are no longer
interchangeable and point estimates they provide take on different meanings both
conceptually and mathematically. (p. 371)

In short, Kellerman argues that even if two people score identically on a measurement
instrument, the score may not carry the same meaning for each respondent, so calculating
a mean for a group of individuals is not necessarily representative of the experiences of
people in that group. The direct implication is that one must reject the use of the mean
for comparative purposes, unless one can determine that the individuals involved in the
study have the same individual response distributions.

Kellerman provides evidence indicating that “sample means based on point
estimates generated by different individuals provide biased estimates of individuals’
characteristic response tendencies and their response repertoire” (p. 381) because
individual scores on measurements “have different underlying response distributions” (p.
381). Taking individual response distributions into account would have a dramatic effect
on the conduct of research on CA and on many other phenomena examined in social
science inquiry. In the present context, Kellerman’s argument provides a clear basis for questioning the use of PRCA-24 scores in comparing average group CA scores under different research conditions.

An Alternative Theoretical Perspective for Examining CA

Despite these questions about the uses of the instrument, McCroskey has demonstrated that the PRCA-24 is both valid and reliable as noted earlier. It is not the goal of this study to refute the outcomes of those studies. Rather, the goal of this study is to examine CA from a theoretical perspective that acknowledges the interactional nature of communication.

Research in the CA tradition presumes that CA exists as a trait-like characteristic of personality. According to Werner & Baxter (1994), researchers who utilize “a trait perspective focus on individuals and their psychological processes as the unit of analysis, view people as largely independent of their context,” (p. 335), expect personality characteristics to remain stable, and may even “assume that there is an ideal end state toward which the individual or personality type is growing” (p. 335). Werner and Baxter expound on this definition by noting that measures of traits are expected to be both reliable and objective, and that studying traits will provide for “the identification of universal principles of behavior” (p. 335). In terms of Fisher’s (1978) framework for communication theories, theory and research on CA seek a psychological explanation for communication behavior. Indeed, CA, as a trait-like variable, is understood to exist as a “semienduring or semipermanent concept that is the function of experiences, that is, the past” (p. 142). Fisher explains that “a psychological model focuses on the source-
receiver, the individual human being, and delves into the internal cognitive and affective makeup of the communicating agent” (p. 144). Craig (1999) states that “psychological theories explain...the cognitive processes by which people are able to create messages” (p. 126). Seeking psychological explanations for communication phenomena is not new. Fisher (1978) notes that “the psychological perspective is probably the most popular perspective of human communication” (p. 136), and Craig (1999) observes that “communication theories traditionally have been classified by disciplinary origin (e.g., psychology...)” (p. 132).

For theorists who employ a psychological perspective in explaining communication, the nature of interaction is secondary to the personality or cognitive processes of the individuals involved. From the alternative perspective of social construction, however, the interaction among persons is the primary explanatory phenomena in all communication (Littlejohn, 1999). More specifically, models of the construction of meaning in communication (e.g., Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Arundale, 1999) view meaning as created in and through the interaction of the individuals. Indeed, the communicating participants co-construct the very situation in which they are interacting, together with their meanings for that situation. These models are grounded in the epistemological perspective of constructionism: “the view that all knowledge, and therefore, all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).
In this study, I adopt the perspective of social construction and more specifically a model of the co-construction of meaning in interaction in investigating an alternative understanding of CA as it is created and maintained through interaction with others. I employ these perspectives in place of what McCroskey terms “situational constraints” in his discussions both of CA as “trait-like” and of the measurement of CA. From the perspective of such a model, CA is defined as an individual’s evaluation of actual or anticipated communicative situations in view of prior experiences with such situations.

CA is created and maintained in two related but distinct types of circumstances. The first type encompasses all circumstances, past and present, in which persons form evaluations of particular communicative situations, as an outcome of their interaction with others in those situations (e.g., meetings, public presentations, etc.). These evaluations may involve any degree of CA from high to low, but from this co-construction perspective, CA is seen as always arising in particular communicative situations and as variable, depending on the interaction unique to any given situation. For purposes of this study, I will refer to this variability in CA as its “situational fluctuation.”

The second type of circumstance in which perceptions of CA are co-constituted is the situation in which the PRCA-24 is actually administered to an individual by a researcher. From the perspective adopted here, it is evident that perceptions of CA are created and transformed within the test-taking situation. Indeed, the experience of simply filling out the instrument affects how a person responds to each question. Within this study, I will refer to this variability in CA as “measurement fluctuation.”
The concept of CA as a trait-like variable continues to be explicitly maintained throughout the CA literature, and McCroskey clearly adopts and advocates the measurement of CA, via the PRCA-24 on the presumption that the trait-like, psychological perspective is the best explanation for CA experiences. However, McCroskey’s (1982a) own explanations for the sources of what he refers to as “trait-like” CA are contradictory. He states that his “underlying assumption is that people develop expectations with regard to other people and with regard to situations” (p. 157). This premise clearly acknowledges the contribution of the situational fluctuation of CA, without any mention of a trait. When he attempts to explain the causes of what he refers to as “trait-like CA,” which he says are “based primarily on speculation and rather tenuous analogies…” (p. 154), he notes that a combination of hereditary and environment are responsible for a person’s tendencies toward CA. One is then led to question what McCroskey’s position actually is. Is he a proponent of past situational fluctuation culminating in an eventual predisposition, or is he a proponent of an inherent predisposition coupled with past experiences culminating in a trait? Though answering these questions is not the focus of this study, they highlight issues regarding etiology of CA that have been the subject of debate in past research.

If CA is affected by environment, as acknowledged by McCroskey, then how and at what point do a person’s past evaluative experiences coalesce into an inherent disposition residing within the individual? Viewed from a co-construction perspective, it is equally likely that each communicative experience affects one’s level of apprehension at the time it occurs. Meaning is co-constructed within the communication experience
based on that interaction. Indeed, "meanings are constructed by human beings as [italics added] they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). People may anticipate reacting in a specific manner to a particular situation based on a prior experience, but anticipated reactions can and do constantly change as people interact with each other and their environment. For example, a battered woman may not be afraid of her husband before violence in the relationship starts. She may develop fear from the violent interaction between herself and her husband. She may come to anticipate being apprehensive when interacting with her husband in the future, but her level of anxiety may very well decrease in situations in which he is not violent, or increase further in situations in which he is more violent. Her apprehension, therefore, is co-constructed within the interaction with her husband. This situational fluctuation (meaning created as a result of various past, co-constructed experiences) is also likely to play a role in people’s responses to the PRCA-24.

When people respond to the PRCA-24, it is entirely possible that they are drawing on a variety of co-constructed experiences. However, referencing past experiences is not entirely that straightforward, for there are an overwhelming number of scenarios any one person may reference in responding to a given situation including the situation of measurement using the PRCA-24. Indeed, a person may not be capable of responding to the PRCA-24 with any degree of consistency if he/she is simultaneously referencing more than one situation, unless each situation had relatively the same outcome. For example, in my personal experience with the PRCA-24, I have been frustrated by the inaccuracy of my answers in that all of my experiences in dyadic, group, meeting, and
public speaking situations were simply too varied to be generalizable. I have been both apprehensive and non-apprehensive in all four of the PRCA contexts, depending on whom I was communicating with and the circumstances surrounding that communication. For instance, I remember being highly apprehensive anticipating a meeting in which my work performance was being reviewed, but I have attended many other meetings in which I was comfortable contributing to the conversation. Others have also reported highly similar experiences in responding to the PRCA-24 and other measurement instruments. In short, from the co-construction perspective employed here, the situational fluctuation in a person’s experiences of CA is one central component in the measurement fluctuation involved in the co-constructing of responses to the PRCA-24. CA, then, is a function of one’s recall of meanings of CA as constructed within past experiences and within the present experience of taking the PRCA-24. Situational and measurement fluctuation, then, are paramount in understanding a person’s CA.

In view of this discussion of the PRCA-24 as well as my own experiences, the following three questions interest me in seeking a more thorough understanding of CA within a co-construction framework: First, what experiences are people drawing from when taking the PRCA-24? Second, does a person have a difficult time choosing a fully representative answer because each item is tapping a wide variety of experiences? And third, how does the test-taking situation affect one’s responses to the PRCA-24? In order to explore the significance of both situational and measurement fluctuation as defined in this study, I explore the following question:
RQ: With respect to the instrument as a whole and to its four subgroups including groups, meetings, dyadic interactions, and public speaking situations, what is a person’s lived experience of communication apprehension in responding to the PRCA-24?
Chapter 2:
Methods and Design

Interviews

This research seeks to understand people’s lived experiences in responding to the PRCA-24 using narrative methodology. Narrative methodology utilizes conversational interview methods as a means of accessing people’s personal stories. Conversation is “a basic mode of human interaction” (Kvale, 1996, p. 5) through which people interact, get to know one another, learn about each other’s lived experiences, and understand each other’s feelings in living those experiences. In interviewing, one “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, [and] to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 1), and the purpose of the interview “is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (pp. 5-6). Kvale also notes, “interviews are particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (p. 105). Because this research focuses on understanding, describing, and clarifying people’s experiences in taking the PRCA-24, conversational interview methods and narrative methodology are the best choice for this study.

Participants

Kvale (1996) recommends 15 ± 10 participants for interview research studies. This number is meant to be somewhat ambiguous in that no specified number of
interviews will be adequate across all research questions. A researcher should interview as many subjects as necessary to obtain essential research information, or more specifically, interviews should be conducted until one reaches “a point of saturation” (p. 102), meaning that research should continue until similar themes, whether anticipated or not, consistently emerge in each interview.

For this research, I recruited and interviewed ten participants. Eight of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and used as the focus of analysis for this study. Interviews were conducted with enough lead time to recruit more participants if consistency was not apparent among interviewees; however, that precaution proved unnecessary. The first interview conducted served as a pilot interview and was among the two interviews not transcribed. I chose not to use the remaining interview because I perceived a lack of interest and seriousness on the part of the interviewee. All participants, with the exception of one, were recruited from University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Fundamentals of Oral Communication classes (Comm. 131X and 141X). Because every student who graduates from UAF is required to take 131X or 141X, the classes include a diverse group of students with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, and major. Given this diversity, I anticipated finding large variations in CA experiences. Students in 131X and 141X were selected for participation in this study because of their accessibility, given that I am a graduate teaching assistant in the Communication Department, and because CA is relevant to their course experience. Though I teach both 131X and 141X, participants in this study, with the exception of two students, one who served as the pilot interviewee and one who filled in after a last minute
cancellation, were recruited from classes other than my own. Finally, I recruited one participant who was not from the introductory level communication classes because of the person’s diverse background.

Students were assured of confidentiality. The space chosen to conduct the interview was private, and I informed each person that the audiotapes used to record the conversations would remain secure until the three year waiting period specified by the Internal Review Board at the hosting institution was complete, at which time they would be destroyed. Participants were assured that the researcher and her advisor were the only people with access to the tapes. Pseudonyms have been employed to reduce the possibility of interviewees being identified. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and to voice concerns at any time before, during, and after the interview process and, as noted in the informed consent form, were free to withdraw from the interview process or the research project at any time by simply informing me.

Procedures

For initial recruitment, I approached students as a group in their respective classroom settings. I informed them about the nature of the project and asked them to write their names and contact information on a sheet of paper that was passed around the classroom or to contact me via electronic mail or phone if interested in volunteering. Recruitment efforts were ongoing until the anticipated number of participants volunteered. All participants were 18 years of age or older, and special care was taken to represent a wide variety of ages. An equal number of males and females were chosen to participate, and diversity in regard to ethnicity and race was a priority.
Interviews were scheduled in one and a half hour blocks, with each interview lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. The interview place was not restricted to a specific area because I wanted interviewees to feel comfortable with the space chosen. The location of the interviews was discussed with each participant prior to interviewing, and each interviewee agreed that he/she would be most comfortable meeting at the Department of Communication at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The Department has several private consultation rooms, and each interviewee noted his/her approval of that particular space prior to being interviewed.

At the beginning of each interview, I thanked each interviewee for his/her effort and time in participating. I then asked them to fill out the informed consent form (see Appendix B), which stated the purpose of the research. Upon signing the informed consent form, I asked each participant if he/she had any questions or concerns. After addressing questions, I engaged in normal everyday conversation for 5-15 minutes so that I could get to know my interviewees and help them to feel at ease in sharing information. At some point during the beginning of each interview, I asked each participant to take the PRCA-24. In order to allow for participants to respond with candor and not be concerned with social desirability, I told them that the numerical scores would not be calculated or used. The test scores were not used for research purposes because the goal of this study was to explore each person’s experiences in responding to the questions that comprise the PRCA-24. Upon having the participants take the PRCA-24, I questioned the participants as to the nature of specific responses so that I could to determine if the CA indicated in a particular context, such as public speaking, meetings, etc., was distinctive to all situations.
within that context or was indicative of particular past experiences. Each interview remained conversational to allow for the interviewees’ narrative stories to develop as spontaneously as possible. Participants were encouraged to relay their experiences in as much detail as possible so that I could more fully understand how they draw upon their own experiences in completing the PRCA-24.

Each interview was directed toward my concerns, but no formal set of questions was followed. Rather, open-ended questions designed to evoke “spontaneous, rich, thick, and relevant answers” (Kvale, 1996, p. 145) were utilized. The types of questions I used to guide each interview process included the following: 1) Introductory questions designed to get the conversation flowing; I asked questions such as, “Tell me about your particular experiences with CA” “Were you thinking of one particular instance when you responded to statement number X?” 2) Probing questions which allow for deeper investigation; examples of the questions I used include, “What were your feelings during your experience?” “Do you feel as though your experience is unique to the situation or do you typically experience CA in all situations within that specified context?” “Why do you think you experienced CA in this instance?” “Have you ever used methods to try to control or alleviate your CA?” 3) Specifying questions which encourage more detailed explanations; examples of these were directly related to information given by each participant. Participants were asked specifically to expound on stories and experiences including providing more detailed descriptions and more thorough explanations. 4) Structuring questions, which help to keep the interview focused on relevant information; these were used when the conversation deviated from the intended topic. Many of the
conversations did digress in terms of the information sought because of the informal nature of the conversational interview. As a result, structuring questions such as, "Getting back to what you were saying about this one experience with CA... tell me...," were used to politely divert attention back to the research topic. 5) Interpreting questions included clarifying and rephrasing, as well as some speculation. Examples of the types of interpreting questions I used included, "Why do you think you felt that way?" "Do you think you felt that way because of..." "Do you mean..." or "Let me see if I understand what you are saying; you feel that this experience is related to...because of...." My goal was to ask questions phrased to reflect sensitivity toward and empathy for the interviewees. Additionally, I intended for all questions to reflect the assumption that CA is a co-constructed behavior manifesting itself through situational and measurement fluctuation as defined by this study; this notion stems from my personal experiences with CA.

In each interview, I particularly emphasized communicative validity, which "involves testing the validity of knowledge claims in dialogue" (Kvale, 1996, p. 244), since the nature of the interview involves creation, understanding, and participant consensus on concepts generated by the conversation. Throughout the interview process, I continually checked with and questioned each participant as to the meaning of what he/she said in order to be certain of my own understanding of the story or narrative. I utilized active listening skills to maintain my credibility as an interviewer. During the interviews, I attempted to "bracket" my own CA experiences. Bracketing involves "listening without prejudice...[and] without interruptions" (p. 135). It allows the
researcher to be open to new or unexpected information. Bracketing while simultaneously being a co-constructor of the conversation is analogous to the idea of seeing an entire forest and the individual trees simultaneously. It was not an easy concept to master, but it was a necessity nonetheless. I attempted to listen to each interviewee as if I were learning something for the first time, in order to forestall interpreting the participant’s experiences solely based on my own experiences. I recognized, however, the inevitable influence my understandings and experiences had on the interview process.

As each interview came to a close, I “round[ed] off the interaction” (Kvale, 1996, p. 128) by referring to some of the main conversational points that were discussed and by allowing the participants to comment on them. I then asked each participant if he/she had any questions. A few of the participants became extremely interested in the topic of my research, so I continued talking with them until they indicated they were comfortable with bringing the process to a close. Finally, I thanked each participant a second time for his/her participation.

Research tool

In qualitative interviewing, the researcher is, literally, the research instrument. The researcher does not claim to be objective or removed from the research; rather, the researcher embraces the idea that he/she is personally influencing the research and seeks a thorough knowledge of self before attempting to understand someone else. My personal narrative of communication apprehension involves years of experience in music performance, competitive public speaking, and professional theatre. I currently perform professionally in the musical theatre venue and in the media when time permits. I plan to
continue pursuing performing as a life long career goal. My interest in communication apprehension is directly related to my experiences as a student and as a performer, in that I have dealt with stage fright, a sub-context of CA (McCroskey, 1982a), extensively over the years.

I began performing in 5th grade when, at age ten, I sang my first solo in a school Christmas musical. I loved to sing and was already focused on singing as a career. That same year, I began playing the flute. I continued to perform in various contexts through middle school including singing, playing the flute, and playing the piano. My interest in instrumental music waned as I began high school. I continued to take flute lessons, but I chose to be in a competitive singing group rather than in the band. I also enrolled in a competitive public speaking course during my sophomore year. I thoroughly enjoyed the class and traveled all over the state of Florida to compete; I even got to go to a national competition held in Philadelphia, PA. Competitive speech was probably the reason I became interested in theatre; many of the competitive speech categories, including oral interpretation, were directly related to theatre. The main difference between speech and theatre is that speech emphasizes the actual speaker and the related topic whereas theatre emphasizes the character being played in relation to the setting being portrayed.

I auditioned for my first musical (Annie) my junior year of high school. By the end of that school year I had performed in two more shows and had chosen to attend an arts school for my senior year. I was sixteen and preparing to leave for school when I landed my first paid (also referred to as professional) role. After my senior year of high school at Florida School of the Arts (FloArts), I decided to continue my FloArts
education in a two-year intensive musical theatre program. Throughout middle school, high school and my first two years of college, I did not really experience any major problems with CA. In fact, I finally felt like my musical career goals had fleshed out into a desire to perform professionally in the musical theatre genre, and I was rather enjoying my new place in the spotlight. I succeeded right away in any musical, public speaking or theatre endeavor that I attempted. For example, I qualified for nationals the first year I took competitive speaking, I landed a lead role in Oklahoma, which was only the second show for which I had auditioned, and I was the only first year student to be cast in every show put on by FloArts my senior year of high school.

It was not until my third, or sophomore year, at FloArts that I began to feel as though my anxiety might be inhibiting my abilities as a performer. As I finished my third and final year at FloArts, I began actively seeking employment in various professional venues. I still wanted more than anything to perform for a living, but my anxiety, particularly during audition processes, became overwhelming. I would go to an audition, be really excited, then my turn would come, and I would freeze. I could get the words out of my mouth, but not without my voice shaking heavily. It was really hard to convince people that I could sing proficiently for a show when I could not even manage a short audition. I would often leave auditions in tears and vow to get it right the next time. I finally came to a point when I realized that each “next time” would be just like the “last time.” I was so concerned about my prospective career path that I decided to get my Bachelor’s degree in psychology, a completely unrelated area of study, because it was the only other subject in which I was even remotely interested and could see pursuing full
time. I continued performing in professional theatre productions while pursuing my BA because I continued to get cast, but I desperately wanted a “fall back” plan. This way, I could feel confident in knowing that even if I failed at performing, I was still needed and valued in another area of expertise.

It wasn’t until the summer of 1993 when I attended a three-week intensive program called the Musical Theatre Project (MTP), directed by Broadway performer Ann Reinking, that I began to learn some singing techniques that helped me to cope with my anxiety. Incidentally, I did not have problems auditioning for MTP because I sent in a videotaped audition; performing for a camera is less stressful than performing for a group of directors because the audition can be retaped if something goes wrong. The coping techniques I learned at MTP were invaluable in that I began to realize that I controlled my anxiety; it did not control me. Suddenly, I felt empowered. Even though I knew my anxiety issues had not disappeared, I felt that I was slowly coming to understand how I would eventually control them.

In addition to the stage fright or performance anxiety I have experienced as a performer, I have encountered CA in interpersonal relationships and group contexts. My interpersonal or dyadic relationships involve family, friends, coworkers, colleagues, and acquaintances. Each of these relationships represents a completely different context in which CA might be present. CA with family members is often based on prior negative experiences, while CA with new coworkers or acquaintances is usually based on unfamiliarity. As far as my own lived experience is concerned, even meetings generate different levels of CA based on what the meeting is about, whom the meeting is with, and
where the meeting takes place. For example, a meeting with coworkers generates very little CA because I normally view situations with friends and acquaintances as an opportunity to relax, be myself, and even joke when appropriate. But meetings involving a review of my personal work performance conjure up a great deal of CA because of the fact that I am being evaluated. I have discovered I feel the most apprehension when I believe someone is evaluating me for some reason or another. This conclusion suggests why auditioning became such a difficult process for me. I still have difficulty with auditions, and often rely on those I know or have worked for in the past to hire me and/or recommend me to other directors. Also, I now have a demo CD that permits me to audition without physically dealing with the audition situation.

Finally, my career goals directly relate to the study of CA. I would like to obtain a more thorough understanding of CA so that I can develop training programs on CA reduction. Moreover, my performing career is directly tied to CA, so I could potentially apply an understanding of the results to my own life. Also, one might argue that CA in the group and interpersonal contexts is applicable to performing because of the intensively focused group dynamics of a cast. Normally professional companies rehearse excessively long hours in a short amount of time in order to bring a production to fruition. The constraints of time and the pressures of learning new material, coupled with consistent interaction among cast members, often causes conflict, which potentially could lead to CA.
Analysis

Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the author. Doing the transcription on my own helped me to maintain the integrity of the shared reality created by the participants and myself during the interviews. Each tape was listened to repeatedly throughout the description and analysis processes to check for inconsistencies in the transcripts, to verify research notes, and to immerse myself more fully in the data. I relied mainly on the written transcription during both the description and analysis phases, though more as a reference and not for the actual context of the conversations constructed within the interview process. It is important to emphasize here that "transcribe" means to transform and that the transcription is not the conversation itself but an abstraction of the original (Kvale, 1996). Kvale warns that transcriptions decontextualize and detemporalize a conversation and that we, as researchers, should not depend solely on the transcription for interpretation. As Kvale states in his text, "the interviewer has an empathic access to the world of the interviewee...communicated not only by words but by tone of voice, expressions, and gestures in the natural flow of the conversation" (p. 125).

Indeed, I found that the transcription simply did not provide an accurate reflection of participants' tone of voice or the information conveyed via gestures and facial expressions; thus, my familiarity with the audiotapes proved beneficial and necessary. Because I used the transcripts as a reference, however, I did attempt to provide for the nonverbal aspects of the interviews by creating a column within the transcripts designed for that purpose. I found myself spending a large amount of transcription time attempting
to capture these observations and perceptions within the transcript. My attempts proved helpful in the writing and analysis process, so the time spent was valuable.

Thematic narrative analysis was utilized in this study. A thematic narrative analysis condenses or reconstructs the information from the interviews into themes and interprets them in terms of the experiences studied (Kvale, 1996). The analysis focuses strictly on the information gleaned from the interviewees’ stories. It is important to note here that “analysis is not an isolated stage, but permeates an entire interview inquiry” (p. 205). I did not approach the analysis stage as another progression in a linear process; rather, I looked for themes during each interview, during the transcription and description processes, and ultimately during the analysis. As noted by Kvale (1996), “In…interpreting ‘as you go’—considerable parts of the analysis are ‘pushed forward’ into the interview situation itself. The final analysis then becomes not only easier and more amenable, but will also rest on more secure ground” (p. 178).

To check the validity of my research findings, I utilized the following methods as suggested by Kvale (1996): “checking the meaning of outliers, checking for researcher effects, following up on surprises, looking for negative evidence, and getting feedback from informants” (p. 242). As Kvale suggests, “validation is moved from inspection at the end of the production line [as in quantitative methods] to quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production” (p. 236). Thus, validity in interview research “comes to rest on the quality of craftsmanship in [and throughout the] research” (p. 240).
Overview of PRCA-24

The PRCA-24 is composed of twenty-four statements, which are broken down into four sections. Each of those four sections contains six statements relevant to communication in one of the following four contexts: groups, meetings, interpersonal or dyadic interaction, and public speaking. The first set of six statements addresses groups, the next six cover meetings, the third set includes interpersonal interaction, and the fourth set encompasses public speaking. In order to reduce response bias, each set of six is composed of three positively worded and three negatively worded statements. The entire PRCA-24 as it was presented to participants is found in Appendix A.

In discussing each interview, I will designate statements by number only unless the content of the statement is unclear from the participant’s answer. Any discrepancies in responses to similar but oppositely worded statements will be noted as for example, if a person “disagrees” with a positively worded statement, but fails to agree with a similar, but oppositely worded statement. If a discrepancy is not noted, one can assume that the responses were relatively compatible.

George

George is an eighteen-year-old college freshman. He is the youngest of four boys, and was born and raised in Alaska, though he has moved extensively within the state over the course of his life as a result of his parents’ mining careers. George has participated in several local community theatre productions. He noted that theatre is not
his desired career choice, but that he enjoys doing it. He also indicated that professional theatre is a relatively unstable job choice and that he would like to find an occupation that is more secure. The 50-minute interview with George took place in a consultation room in the Department of Communication on the campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. George responded to my questions without hesitation. His answers were detailed, and he asked for clarification when he did not fully understand my inquiries.

At the beginning of the interview, after George finished completing the PRCA-24, I set the instrument aside and asked him if he had ever experienced apprehension in communicating with others. His immediate response was if he was with an authority figure, then, yes, he would usually be nervous, but when he “is talking to a friend or a brother or even an acquaintance that [he] just met, [he is] usually pretty calm [and] pretty relaxed.” He continued by saying that he also gets nervous when speaking formally in front of a group of people and referred to recently having to give a diagnostic presentation in his public speaking course. I followed up the previous answer by asking George why he thought he felt nervous in public speaking situations and to elaborate on his answer by referring to specific instances. His immediate response was, “I am nervous in front of large groups because everybody is paying attention to me.” He continued saying that one of the worst situations he has ever experienced was having others laugh at him while he was giving a speech. This interested me since he was reporting that something which happened during the speech played a role in his apprehensiveness, so I asked him if he could describe any other situations in which his CA increased or decreased as a result of something that happened either before or during a situation. He
responded by saying that while performing on stage he has been thrown off when the theatrical illusion of the fourth wall has been broken (e.g., a baby starts crying). He continued, however, by saying that when that happens, he attempts to use the extra nervousness as increased performance energy. He also added that it is rather important to him not to appear nervous in front of others, regardless of how nervous he really feels. Later in the interview, George noted that “if somebody laughs” during his presentation, then he will become apprehensive, even if the person laughing is not necessarily laughing at him.

I continued the interview by looking at George’s responses to the PRCA-24 (See Appendix A) and explaining how the analysis of the tool works. We began by examining the first six statements, which refer to group communication. George had one “undecided” (#6), three “agrees” (#s 1, 2 & 4), and two “disagrees” (#s 3 & 5). I asked George to talk to me about what he was thinking when he responded to those six statements. In particular, I asked why he chose “undecided” on #6, “I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.” George’s response was “it depends totally” on whether the other people agree or disagree with what he is saying. For example, he expressed that if he is in a situation in which “everybody is there for the same situation and wanting to work it out” then he is “totally calm [and] totally relaxed.” However, if people are disagreeing or pointedly telling him he is wrong, he feels uncomfortable. Upon looking over the other five responses, George noted his affinity for communicating with others. He said he enjoys conversing with others and “really likes talking about [his] feelings.” Based on his positive reaction to those statements, I asked
him to comment on why he chose 2s/4s and not 1s/5s in those instances. He answered by again saying, “it totally depends on the situation.” He added that it also “depends on who the people are.”

We continued our conversation by looking at the next six statements on the instrument. Numbers 7-12 refer to meetings, and George had responded with four “disagrees” (#s 7, 9, 10, & 12), one “agree” (#8), and one “undecided” (#11). Though I did not pick-up on the disproportionate number of positive and negative responses during the interview process, I did notice the discrepancy in transcription and analysis. Indeed, George agreed with #8, “Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings,” while simultaneously disagreeing with #9, “I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.”

George noted that he is typically relaxed at meetings because he does not feel a need to interact. Specifically he said, “If I am just sitting there—[and] this is my experience—listening to what is going on, I am usually pretty calm and relaxed.” He also said that if he is called upon to express his opinion at a meeting, then he is “really nervous.” George continued by saying that his level of comfort in communicating in a meeting setting “also depends on how well [he] know[s] [the] people in the group.” My next question focused on his reasoning for the “undecided” on #11, “communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.” George’s response was,

I put undecided because, again, it really depends. Like if there are officials and I don’t know them very well and my job is on the line...if they don’t like what I am
doing, then I am very uncomfortable. But when they do enjoy what I am doing, then it is great. So it is undecided. I mean it really varies.

I then asked if George perceived that the options posed were limiting, and he responded by saying that it wasn’t the answer options that were limiting, “it is the questions that are limiting.” He said the statements were too general for him to accurately answer. He said his initial response to the statement “I dislike participating in group discussions” was “What group discussions?” “Who are the people?” “Who are you with? It totally depends on your situation.” At this point in the conversation, George indicated a frustration with the word “generally.” Specifically, he said, “The catcher though is the ‘generally.’” Generally—I mean normally—yeah, I am pretty comfortable—sometimes not…. Six meetings out of ten—those are comfortable. The other four are uncomfortable, so, generally, [emphasis on the word generally], yes. I don’t know.”

George’s responses for statements 13-18 included one “undecided” (#14), two “disagrees” (#s 13 & 18), one “agree” (#17), one “strongly disagree” (#15), and one “strongly agree” (#16). For this section, I specifically asked George to comment on #s 15 and 16, as they were the only two statements on the instrument in which he indicated a 1 or a 5. He answered by saying that he simply enjoys talking to people and unless they are non-verbally signaling their impatience with the conversation (e.g., rolling their eyes, looking at their watch), then he enjoys speaking with people one on one. Next I asked him to comment on his “undecided.” He reread the statement, “I have no fear of speaking up in conversations,” and simply said, “it totally depends—see I hate this though because I am giving you all of these ‘it totally depends.’ It depends on the
situation.” He noted that while he enjoys conversing with people, there have been times, such as when he was pulled over for speeding, that he was not calm and relaxed about communicating. He also noted that if people touch him (e.g., someone taking his hands while talking), he feels very uncomfortable with the communication situation.

The final six statements, #s 19 through 24, encompass public speaking. George’s responses included three “disagrees” (#s 19, 21, & 23), one “undecided” (#20), and two “agrees” (#s 22 & 24). Again, I asked George to talk about his public speaking experiences and the reasons he responded with those particular answers. He noted that as president of his choir in high school, he was often called upon to lead rehearsals. He said he was extremely nervous the first few times he was asked to this, but that the process of leading rehearsal became easier as he grew more comfortable with everyone in the group. He indicated that his nervousness stems from his concern that others are judging him.

As we continued, I asked George about #19, “I have no fear of giving a speech.” Specifically, I asked him to talk about why he disagreed with that statement. He responded by saying that though being prepared is necessary and can help ease his tension in approaching the situation, there are so many details to think about when giving a speech that he might “lose everything [he has] prepared” depending on circumstances surrounding the speech. He continued by noting that the reason he agreed with #24, “while giving a speech I get so nervous, I forget facts I really know,” was because certain circumstantial aspects, such as whether or not he stumbles over his words, whether the audience laughs at him, or whether he follows his prepared outline as practiced can have a major effect on his level of apprehensiveness. After we finished discussing the
instrument, but before finishing the interview, I asked George if he had any questions for me. He indicated that he did not, so I proceeded with debriefing, and then thanked him for his participation.

*Alex*

Alex is a 32-year-old disabled combat veteran who is married with two sons. He is currently a full time student majoring in mining engineering, and chose to return to school when his disabilities prohibited him from continuing his work in construction. Alex did not engage in much small talk. He was not very outspoken unless he had something particular to say. His responses were complete, but upon making his point, he stopped talking. My interview with Alex took place in a consultation room in the Department of Communication. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Before discussing Alex’s specific responses on the PRCA-24, I asked him to comment on any prior experiences with CA. He answered immediately by saying he experienced CA quite a bit when he was younger and had first joined the military, because he was often called upon to give impromptu classes to the other men in his division. He noted that he often got no more than 2 minutes to prepare. He explained that he felt as though his CA stemmed from the spontaneity of the situation and from his attempt to organize his thoughts coherently in such a short amount of time while 100 other officers simply stared at him, waiting. Alex continued by saying he also worried about his friends making fun of him if he gave incorrect information, and he was concerned with the notion that “somebody out there knows more about the subject than
you do.” Finally, Alex commented that he became more comfortable giving the impromptu classes as time progressed.

The rest of my interview with Alex focused on his responses to the PRCA-24. As noted in the description of George’s interview, I explained to Alex how the PRCA-24 was categorized, and to which context each section applied. As with George, I simply began at the beginning of the instrument with #s 1-6 and continued discussion until we reached #24.

Alex’s responses to #s 1-6 included one “strongly disagree” (#1), one “strongly agree” (#4), two “disagrees” (#s 3 & 5), one “agree” (#2), and one “undecided” (#6). I began by asking Alex about his answer to #2, “Generally I am comfortable while participating in a group discussion.” I asked him why he did not answer with a “strongly” as he did in #1. He remarked that he wrote “agree” because the size of the group plays a role in his comfort level. Specifically, he said, “the bigger the group, the more the tendency you have to get somebody stupid in there” and he doesn’t “like to deal with stupidity.” He said that his comfort level is not associated with being afraid to communicate with such a person, but that the communication is going to be difficult and time consuming, so he is not interested in communicating with “stupid people.” Next, I asked Alex about his “undecided” response to #6, “I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions,” and he said simply, “It is undecided because you didn’t have a ‘sometimes’ in there.” Indeed, he continued by saying, “I don’t straight agree with it and I don’t straight disagree with it…. I couldn’t accurately say “agree” or “disagree.” It was both.”
We moved on to the next section and looked at #s 7 through 12. Alex’s responses were: three “disagrees” (#s 7, 10, & 11), and three “agrees” (#s 8, 9, & 12). Upon looking at these responses, Alex shared that, in meetings, “if there is something at stake and I don’t have any control over it, I am kind of apprehensive about it.” He pointed out that he disagreed with #12, “I am very calm and relaxed when answering questions at a meeting,” because “there is a lot of recourse” in the military in responding improperly to a major general or sergeant major. Alex went on to say, though, that when there is nothing at stake such as in the situation in which I was interviewing him, then he does not feel apprehensive. Next, I asked Alex if he used any means to alleviate his apprehension in stressful situations, and he said he tells jokes. He said telling a joke usually gives him a few minutes to collect his thoughts before having to proceed with the anticipated communication. Again, he noted that he has become more comfortable with communication in groups and meetings as he has gotten older and gained more experience.

In the third section, interpersonal interaction (#s 13-18), Alex responded with three “disagrees” (#s 13, 17, & 18), two “strongly agrees” (#s 14 & 16), and one “strongly disagree” (# 15). As was the case in discussing the second section with George, I did not pick up on Alex’s disproportionate number of positive and negative responses during the actual interview. Rather, I noticed the discrepancy during transcription and analysis. Specifically, Alex noted that he strongly agreed with #16, “Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations,” while simultaneously disagreeing with #17, “While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.”
I first asked Alex about his response to #13, "While participating in conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous." Specifically, I wanted to know why the response was not stronger since he had indicated earlier that he enjoys talking with people. He noted that meeting someone new can often be uncomfortable, that it may take a few minutes to warm up to someone. He did say, however, that once those first few minutes have passed, the apprehension fades. Before continuing to examine Alex's responses on the actual instrument, I paused to ask Alex if he felt the five responses to choose from adequately represented his feelings. He responded by saying,

No, I have never done one of these papers where I feel like I have enough choices. I have a problem with accuracy. I like to be very accurate. Once again, out of all these choices, there wasn’t a ‘sometimes’ in there.

I moved on by asking Alex how he interpreted the words "generally” and “ordinarily.” He continued his explanation by saying that he usually feels comfortable because he believes he is good with words, but that there are times when he simply cannot talk his way out of a situation, which would be the time when he feels apprehensive about communicating.

Next, I examined Alex’s three “disagrees.” I noticed immediately that he responded to two opposite sentences with the same answer. Specifically, his responses to #18, “I’m afraid to speak up in conversations,” and #17, “While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed,” were both “disagree.” I asked about this inconsistency in answers, and Alex said that the word “very” was the reason he put “disagree.” Indeed,
he said, “I would say I feel relaxed but…not very relaxed. I hardly ever feel very relaxed when I am talking to somebody new.”

Finally, we looked at Alex’s responses to #s 19 through 24. He had four “disagrees” (#s 19, 20, 22, & 24), one “undecided” (#21), and one “agree” (#23). Again, I honed in on the seeming discrepancy in answers on #19, “I have no fear of giving a speech,” and #20, “Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.” Specifically I asked Alex to talk to me about the difference between the two answers since he clearly indicated that he has some fear associated with giving a speech, but that he does not necessarily feel tense or rigid when doing so. Alex answered by saying,

I don’t go up to give a speech with absolutely no fear. I have slight worries or fears of how I am going to get graded, if I am going to. [My] biggest fear...is communicating my points across in a manner that the audience can understand.

I then asked Alex to explain to me why he chose to put “undecided” for #21. Again, he referred to there not being a “sometimes or sometimes not.” He said, “I can’t accurately answer that with the choices given up here. I don’t agree or disagree.” Next, Alex and I looked at #23, “I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.” As we began to talk about his answer (agree), Alex indicated that nervousness does not necessarily cause him to forget facts, but that forgetting a fact would make him nervous. He went on to say that if he forgot a fact in a presentation, his level of apprehensiveness would change with the knowledge of the audience. If audience members have some knowledge of the topic he is presenting, then forgetting a fact would cause more nervousness and apprehension.
than if audience members know very little about his topic. I finished the interview by asking Alex if he had any questions for me or if he had any other relevant information to share given our discussion. He said no, so I proceeded with the debriefing. After informing Alex as to the nature of my thesis topic, he indicated that he has taken quite a few measurement instruments in the past because of his military background, and he has rarely “come across a question that [he] can actually say [he] answered accurately.”

Shannon

Shannon is an 18-year-old college freshman majoring in business and accounting. She did not answer any questions without my probing. When I first asked her to share demographic information, all she said was, “my name is Shannon, and I am a freshman.” I had to specifically ask how old she is, what her major is, and where she is from. She readily volunteered to participate when I recruited for this project, but she remained silent much of the interview unless I specifically addressed her with a question. I did notice, however, that I tended to fill in any silent pauses with questions or various verbal fillers. I interviewed Shannon in the same consultation room as I interviewed George and Alex. Shannon’s interview was the shortest of all nine interviews; it lasted approximately 35 minutes.

I began the interview by asking Shannon if she could identify any communication experiences in which she remembers being apprehensive. She answered no, so I began explaining the function of the PRCA-24, and how it is broken down. Shannon responded to the first six statements of the PRCA-24 with: one “strongly disagree” (#1), two “agrees” (#s 2 & 4), one “disagree” (#3), and two “undecideds” (#s 5 & 6). My first
inquiry was about the undecideds. Specifically, I asked Shannon to “tell me why you chose to put a three there, and what you were thinking about when you put that down.” Shannon’s immediate response to me was “it kind of depends on...the people I am working with.” I then asked her if there was anything else besides people that affected her response to the situation, and she said age of the people. Shannon indicated to me that she enjoys participating in groups because of the relaxed atmosphere in which she can’t “say something too stupid.” Upon discussing her answers to #s 2, 3, & 4, Shannon indicated that there are times when her mood contributes to her willingness to communicate or to her feeling confident in communicating.

We continued our discussion by moving on to statements #7-12. Shannon’s responses included two “disagrees” (#s 7 & 10), one “agree” (#8), two “undecideds” (#s 9 & 12), and one “strongly disagree” (#11). I noted that both of her undecideds had to do with speaking up in a meeting as opposed to simply participating. Shannon stumbled over her words quite a bit in responding to my inquiry about speaking up. She began her answer with “the ‘express an opinion’—I don’t really, [pause] if I am not really, [pause] I don’t know.” She was able, however, to finally express herself when she said that the circumstances surrounding a meeting often play a role in her communication with others. Specifically, she stated, “I don’t really want to talk about my opinion if I think that it just got shot down or I was wrong.” She also noted that she would be unlikely to share her opinion if it wasn’t as strong as others’ opinions, and she would probably not share her opinion if that same opinion had already been expressed, simply because she would feel
uncomfortable with the redundancy. As we continued, I asked Shannon about the rest of the responses to this section. She replied by saying,

Basically…I will tell anyone what my opinion is, but…I don’t want to keep hammering it into people and keep on telling people the exact same thing that someone else has already said because there is no point in me saying it a thousand times over. I mean, if they have already heard it, and they know what everybody is feeling, then why say it again?

My final question for Shannon in this situation was “so it would make you nervous to have to repeat something over and over again in a situation?” Shannon responded by saying “yeah.”

We continued the interview by moving on to statements 13 through 18. For this section, Shannon’s answers included one “undecided” (#13), three “agrees” (#s 14, 16, & 17), and two “disagrees” (#s 15 & 18). I began the conversation by simply reading #13 aloud and then saying “tell me why you chose ‘undecided’ there.” Shannon’s answer revealed that it often depends on the person. Specifically, she noted,

There are some people that [sic], [changing thought in mid sentence] like if I was having a one-on-one conversation with someone like the president or something, I would feel very nervous. I wouldn’t feel comfortable with doing it because I don’t know them [sic]…and they [sic] are a higher ranking than just a regular common person.

She continued by saying that the location of the encounter with a person may also affect her communication apprehension. For example, conversing in a back alley would not be
comfortable for her. For the remaining set of responses, Shannon simply noted that if the questions were more specific, she could answer them more descriptively. Specifically, she said,

If it was in a certain circumstance, I could answer it [sic] a little bit more descriptive because I would know what the circumstance is. There are thousands of circumstances that this [indicating statements of instrument] might be according to.

Statements 19 through 24 were explored last. Shannon’s responses to this section included three “disagrees” (#s 18, 19, & 21), one “undecided” (#20), one “agree” (#22), and one “strongly disagree” (#24). Since three of the statements are worded negatively and three of them are worded positively to reduce response bias, I found these particular responses rather interesting since four of the statements included a “disagree” while only one of the responses included an “agree.” Once again, I addressed this section by asking first about her “undecided,” which was given in response to the statement, “Certain parts of my body feel tense and rigid while giving a speech.” Shannon answered by explaining that if she had a podium or table to “hide behind,” she would be less likely to have problems with being tense or with shaking because audience members would have something else to look at besides just her.

I then moved on to exploring Shannon’s answer to #24, only one of three “strongly disagrees” on the entire instrument. I read the statement to her and then asked the following question: “So, your mind doesn’t become jumbled or anything if you are apprehensive about performing?” Shannon’s response was
No, not really. I think if I know stuff, I might forget one or two little things but it is not going to be the whole thing. I mean I know basically what I am going to say and the order.

Because this response seemed to indicate to me that preparation played a role her Shannon’s comfort in communicating, I asked her how she would feel about public presentation if she weren’t prepared. Her response was, “I don’t know. I would probably forget everything I was going to say, and I wouldn’t be able to go through with it.”

We continued the discussion by looking at her three “disagrees.” Her response to #20 indicated that she had some fear of giving a speech but not complete or total fear. I asked her to comment on what factors contribute to her being afraid of giving a speech. Shannon said experience and practice play key roles in her being comfortable when presenting. When I asked Shannon about her “disagree” on “facing the prospect of giving a speech with confidence,” she answered by saying

I am not really confident in [giving a speech] because I don’t think I have the skills to do it. But I am not to the point where I won’t do it because I can’t do it…. I am not quite confident enough, but…you kind of build your confidence as you start your speech.

My next question to Shannon was, “has there ever been a time in your life when apprehension has kept you from actually communicating with someone?” Shannon answered by saying,

No, not really. It depends. —I don’t know—like in big classes I kind of feel like I am afraid to talk. When there are huge group discussions like that, like when there
is [sic] 70 people and everybody is kind of joining in and saying something, I just don’t really like to talk then because, [pause], I don’t know, [pause], I am kind of like a minority in front of 69 other people.

I then asked Shannon if there was anything else she would like to add to our discussion which we had not talked about. She answered by saying “no,” but then went on to explain that when she is given a subject to present, she is more comfortable with the presentation. She noted that choosing her own subject matter was more difficult for her.

My final question included asking Shannon whether she felt the scale accurately represented her communication apprehension. She responded with, “To a point because it doesn’t specify what kind of instances it is in. It doesn’t say ‘in most cases.’” I then asked Shannon if she had any questions for me before I debriefed her. She immediately responded by asking if this instrument was “going to tell how [she] would do in...a class.” I noted that I was not going to calculate the scores; therefore, no classification of apprehension level would be specified. Also, I assured her I was not attempting to predict levels of apprehension in this study; I was simply exploring the variable. I then proceeded with the debriefing and asked Shannon one last time if she had any questions. She said, no, so I thanked her for her time.

**Ginger**

Ginger is a half Inuit and half German Dutch woman who is 49 years old. She is married with one son and two granddaughters. She expressed her support and confidence in the project and agreed readily when approached to participate. Ginger’s interview also took place in a conference room in the Department of Communication at the same
university indicated in previous interviews. The interview lasted approximately 50 minutes.

I began the interview by asking Ginger if she had any experience with apprehension in communicating. She began by saying that for several years she belonged to a religious group that worked with various native villages. Her work in these villages included door-to-door, interpersonal communication with the village residents. She noted that this particular communication experience became easier for her as she gained experience, but that she was, indeed, apprehensive when she first began her work. She then remarked that, in the professional job market, she has never really been asked to give presentations, but that she does speak up in meetings by giving suggestions or input.

Once again, I explored the responses to the instrument by looking first at numbers 1-6. Ginger's responses included three “disagrees” (#s 1, 3, & 5), two “undecideds” (#s 4 & 6), and one “agree” (#2). Before beginning our discussion, Ginger remarked that the instrument seemed to use different phrasing to ask very similar questions. I noted that I would explain that component of the instrument when we were finished with the interview. I began our discussion by inquiring about the undecided responses. Specifically, I asked why she opted for that particular response. She answered by saying,

I put [an undecided] there because it really depends on the subject or the training program that we may be going to—if I am familiar or not familiar with it—I tend not to open up...so I guess the short answer is if I don’t feel confident in the subject that is being discussed, I will probably have a little lower key until I have a better understanding of what is going on in the group.
I then moved on to #6 where Ginger had indicated a second “undecided.” She responded by saying that her being calm and relaxed in group discussions “depends on the discussion that is going on.” Next, I shifted my attention to her responses marked “disagree.” Ginger noted that she enjoys participating in group discussions because she enjoys “listening to other people and getting their viewpoints.” I then asked Ginger to elaborate on why “strongly agree or disagree” was not an option for the remainder of her answers in that section. She noted that her interest in and knowledge of the subject plays a role in her willingness to speak up and her feeling comfortable when speaking in group situations.

I continued with the interview by examining Ginger’s responses to statements 7-12. Responses included the following: one “strongly disagree” (#7), three “agrees” (#s 8, 10, & 12), one “undecided” (#9), and one “disagree” (#11). I first asked Ginger to comment on why she chose “undecided” for “I am very calm and relaxed when called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.” She replied that in the previous employment position she held, it wasn’t in her best interest to give opinions in meetings. Indeed, responses toward her speaking out were negative and often held repercussions. She noted that she used to feel comfortable speaking up in meetings but that her experiences in that position have played a role in her unwillingness or desire to communicate in meetings. I concentrated next on Ginger’s response—a “strongly disagree”—to #7. This response was only one of two on the entire instrument in which Ginger indicated “strongly” agreeing or disagreeing. As a result, I asked specifically about why she does, indeed, enjoy participating in meetings. Ginger said that she enjoys observing others, learning
more about their opinions, and gathering new information from them. My next question
for Ginger encompassed her seemingly opposing responses to #s 10 & 11. I specifically
asked about her being fairly comfortable when “communicating in meetings” while
simultaneously indicating being afraid to “express herself at meetings.” She said that her
confidence level plays a role in her level of comfort. She also indicated that if someone
in the meeting has a higher education than she does, then she is typically apprehensive
about speaking. Ginger also noted that the type of meeting contributes to her level of
apprehension.

In the third section, interpersonal interaction (#s 13-18), Ginger’s responses
included two “disagrees” (#s 13 & 15), one “strongly agree” (#14), two “agrees” (#s16 &
17), and one “undecided” (#18). I began by looking at the “strongly agree.” Again, this
response was one of two answers utilizing a “strongly” agree or disagree. Ginger replied
that she simply loves talking to people. She did note, however, that she gets
uncomfortable in one-on-one interaction if the other person gets too close or invades her
“comfort zone.” Next, I looked at Ginger’s “undecided.” I asked her to tell me why she
put undecided in response to “I am afraid to speak up in conversations.” She said, “I put
‘undecided’ because it depends really on the conversation.” To clarify, I asked Ginger if
she thought her level of comfort or her willingness to speak up had to do with either the
person or the situation or a combination of both. She said both, but noted that the person
played a bigger role in her comfort level than did the situation. Specifically, she noted
that if she “didn’t feel comfortable with the individual...[she is] not going to readily reply
back.” My final question for this particular group of statements encompassed the
remaining four statements in that section. I asked Ginger to comment on why she responded the way she did to those four statements. She answered by saying that the responses including the word “strongly” were too emphatic for her to use on these statements. She said that she is a flexible person, and if she put a “strongly” agree or disagree, then she would not be leaving herself open to new ideas or thoughts. Before continuing on with exploring answers to the instrument, I paused and asked Ginger if she felt as though she had an adequate number of responses from which to choose her answers. She replied by saying, “Yes I do. I especially like the ‘undecided’ though because there are situations sometimes when it depends on the situations…”

We continued our conversation by moving into the fourth section representing public speaking. For statements 19 through 24, Ginger responded with three “agrees” (#s 19, 20, & 24), two “undecideds” (#s 21 & 23), and one “disagree” (#22). I continued the conversation by asking about the “undecided” responses. Ginger told me that she is undecided because “it depends on the topics.” Indeed, she said, “I could talk readily about something I am very familiar [with]…but if it is something that I have to research…I am a bit more on the reserved side.” I then asked Ginger if there was ever a time when her apprehension was so overwhelming that she chose not to communicate. She answered by saying yes, but she noted that her career situation over the past couple of years has played a prominent role in her communication apprehension. She said that responses to certain issues have had repercussions that currently prevent her from feeling comfortable with expressing her opinions. In response to this answer, I asked Ginger if she had ever used any method to help alleviate communication apprehension. Ginger
remarked that she uses proactive thoughts; she declares specific phrases to herself such as “you can do this; you know what you are saying.” Ginger went on to say, however, that her apprehensiveness as specified in this instance is limited to her experiences within one particular employment context. She also said that most of her answers on this instrument were based on professional employment situations; she noted that she tends to be more comfortable communicating with others outside of the work place than she does within the work place.

We continued by looking at #s 22 & 24. Ginger pointed out that forgetting facts or having confused and jumbled thoughts “depends on what [she has] to talk about.” We then moved on to #s 19 & 20. Ginger’s responses were seemingly opposed on these two statements in that she indicated little fear in giving a speech while simultaneously noting that certain parts of her body felt tense and rigid when giving a speech. Ginger responded by saying if her body responds to the communication situation by twitching, she will become more nervous because she starts to think about the physical reaction as being representative of her overall nervousness rather than as a simple physical reaction to the situation. Before debriefing, I asked Ginger if she had anything to add in terms of the things we had discussed. She said she was very interested in participating in the interview because she feels that throughout her life she has had a “very hard time communicating.” She said that one specific situation, which occurred in her late twenties, has significantly contributed to her willingness or desire to communicate. Indeed, Ginger referred specifically to both that situation and the employment situation she referred to previously in the interview throughout most of our discussion.
Gabrielle

Gabrielle is a 19-year-old African-American woman who works full time during the day and attends classes at night. She is married and expecting her first child in a few months. Gabrielle’s husband is in the military, so the couple has recently relocated and will probably only stay in this location for one more year. Gabrielle readily volunteered for the project during the recruitment process. She was comfortable enough in the interview to laugh when I used humor as a means of lightening the atmosphere; however, her answers were often filled with verbal hedges and pregnant pauses. Nonetheless, she answered each question thoroughly. The interview with Gabrielle lasted approximately 45 minutes and took place in the same conference room specified in the previous four interviews.

After introducing ourselves, I began the interview by explaining how the PRCA-24 is categorized, and how the scores are typically used. Before looking at her responses, however, I asked Gabrielle if any specific CA experiences are prominent in her memory as being particularly upsetting. She responded by saying that communicating with people one-on-one is usually not a problem for her, but that group communication can be problematic for her if she is not familiar with the people. Again, we started at the beginning of the instrument with #s 1-6. Gabrielle’s answers included three “disagrees” (#s 1, 3, & 4), two “undecideds” (#s 2 & 6), and one “agree” (#5). I asked first about the “undecided” responses. Gabrielle remarked that she chose undecided because “it depends on the topic, or what we are discussing.”
I continued my inquiry into why she chose certain answers by moving on to the remaining four statements in that section. Specifically, I noted that her answers to #s 1 & 4 seemed opposing in that she disagreed that she liked to get involved in group discussions, and she disagreed that she dislikes participating in group discussions. Gabrielle stated that she enjoys participating in groups because she “likes to hear what everybody else has to say” because it helps her recognize new ideas and contribute more to the group discussion, but that she dislikes getting involved in group discussion when the topic is personal. She said she is a very private person and is uncomfortable sharing personal information. I continued by asking about statement #5, “Engaging in group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.” I asked about how and why she felt tense and nervous in group situations, and I noted that the question specifically refers to group situations with new people. Gabrielle responded by saying that in a group of strangers, she is often nervous about what others are thinking about her and what they expect from her. I finished this section by asking Gabrielle to comment on whether she reacted similarly apprehensive across all of her group experiences or if she could put her reactions to all of her group situations under one umbrella. She explained that there was not a common response across all group situations because “it really depends on what type meeting” she is in.

Next we looked at #s 7-12, the section covering meetings. Gabrielle’s responses included three “undecideds” (#s 7, 10, & 11) and three “disagrees” (#s 8, 9, & 12). I asked first about the three undecided responses. Gabrielle responded with “it depends on the person that [sic] I am having the meeting with.” We continued our discussion by
moving on to the remaining three statements in that section. All three statements refer to a person being relaxed while participating in, expressing an opinion at, or answering questions in meeting situations. I asked Gabrielle if her reasoning for her responses in this section was similar to her reasoning for her responses in the groups section, in that CA does not necessarily keep her from participating in a meeting but can keep her from communicating in a meeting. She agreed. To be certain of her answer, I asked her if my thoughts accurately reflected what she had told me, and she again agreed. Before moving in to the next section, I asked Gabrielle to comment on a situation in which the context influenced her apprehension. She described a debate situation on her senior English class in which she readily disagreed with what was being discussed, so she spoke up, even though it was unusual for her to do so.

The next section, #s 13-18, covered interpersonal interaction. Gabrielle responded with three “disagrees” (#s 13, 15, & 18), two “agrees” (#s 14 & 16), and one “undecided” (#17). Once again, I focused first on the “undecided” by asking Gabrielle to simply talk to me about her response. Her response was “it depends on the individual.” I asked Gabrielle to elaborate on what people have been influential in inhibiting or encouraging her communication behaviors. She noted that her husband was instrumental in her feeling comfortable communicating. She said that when she met him, she did not know what to say, but that he helped her to express herself without feeling shy or reserved. Next, I noted that the remaining statements basically indicated to me that she was not really afraid to speak up in conversations, so I asked Gabrielle why, in this particular section, she chose not to respond with “strongly” agree or disagree. She stated
that until she feels comfortable with someone, there is always some tension associated with communicating, and it is that underlying tension that makes it difficult for her to express herself.

For the final section, Gabrielle’s responses included two “disagrees” (#s 19 & 21), three “agrees” (#s 20, 22, & 24), and one “undecided” (#23). Once again, I began by asking Gabrielle about the “undecided.” Gabrielle noted that she might simultaneously feel uncomfortable with the subject matter of the speech yet comfortable with the audience members. She said she feels most comfortable with audiences she knows, and that her comfort level simply depends on the surrounding circumstances. Next, I looked at #s 19, 20, & 21. I noted that they were similar statements and that all of her responses seemed to support each other, so I merely asked her to comment on why she chose those particular responses. Again, Gabrielle noted that she responds apprehensively to a public speaking situation when she is not familiar with her audience. She specifically noted that she was nervous giving her first speech in her communication class, but that she relaxed as the speech progressed because the audience “seemed to be very attentive to what [she] was saying.”

Finally, we discussed the last two statements. I asked Gabrielle to comment on specific instances in which her thoughts became confused and jumbled or in which she forgot facts as a result of being nervous. She said that her experiences are limited to that one particular instance because it was the first time she had ever been asked to present a speech; nonetheless, she noted that she did, indeed, forget facts she had researched and memorized for that assignment and that her physical reactions included her legs and
hands moving involuntarily during her presentation. Gabrielle indicated that the involuntary responses did subside as her speech progressed, so I asked if she thought experience might play a role in reducing her communication apprehension. She said, yes.

Ray

Ray is a 45-year-old single, Caucasian man. He is currently a full-time student pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in English. His ultimate career goal is to attend law school and become a practicing attorney. Prior to becoming a student, Ray worked extensively in the restaurant industry, including helping failing companies restructure and, ultimately, succeed. Ray made the decision to return to school after a severe accident in which he lost most of his left arm. Ray was the first interviewee in this study apart from the pilot interview. Ray was talkative, spoke without hesitation, and was immediate and animated in conversation. The interview with Ray took place in the same conference room noted previously. The interview lasted approximately 95 minutes.

I began the interview by giving Ray some background information on the PRCA-24, such as how the scores are used and how the instrument is categorized. Ray interjected that he thought of himself as low in apprehensiveness. I explained that I would not calculate the score, but that we would simply talk about what he had been thinking upon responding to each statement. Before actually discussing his answers on the instrument, however, I asked Ray to tell me about any experiences with CA that he may have had. Ray told me about a recent experience in which he became apprehensive during a presentation because he deviated from his prepared material. I then asked if there were any experiences not necessarily related to the public speaking genre in which
he remembered being apprehensive about communicating. Ray answered that he could not think of anything at the moment, but that if he did, he would let me know. At this point, we moved into looking at his responses to the instrument. Many of Ray’s answers on the entire instrument were either “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree.” Based on those answers, I said to Ray that it appeared to me that he was fairly comfortable communicating; he readily agreed. At this point, Ray revealed, however, that he has often been accused of taking control in various communication situations. He says his intent is not to dominate or control the conversation; nonetheless, he comes across that way. I asked him if he thought his approach to communication caused others to be apprehensive about communicating, and he said, “sure it does.” He explained that the few people who have been willing to share their perceptions with him have said that he can seem intimidating.

Ray’s answers for the first section on groups included the following responses: three “strongly agrees” (#s 2, 4, & 6), two “strongly disagrees” (#s 1 & 5), and one “disagree” (#3). I honed in on #3, “I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussion,” immediately asking why he chose to respond less ardently on that particular statement. Ray said that he tunes in to the people in a group and often notes what they are saying, how they say it, and what body language they are using. He noted that he can usually tell when someone is not open to new ideas. He called his response to #3 “being alert” as opposed to having tension or fear, but it was enough for him to answer with less conviction on that particular statement. As we continued our conversation, Ray began giving me some personal history as to why he is so comfortable with communication. He
mentioned that his past career choices have required him to be overtly communicative in order to be successful, and he adamantly noted that his confidence has grown as a result of experience and learning from past mistakes.

Next, we looked at Ray’s responses to the section on meetings. Specifically, those responses included three “strongly agrees” (#s 8, 9, & 12), two “strongly disagrees” (#s 10 & 11), and one “disagree” (#7). Again, I focused on his one less extreme response. Ray told me his “primary concern in approaching a meeting is...how prepared [he is].” He explained that he is concerned with how much information he has, whether he has thoroughly prepared, and what the other parties are anticipating and expecting from the meeting. He noted that it is important to understand the dynamics of the relationship between himself and the other members of the group before communicating. For instance, he talked about the “after transaction relationship” and remarked that his communication tactics and levels of comfort in how he communicates changes with the dynamics of each relationship. He said that there are times when the relationship is the only aspect that matters, so he would go into that type of meeting knowing he will accede to all requests; nonetheless, he said that, in other circumstances, the relationship may be the least important aspect, in which case his communication reflects that knowledge. Ray continued by saying that he is also uncomfortable in situations in which he must terminate an employee because of the potentially devastating impact, and he also said he would be uncomfortable discussing personnel records in terms of who the company was going to keep and who was going to be discharged. Finally, Ray indicated that if he were an instructor, he would probably feel uncomfortable having to give a student an “F.”
Our conversation continued as we moved into the third section on interpersonal interaction. Ray’s responses included one “undecided” (#13), three “strongly agrees” (#s 14, 16, & 17), one “strongly disagree” (#18), and one “disagree” (#15). I asked Ray first about his “undecided.” Specifically I asked him what he was thinking when he chose that response. He replied by saying, “Who is this person? What are they [sic] like? What are their [sic] wants, needs, desires, expectations? Do they have some particular agenda or motive?” I then asked Ray why he chose the less powerful response for #15. He remarked that it depends on what the conversation entails. For instance, if someone was asking to borrow money and he knew that person had no intention or no means of paying it back, then he would feel uncomfortable in that communication situation. Ray continued by saying that whenever he feels uncomfortable with or has second thoughts about communicating in any of the contexts represented on this instrument, he simply thinks about the worst things that could happen in life. From this perspective, he says he realizes that “being embarrassed in front of a group is not going to rank high on the list at all.” I suggested to Ray that I would attribute his response to experience, and he readily agreed.

In the final section covering public speaking, Ray’s responses included two “strongly disagrees” (#s 19 & 24), three “agrees” (#s 20, 21, & 23), and one “disagree” (#22). I began by asking Ray about the three “agrees” and one “disagree.” Though I did not notice at the time of the interview, Ray’s responses to the final section on public speaking were less polarized than they had been for the other three sections. Ray inadvertently accounted for his responses to this section when he noted that #21, “I feel
relaxed while giving a speech," simply could not be “strongly agree” because he is only “relatively relaxed” while giving a speech. He continued by explaining that he knew the word “relatively” was hard to quantify; nonetheless, he could not answer with a ‘strongly agree.’ This explanation prompted me to ask if he felt having only the five options offered was limiting. He responded by saying that “if there was a wider range of gradation—from 1 to 10 instead of 1 to 5—[it] would probably be helpful.”

When I inquired as to Ray’s response to #20, “Certain parts of my body feel tense and rigid while giving a speech,” Ray noted that “sometimes [he] will find a hand gripping a little bit tightly.” I asked what type of situation might cause this reaction, and he said that having an unreceptive audience could cause him tension. At this point, Ray noted several techniques he typically uses in overcoming communication-based tension. First, he said it is important to stay focused. Second, he explained that making a joke out of a seemingly tension filled situation often helps alleviate anxiety, and third, he noted the importance of keeping the situation in perspective, particularly if it is a minor error or problem. I then asked Ray if his apprehensiveness changed as a result of the situation. He said yes. He explained that he was recently invited to present a paper at a national history conference, and since all of the conference participants are prominent history scholars, he anticipates being more apprehensive than he has been in previous public speaking endeavors.

Upon finishing our discussion of the PRCA-24, I asked Ray if he had any questions regarding my research. He noted simply that his questions would probably be answered in the debriefing; thus, I began to explain the nature of the project. The
interview with Ray continued for several minutes past the debriefing. Ray continued to describe his various experiences with communicating including how modeling tuxedos in his twenties “probably help[ed] a lot in terms of being in front of the public,” and that he noticed that the instrument failed to address “I want” questions. I inquired as to what he meant by “I want” questions, and he replied that he thought it would be important to ask people what context within the communication event they would feel most comfortable in. For instance, would the person want to be the leader, the spectator, the record keeper, or the facilitator in a particular communication context such as a group? He said some people might enjoy being part of a group, but not if they have to lead the group in the discussion. Ray continued to provide his opinions of and experiences with communication until we were forced to end the interview due to time constraints.

Byron

Byron is an 18-year-old college freshman of Native American descent whose major is civil engineering. Byron owns his own lawn mowing business and is an avid fisherman, hockey player, and martial arts enthusiast. Byron suffers from a severe, diagnosed learning disability that affects his capacity to read. As a result, I read the informed consent form and the PRCA-24 to him. He did, however, write his responses to each corresponding statement. My interview with Byron took place in a consultation room in the Department of Communication at the same university indicated in the other interviews. The interview lasted approximately 65 minutes, but much of that time was spent either explaining concepts or reading particular items to Byron to increase his understanding. Byron was the final interviewee.
After explaining how the test was categorized and how the scores are typically used, I began our discussion by looking at the first section on groups. Byron’s responses for #s 1-6 included four “strongly agrees” (#s 2, 4, 5, & 6), one “strongly disagree” (#1), and one “disagree” (#3). Only during transcription did I pick up on Byron’s seeming contradiction between his “strongly agree” in response to #5, “Engaging in group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous,” and his “disagree” in response to #3, “I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.”

My first question for Byron encompassed his less polarized response to #3. Specifically, I asked Byron what he was thinking while responding. Byron answered that he gets “nervous because, what if they pick me…and…I don’t know what to say.” He also indicated that he likes to be prepared by “knowing what [he is] going to get [him]self into or what [he is] going to talk about.” I responded to this answer by clarifying if he thought being prepared had anything to do with his being apprehensive, and he said yes. Before we continued, I asked Byron if he could recall any specific instances in which he remembers experiencing communication apprehension. “Yeah, a lot” was his answer. He said that in elementary and middle school he was often singled out because of his dyslexia, and as a result, began to fear group situations. He recalled specifically that many of his teachers were not very tolerant of his learning disability and often singled him out by having him “go out in the hall.” Byron also noted he experiences anxiety about communicating when he feels it necessary to defend his brother, who is of smaller proportions than Byron and apparently gets picked on as a result when practicing and playing hockey with peers. He did not elaborate as to why he feels apprehensive in
standing up for his brother, except to say that family is more important than friends; therefore, “I just go with my brother.”

Our conversation continued by looking at #s 7-12 to which Byron responded with one “agree” (#7), one “disagree” (#8), one “strongly agree” (#9), and three “undecideds” (#s 10, 11, & 12). I asked Byron first about his response to #9. He remarked that if he is prepared, he is happy to speak up. I then focused on Byron’s three “undecided” responses. I asked him specifically to tell me why he chose “undecided,” and what he was thinking about when he did. He responded by saying, “Every time I go to meetings, I say something, and it pops out totally bogus, to where no one understands me at all. And it is so frustrating.” I then narrowed the focus of the question by asking when he would be afraid to express himself at meetings, and he said when he is unprepared. Byron continued his explanation by saying that the formality of the meeting can also cause him anxiety in terms of communicating. He noted that he is much more comfortable when the meeting is less formal. In discussing his answer to #12, Byron explained that he put “undecided” for that statement because “you never know when someone is going to put you on the spot and say, ‘just speak.’” He continued by saying, “It all depends on if you are prepared. If you are not prepared, it is going to be an uncomfortable meeting.” My final question for Byron in this section on meetings encompassed what he was tapping while responding to #s 7 & 8. He, again, noted that being singled out in a group or asked to speak on the spur of the moment “kind of upsets [his] stomach” and makes him feel apprehensive about communicating. Byron indicated once again, however, that if the setting is more informal then he is more comfortable.
For the third section, interpersonal or dyadic interaction, Byron's responses included three "strongly disagrees" (#s 13, 15, & 18), one "strongly agree" (#14), one "agree" (#16), and one "undecided" (#17). I questioned Byron about his three "strongly disagrees" first. Byron's answer to my question was quite lengthy and was extremely difficult for me to decipher. When I asked him what he was thinking when he responded to #s 13, 15, & 18, he noted that it was important for him to know if someone is his "real" friend. Because I was unsure as to what he meant by his response, I said to Byron,

In what you were saying, you indicated that there might be a time when you are apprehensive about communicating with people because they might not be your true friends, but on these particular ones [meaning the statements referred to], you indicated that you are always comfortable.

He responded by saying,

I am always comfortable. I really am always comfortable with talking with people and going out into the community and talking to people. But right if they try to be your friend, you know, I don't know; it is hard to explain...you don't know when they are going to turn [on you].

At this point, I was getting confused as to what point Byron was attempting to make, so I moved on by asking him about his other responses. I focused next on Byron's "undecided" response. Byron's answer, though he explained he thought it sounded rude, included indicating a lack of comfort when talking with Asian people or with people who might have some type of facial disability, because he cannot stop focusing on the differences. Once again, after several attempts at clarification, I found myself unsure of
what this answer meant, so I moved on. I next asked Byron to tell me why #16 was “agree” as opposed to “strongly disagree.” He answered by saying, “I am relaxed, but...if he [indicating the friend] says the wrong thing, I don’t really want to be [his] friend.”

The last six statements, encompassing the public speaking context, included the following responses from Byron: one “disagree” (#19), two “strongly agrees” (#s 20 & 23), two “agrees” (#s 21 & 22), and one “undecided” (#24). I asked Byron about his response to #19, “I have no fear of giving a speech,” first. He replied, “Basically in the beginning of a speech, in any speech, you got that one moment to where you are going to be scared.... Maybe you don’t feel it mentally, but your body feels it.” I asked Byron if his response to this statement was for the same reason as his response to #21 in which he indicated an ‘agree,’ but not a ‘strongly agree,’ to “I feel relaxed while giving a speech.” He indicated that yes, it was for the same reason. I continued the interview by looking at his two ‘strongly agrees.’ I noted the seeming discrepancy in his responses since #20 indicated fear associated with public speaking and #23 indicated confidence associated with public speaking. Byron said though he often feels relaxed mentally, his physical reactions indicate nervousness. For instance, he mentioned regularly experiencing a nervous twitch and speaking in a monotone voice when presenting publicly. I then asked about his response to #22. Byron noted that his response to this statement goes back to being prepared. He said his thoughts are more likely to become confused and jumbled if he is “put on the spot.” My final inquiry about Byron’s responses to the instrument encompassed his “undecided” on #24. Byron stated, “I just forget facts sometimes...
being nervous up there...” At this point, I asked Byron if he had any questions for me concerning the research. He said, no, so I proceeded with the debriefing.

_Damon_

Damon is an 18-year-old college sophomore double majoring in criminal justice and business. Damon is a single Caucasian male who has worked extensively as a police cadet and park ranger. The interview with Damon also took place in a conference room at the Department of Communication at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

I began the interview by asking Damon to discuss with me any experiences he may have had with communication apprehension. He said that his apprehension associated with communication usually stems from his work as a police cadet and park ranger, since his job typically entails having to confront strangers about what they are doing wrong. He said sometimes his “heart starts pounding and [he] get[s] real nervous, especially if the situation is dangerous.” I then explained to Damon how the test is categorized and why it is typically used.

Damon’s responses to #s 1-6 included: one “disagree” (#1), two “strongly agrees” (#s 2 & 6), two “strongly disagrees” (#s 3 & 5), and one “agree” (#4). I inquired first about the one “disagree.” Specifically, I asked Damon to talk to me about what he was thinking when he responded with the answer he chose. Damon replied,

"It always depends on the discussion. I mean I usually like talking with a bunch of people [or] getting a lot of opinions, but sometimes there are too many people I
don’t agree with or who like to argue...so I like to sit and talk to people, but not when it gets heated.

He said he did not put “strongly agree” because that would mean he liked any group discussion, and that is not always the case. I then asked Damon about his “agree” on #4 and he noted that it was basically the opposite of statement #1. Specifically, he stated, “I was just saying that I don’t like to get into every discussion.... I like talking to people, but I don’t like talking to everybody all the time...because some people are irritating.” My next question focused on #2 and what he was thinking in responding. Damon replied that “mostly in classes and stuff...[he is] never really nervous.” He indicated that he will remain quiet if it is not his turn to speak, or if the conversation shifts and his comment becomes irrelevant, but he basically feels comfortable communicating in group situations.

I asked Damon if he could think of specific instances when he felt apprehensive in having to communicate in a group situation. He remarked that if he was new to a group or did not know the group very well, he would be more apt to be quiet until he got to know some of the people or understood the group’s expectations or norms.

In the second section on meetings, Damon responded with two “strongly disagrees” (#s 7 & 11), two “strongly agrees” (#s 8 & 12), one “agree” (#9), and one “disagree” (#10). I asked first about statements #9 and #10. This time, I noted the similarity in content but the opposition in wording. I particularly asked Damon to respond to why those two answers were less intense than the other four responses. Damon’s response was that:
It is mostly because my opinions usually differ from those of other people, and it will start a lot of arguments a lot of times, so I don’t mind discussing things with people...but when it comes right down to actually expressing my opinion, I am pretty reticent usually.

When asked why he thought that was the case, Damon said that he learned fairly early on that many people simply throw out uninformed opinions in meetings, which can appear rather ignorant. He noted that he did not want to be seen as one of those types of people. Damon also remarked that he is more willing to give ideas or proposals in meetings, rather than opinions, because his “opinion is not going to get anything done.” Lastly, Damon asserted that he “will only speak up if [he] thinks [he] is right.” He explained further by saying that sometimes people do not agree with concepts based on personal biases. In such a case, he would not give his opinion because it is not necessarily relevant to getting the task done, but if the situation were such that it went against his belief system and convictions, then he would speak up.

I began the next section by noting that it covered interpersonal interaction. Before I had a chance to finish explaining that interpersonal interaction could be any one-on-one interaction, Damon spoke up and said with a laugh, “There is so much variety in that category [that] I don’t know how that many questions covers it.” In response, I asked him if he felt that these six questions accurately represented his interpersonal interaction. He answered by saying that because of his employment background, he has learned several tactics in gaining control of conversations, thus he is rarely nervous in one-on-one situations. However, he did note that losing control of the conversation could make him
nervous depending on the situation. He said if his personal safety were at risk he would obviously feel anxious or apprehensive. Damon continued by explaining that he was referring specifically to his police work. He said that talking to a friend is different from talking to people on the job. As we continued our discussion, Damon went on to say that his ease in one-on-one situations was not innate. Indeed, he said he learned through experience and by watching other people. He also noted that having a support system of fellow employees also contributed to his willingness to speak up when he might otherwise have been uncomfortable.

Eventually, we focused our attention on Damon’s answers to the third section. He responded with two “strongly disagrees” (#s 15 & 18), two “strongly agrees” (#s 14 & 16), one “disagree” (#13), and one “agree” (#17). Again, I first asked him about the two less intense responses. Damon said simply, “...it depends on whether or not I care about what they think of me.” He explained,

If I don’t care what they think of me, I will be myself and just say whatever. And if they think that is weird, then they...can get over it...but...if I care about what they think of me...then I will probably be more guarded with my words and what I say. I would just kind of feel them out a little bit more until I know where they stand or what their norms are.

To clarify, I said to Damon, “I guess what you are saying is that there is no one general way to respond in terms of interpersonal interaction; there are a variety of responses depending on who you were talking to?” His answer was “Always, always. Every situation is different.”
We continued talking as we moved into discussing Damon’s final six responses. For the final section on public speaking, Damon’s answers included two “agrees” (#s 19 & 21), one “strongly disagree” (#20), one “undecided” (#22), one “strongly agree” (#23), and one “disagree” (#24). We began by looking at #19, “I have no fear of giving a speech.” Damon said that when he first began giving presentations in high school, he got really nervous in that his heart was pounding, there was sweat on his brow, and he kept forgetting what he was saying. But continued experience helped to lessen those particular nervous reactions. Nonetheless, he said that, now, he usually feels confident going into a presentation situation, but that afterwards he notices that his pulse rate is up, and he is usually blushing. Indeed, he noted with a laugh, “it is like my body is nervous, but I am not.” My next question encompassed Damon’s more intense response to #20 and how that related to his response to #19. He explained that he usually does not feel those physical symptoms until after he is finished presenting, therefore, feeling tense and rigid during the speech was not really an issue. As we conversed further, Damon revealed to me that his apparent lack of confidence in the public speaking section as evidenced by his responses to the instrument as a whole was because “there is no feedback in public speaking situations.” He said, “I need something to go on, or play off of.” At this point, I asked if he would stop communicating with someone if he was not getting a reaction. He replied, “It depends. If I had a choice in the matter, then I probably would.” Lastly, I inquired about the one “undecided” response. Damon replied that he is “not always completely clear when [he] is giving a speech.” He said,
Sometimes if I am not prepared or if I slip up and miss a big point and I don’t have time to back track, but...the rest of the speech was based on what I didn’t talk about, it would grind me to a halt.

After discussing Damon’s responses to the instrument, I asked him if he had any other CA experiences to share that might be unique to a particular setting or might not have gone according to plan. He asked me if I was “looking at things that make communication hard,” and I simply encouraged him to continue with his thoughts so that I would not lead his responses. Damon replied that he often has to communicate with people who have been drinking or are under the influence of drugs. He noted how particularly difficult it can be to communicate effectively with people in these situations. He said they simply “don’t respond normally to anything.” He continued by saying that he still gets nervous about communicating in situations that may be dangerous or in situations where he is unsure of what is going on or what is involved. He explained that the apprehension comes from having to deal people as a part of the job. Indeed, he is forced to communicate as a result of the job. At this point I asked Damon if he had any other questions or comments. He said no, so I proceeded with the debriefing. Upon wrapping up my debriefing, I again asked Damon if he had any more questions. He said, not really, but that he wondered why the instrument was so highly respected “because it doesn’t really cover everything that [he] thinks it should cover.” Just out of curiosity, I asked him to elaborate on his thoughts. His response was, “Well, it is so general. The questions are so general that you begin to have to think about specific cases...that you have communicated, excluding a lot of others because you had nothing else to go on.” I
responded by asking if he would have wanted more options in terms of answer choices.

Damon replied,

Not answers. I wanted more options in terms of questions—maybe the way it was
worded—have a longer test, and have it more situational oriented like “you would
do this and this and this in this situation”...[or] “you are in a group with people
you don’t know as opposed to a group of people you do know.

I did not respond to Damon’s statement because I did not want to influence him. I simply
indicated that I understood what he was saying and left it at that. I then thanked him for
his time and participation and ended the interview.
Chapter 4:
Analysis

Overview

Three themes were apparent in the narratives of the co-researchers: 1) participants reported experiencing communication apprehension in terms of specific events or situations, 2) participants reported difficulty in responding accurately to each statement because of the situational fluctuation indicated in the first theme, and 3) participants were sensitive about appearing to be highly apprehensive.

It Depends

The first and most prominent theme evident in co-researcher experiences is participants’ consistent references to situational circumstances in explaining their causes of CA. Each participant, at some point in each interview, noted situational fluctuation as the reason for his/her responses to statements, particularly when those responses were “agree” (2), “undecided” (3), and “disagree” (4) as opposed to “strongly agree” (1) and “strongly disagree” (5). Participants specified five central elements affecting communication apprehension within the communication event: problems arising within the communication event, people involved in and circumstances surrounding the communication event, level of experience in communicating within context or situation, importance of communication event, and level of preparedness.

Co-researchers identified problems arising within a communication event as responsible for an increase or decrease in their CA. George specified this situational component by elaborating on an instance in which he lost his place in the middle of a
presentation, and both the teacher and his classmates laughed at him. He remarked that his communication apprehension increased during that particular situation because of their reaction to his stumbling. Indeed, he said, “It [the situation] was rather distressing.”

Damon also indicated that his level of CA is related to problems arising within a communication event. Notably, Damon remarked that his CA and hence his participation in a conversation “depends on the discussion.” He continued by saying,

I usually like talking with a bunch of people [and] getting a lot of opinions, but sometimes there are too many people I don’t agree with or who like to argue [or who] have a combative style that I just don’t like to get into it with them. So, I like to sit and talk to people, but not when it gets heated.

As evidenced in the above examples, problems arising within communication events can clearly affect one’s level of apprehension. In both cases, the participants indicated that their level of CA increased as a result of what happened within the situation despite their noting an overall affinity for interacting with others. In addition to problems arising within a communication event, both the people involved in and the circumstances surrounding a communication event were identified as affecting a person’s level of CA.

Alex noted that the people present played a role in his level of apprehension when he described his experiences in giving impromptu classes to the other members of his troop. Specifically, he remarked that, “there is also the knowledge [that]...somebody out there knows more about the subject than you do...and you are trying to give them a lesson. That is what is difficult.” In this particular instance, Alex was referring to having to give an instructional class to people who may have had more experience and expertise
in the subject area he was presenting. He explained that the difficulty arose in knowing that “if you say something wrong in a class, if you give the wrong information, [or] if you skip a step, you are going to hear about it after. They are going to razz you for about a week.” At the other end of the CA continuum, Gabrielle revealed that her being relaxed “when conversing with a new acquaintance” as specified in #17, depended on the individual. She noted that her husband played a major role in her overcoming her communication apprehension in speaking one-on-one with him when they first met. His communication and interaction with Gabrielle made her feel at ease in communicating with him because “he kind of pulled those things out that [she] wanted to say to him.”

Shannon noted that both the people within and the circumstances surrounding the communication event were fundamental to how apprehensive she is in a communication situation. For example, when answering my question encompassing why she chose to respond with an “undecided” on #5, “Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous,” she said, “It kind of depends on what my first instinct is. The people that I am working with, if they are all bigger than me...sometimes I might feel kind of inferior.” For Shannon the content being discussed and the nature of how the group is discussing a subject is also relevant to her level of CA in that she stated, “If somebody right before me had some really good points, and so now I kind of change my opinion...[or] my opinion is not quite as strong, then...I don’t really want to talk about my opinion.” She continued saying that her level of comfort associated with communicating is dependent on the situation:
If I was the first one to speak, I would feel pretty comfortable with doing it, but if I was the last person, I wouldn’t feel comfortable at all speaking because…if it is redundant and I keep on saying the same thing everybody else has already said, then I wouldn’t feel comfortable.

Finally, Shannon noted that she was more comfortable giving a presentation when she had access to a table or lectern because she could hide behind something.

Ray remarked that people involved in and circumstances surrounding a communication event affect his level comfort in communicating when I asked him his reason for choosing “undecided” on #13, “While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance I feel very nervous.” Ray answered by saying, “Who is this person? What are they [sic] like? What are their [sic] wants, needs, desires, expectations? Do they [sic] have a particular agenda or motive?” Clearly, the person and his/her motives within the situation play a role in Ray’s level of CA. From these examples, one can see that the people involved in and the circumstances surrounding a communication event factor into one’s level of communication apprehension. Indeed, in some cases, the interaction among the people communicating and the circumstances of the situation clearly affect whether communication apprehension is experienced at all. In addition to people and circumstances affecting levels of CA, a third explanation encompassing the situational variability of communication apprehension as noted by co-researchers is the person’s level of experience in communicating within a specified context or situation.

Ginger indicated that her level of experience has played a role in her feelings of comfort in communicating. Even before discussing her responses to the instrument, she
spoke of her high levels of apprehension in communicating one-on-one with community members she did not know when she first began going into Native villages with her church group to share religious convictions. She explained that her interpersonal communication became easier the more she did it. Ginger also noted that her level of comfort or ease with a communication event is related to experience when she mentioned that as a public speaking endeavor progresses, she will become less nervous. For example, she stated, “I do get relaxed once I start talking, but my body parts do twitch in the very beginning.” Ray also indicated that level of experience contributed to his communication apprehension when he noted,

If I have any second thoughts before I give [a presentation] in front of the group, all I have to do is think about the worst things that have happened to me in life, and being embarrassed in front of a group…is not going to rank high on the list at all.

In following up his comment I attempted to clarify his meaning by asking if he thought his experiences factored into his being able to view a public speaking event from that perspective; he said, yes.

Finally, Damon noted how his experiences in communicating one-on-one with people as a police cadet and park ranger have played a role in his level of communication apprehension. Indeed, Damon remarked,

At first I kind of hung back and watched how other people did it [communicated interpersonally], and then I started to do it. And you just get better every time you
do it until one day you just look back and realize, I am doing all this stuff now [and] not even thinking about it.

Based on these three examples, one can clearly see that level of experience in a particular situation or communication context can factor into one’s level of CA. As identified in these three cases, however, the more experience one has with communicating in a particular context, the less likely he/she is to be apprehensive about future communication within that context. Indeed, level of experience appears to reduce CA; however, as noted by Ginger, experience can serve to increase one’s level of apprehension.

Ginger mentioned that between the ages of “16 and 28 [she] was really open. [She] talked to anybody in the world. [She] didn’t care what the issues were; [she] had an opinion for everything. Now [she] is more reserved.” When I asked her to elaborate, she noted that she has a fear of people getting too close because, at the age of 28, a particularly stressing incident occurred that caused her severe communication apprehension not only within that situation but also in future situations. Subsequently, though it would appear to be fairly obvious that level of experience would serve to decrease one’s CA within each situation, Ginger indicated that experience served to increase her CA. In addition to experience factoring into one’s level of apprehension within a situation, co-researchers also noted that the importance of the event specified can contribute to level of apprehension within a situation or context.

My own experiences in performing and in teaching public speaking suggest that the importance of the communication event, including such aspects as grades or obtaining
employment, is one of the biggest factors affecting one’s level of communication apprehension, and my co-researchers appeared to agree. Alex indicated that he often becomes more apprehensive in having to communicate one-on-one with a major general or sergeant major than he is when speaking to an acquaintance or friend because “if you mess up [when speaking to superiors in the military], there is a lot of recourse.” He continued by saying that job interview situations can be uncomfortable if the person one is communicating with is in a bad mood. If he wants the job, he must sit through the interview regardless of the interviewer’s disposition. Ray referred to the importance of the communication event when he noted that he has been asked to give a presentation at a professional history conference:

It will be to a bunch of history professors from all over the nation and some of their advanced history students. And I am afraid that some of those professionals will really pick me apart after the presentation.... It is going to depend on their reaction.

Interestingly, Ray, who enjoys and is even passionate about communicating with others in all four communication contexts can identify circumstances in which his communication apprehension changes according to the importance of the communication event and to how others respond to him within that event.

Damon’s experiences with the importance of the communication event differ from Ray’s in that Damon’s line of work as a police cadet or park ranger encompasses potential risks in safety. Damon remarked that he gets “real nervous [about communicating with someone] especially if it is dangerous.” Indeed, when Damon’s
personal safety is at risk, his level of apprehension increases. Thus, the importance of the communication event appears to play a role in one's level of CA. In all three of the above examples, co-researchers could neither anticipate nor prepare for the upcoming event in terms of their communication apprehension; their level of CA varied according to what happened within the context of the communication. They might know the situation is important as evidenced by Alex, but as noted by Ray and Damon, until the circumstances of the actual situation occur, they do not know what their reaction in terms of CA will be. Depending on other people's responses involved in the particular event, a person's level of CA can increase or decrease. Aside from experience affecting one's level of apprehension, both within a situation and in future situations, the co-researchers also noted that level of preparedness factored into their apprehensiveness within any given situation.

The fifth and final explanation identified by participants as affecting their level of CA was level of preparedness. At some point in each interview, every one of the interviewees mentioned the concept of being prepared as a factor in overcoming CA. Byron mentioned preparation as the main reason for his comfort in a communication situation saying "I like being prepared...when I go into a situation...knowing what I am going to get myself into." Indeed, when we discussed meetings, Byron remarked, "It all depends on if you are prepared. If you are not prepared, it is going to be an uncomfortable meeting." He also indicated that he does not like to be chosen to answer a question or give an opinion in a meeting if he does not know ahead of time that he will be
asked to communicate, and that he gets very nervous or apprehensive when someone calls on him to express an opinion when he is not prepared.

There are countless examples evidenced in each interview in support of communication apprehension manifesting itself through communication with others. Indeed, no one was able to say that he/she reacted exactly the same way or even similarly across all situations within one context. Each participant specified particular stories and events in which he/she became apprehensive during the communication event as a result of the circumstances surrounding the communication event. Again, five specific reasons were identified as being pivotal to one’s level of apprehension during a particular communication event: problems arising within the communication situation, people involved and circumstances surrounding the event, level of experience in communicating within a context or situation, importance of the communication event, and level of preparedness.

Accuracy of Responses

The second theme that emerged from the interviews conducted in this study encompasses co-researchers struggles in responding accurately to statements on the PRCA-24. At some point in every interview, each participant identified that he/she either had difficulty in responding to a statement due to the situational variability noted in the previous section or simply responded according to his/her own interpretation at the time the instrument was given to him/her. Interestingly, several of my co-researchers asked me to clarify the meaning of some of the statements while they were in the process of
filling out the instrument. When this occurred, I simply told them to fill it out as best they could without my answering any questions.

Shannon provided one of the most overt indications of having a difficulty providing precise answers to the PRCA-24 when she remarked that she could respond more accurately to each statement if a particular circumstance were specified because “there are thousands of circumstances this might be according to.” George actually became exasperated with himself because his responses to my questions seemed to consistently depend on the circumstances surrounding the situation he was describing. During our discussion of interpersonal interaction (#s 13-18), George read aloud statement #14, “I have no fear of speaking up in conversation,” to which he had responded with an “undecided.” He immediately said, “That totally depends. See, I hate this though, because I am giving you all of these ‘it totally depends.’ It depends on the situation. Perhaps if it was something like....” He continued by giving me an example of one particular situation in which he became apprehensive after asking a question in class when he realized his question had already been covered. He remarked that he was “so embarrassed” because both the teacher and the students had become exasperated with his lack of attention. Additionally, when I asked George if he felt as though the response options offered were limiting. He remarked,

It is not so much these [indicating answer choices at top of instrument] that are limiting. It is the questions that are limiting. Like, ‘I dislike participating in group discussions,’ I mean that is really general. What group discussions? And
who are the people? Who are you with? It totally depends on your situation and what you are in.

Indeed, George found it necessary to specify the various circumstances surrounding the communication event in order to discuss his responses to the instrument with any accuracy.

Alex also provided an interesting perspective on why he had difficulty in responding to each statement. Alex, however, described this struggle in terms of his "problem with accuracy" clarifying several times that the word "very" played a major role in his response to some statements. For example, "very relaxed" and "relaxed" are two distinctly different concepts in his mind. Alex noted that he might have responded to some of the statements with a stronger answer if the word "very" did not appear in the statement. Second, Alex revealed that his response to #24, "While giving a speech I get so nervous, I forget facts I really know," encompassed the notion that he would become nervous if he forgot a fact in a speech, but that he does not forget facts as a result of his being nervous. Though this second example does not encompass Alex's difficulty in answering statement #24, it does reflect the notion that accuracy of responses to the instrument at any given time may vary according to numerous circumstances, including the particular situation a person is drawing upon when responding to the instrument, or the participant’s understanding and interpretation of the statement at the time the instrument is being administered.

Ginger provided a unique perspective on the accuracy of her responses while filling out the instrument in that she noted that most of her answers "were made on a
professional level." She continued saying that how she feels “communicating on a personal level with people is different.” Ginger’s perception of what the instrument was indexing is clearly different from some of the other interviewees’ perceptions given that some of them have not yet entered the professional work force. In responding to my question about the reason for her answer on #7, “Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting,” Ginger remarked that she enjoys participating in meetings because she gets to “learn about other people, their professions, and kind of grab information from them [because] it makes [her] feel like a better person.” However, she also indicated in #10 that she is afraid to express herself at meetings. In continuing our conversation, it became apparent to me that in her experience, participating in a meeting and communicating in a meeting were two distinct concepts for her. Finally, when I asked Ginger about the difference between “agree” and “strongly agree” or “disagree” and “strongly disagree,” she remarked that agreeing or disagreeing “strongly” meant that she must be unwavering in her response to the specified context. She continued by saying that she was a “flexible type person,” and that those “strong” responses signified to her that she was not being open minded.

Damon’s experience in responding to #24, “While giving a speech I get so nervous, I forget facts I really know” also suggests variability in meaning among co-researchers. Damon indicated that he disagreed with this statement. When I asked him about his reasoning for his answer, he said that he disagreed because he has given speeches in the past and therefore knows how he responds in public speaking situations. Based on his seeming confidence with not forgetting facts as a result of being nervous, I
inquired further as to why his response was not a “strongly disagree.” He remarked that he simply forgets facts at times in the flow of normal conversation, and that his forgetting facts had nothing to do with being apprehensive; rather, there are times when he merely loses his train of thought. Damon responded to #24 based on an interpretation of the question at the time the instrument was administered. Though Damon’s interpretation of that particular statement is contrary to the intended purpose of the instrument, Damon’s response points to a variation in meaning that any one participant may encounter given varied circumstance surrounding the taking of the PRCA-24.

George and Ray evidenced having difficulty with accuracy in responding to each statement in that they both questioned the meaning associated with specific statements used to make up the PRCA-24. Ray noted that on #21, “I feel relaxed while giving a speech,” he could not respond with a “strongly agree” because, though he agrees with the statement, he would say he feels only “relatively relaxed.” His response to me prompted my asking whether he felt he had enough choices in responding to each statement. He remarked that it would be easier for him “if there was a wider gradation—from 1 to 10 instead of from 1 to 5—it would probably be helpful...because...[he] could break it down [further].” George noted that #1, “I dislike participating in group discussions,” “is really general.” He continued by saying,

What group discussions? And who are the people? Who are you with? It totally depends on your situation and what you are in. And the catcher is the ‘generally’ [referring to the use of the word in the individual statements]. Generally—I mean normally—yeah, I am pretty comfortable [but] sometimes not.
George also noted that "generally" or "normally" could mean 9 out of 10 times or 6 out of 10 times. How George chooses to represent his answer could thus be inconsistent even within his own responses, which suggests the possibility of different meanings across respondents. Within the overall context of this theme, participants responded to the PRCA-24 with some reservations as to the accuracy of their answers. Some noted problems with the instrument itself, while others simply alluded to their responses being dependent on how they interpreted the instrument at the time it was administered.

**Negative Connotation**

As cited by McCroskey (1978), there is a negative connotation associated with high communication apprehension. Concurrently, there appears to be a positive connotation associated with low communication apprehension. Indeed, the negative connotation suggested by McCroskey could potentially alter responses to the instrument, particularly given a specific context in which the instrument was administered. I offered a relatively safe environment for my interviewees in that I did not plan to score the instrument, but even in discussing answers, interviewees responded to my inquiries as if their having a higher level of communication apprehension would be viewed as being deficient. Byron, in particular, was quick to note that he is very comfortable communicating in any context, but when asked about some of his responses that appeared to be contradictory to what he was saying, he noted his extreme discomfort with being put "on the spot" by being asked to share an opinion or answer a question when he is not prepared.
Gabrielle noted her discomfort in being too apprehensive when I asked her about her responses to the public speaking section (#s 19-24) in which she had indicated that she often gets so nervous she forgets facts, that her thoughts often become confused and jumbled, and that certain parts of her body often become tense and rigid. Specifically, I asked her why her responses were “agree” and not “strongly agree.” She remarked,

Well, because I don’t forget all of my facts, but—you know—I just put a 2 because I didn’t want to [pause; changing thought in mid-sentence] I thought it would be too, too hard on myself, so I just put a 2.

Shannon also referred to her discomfort in being too apprehensive, and also appeared to be a bit defensive when I inquired about her disagreeing with statement #19, “I have no fear of giving a speech.” In particular, I stated, “so you do have some fear, right?” Shannon’s first response was simply, “yeah.” However, she continued after a long pause by saying,

It doesn’t totally knock it off, I guess. It just kind of puts me down a little bit, but it doesn’t really [pause; changing thought mid-sentence], I mean it is not like—on a scale of 1 to 5—it is not like I am a zero.

As we continued our conversation, Shannon again appeared to be a bit defensive about my questioning her level of apprehension when I inquired about her disagreeing with #21, “I feel relaxed while giving a speech.” I had merely pointed out that she had disagreed with the statement and asked her to tell me why. She responded somewhat brusquely by saying,
I am not totally like—if I am giving a speech in front of 30 people—I am not totally comfortable with doing that, but I am not to the point where I can’t do it. I mean I can do it. It is just a little harder sometimes.

And finally, in asking Shannon about her disagreeing with statement #23, I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence,” she replied with seeming frustration,

I am not really confident in doing it because I don’t think I have the skills to do it, but I am not to the point where I won’t do it because I can’t do it. I mean I won’t do it just because—I don’t know—I am not quite confident enough, but—I don’t know—it just kind of depends what—I don’t know—like, your confidence. You have to build your confidence as you start your speech and stuff.

Indeed, Shannon seemed upset with me for simply referring to her answers. Based on her answers, I perceived this reaction to be related to her being defensive about the negative connotation associated with CA. Clearly there is an aversion to being labeled highly apprehensive, and that aversion undoubtedly affects one’s responses to the PRCA-24.

Conclusion

This research explored the lived experience of individuals taking the PRCA-24. In studying these lived experiences, I perceived several issues to be pivotal in understanding responses to the PRCA-24. Participants’ concepts of CA and the reasonings for their answers appeared to change within the interview process as a result of responding to the instrument, discussing the answers, or both. Interestingly, while being interviewed, co-researchers referred to communication events that they either forgot about or did not access when filling out the instrument. Many of them only
remembered particular events referred to because of the conversation constructed within the interview.

The notion of “it depends” appears to play a large role in participants’ responses to the PRCA-24, in that they indicated that the people and circumstances surrounding actual communication events consistently influence their level of communication apprehension. Indeed, participants in this research had a hard time generalizing across all of their apprehensive responses when faced with the task of choosing a single response option for each statement, because the level of CA they were reporting depended on which situation they chose to attribute it to. In addition to the role of situational fluctuation in reporting one’s level of apprehension on the PRCA-24, response accuracy also emerged as important in the lived experience of taking the PRCA-24.

Participant responses to the PRCA-24 appear to be variable and even inaccurate in representing a person’s level of CA due to differences in interpretation. Participants in this research were either not sure how to respond to some of the statements given the situational fluctuation in their past experiences, or they simply responded to the instrument according to their interpretation at the time the instrument was administered. Whether or not they were conscious of measurement fluctuation affecting their responses to statements, they nonetheless made an interpretation and selected a response option as the situation demanded. It is important to point out that though situational and measurement fluctuation can be separated theoretically, the lived experience of filling out the PRCA-24 involves the combination of meanings co-constructed in both past and present communication situations.
Finally, the negative connotation associated with having a high level of CA also factored into how and why participants responded to the PRCA-24 in the interview situation. It appears that participants did not want the stigma of being labeled too highly apprehensive in that they willingly offered reasons for having high levels of apprehension, but never addressed reasons for low levels of apprehension unless asked to elaborate. In addition, I can now see how my own biases factored into each interview situation in that, given my performing background and the importance of seeming calm, confident, and collected while on stage, I perceive people who are apprehensive in communicating as deficient. Indeed, I noticed that I focused more heavily on why participants noted high apprehension than I did on why participants noted low apprehension. In sum, exploring people's lived experience in filling out the PRCA-24 yielded three themes encompassing the participants' response variability. The situational fluctuation present across past experiences, the measurement fluctuation inherent in administering the PRCA-24, and the negative connotation associated with higher levels of CA together raise serious doubts about whether CA is a stable trait.

The three themes evident in this research, “it depends,” “accuracy of responses,” and “negative connotation” speak distinctively to the issue of whether or not CA is “a relatively enduring personality type orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety of contexts” (McCroskey, 1982a, p. 147). McCroskey acknowledges that viewing “all human behavior as emanating from a trait-like personality orientation of the individual...ignores the powerful interaction of [both hereditary and environment]” (p. 146), yet throughout his subsequent research, he
consistently maintains that CA is a trait-like variable. Indeed, McCroskey argues that CA exists within the individual as a personality characteristic, yet he simultaneously maintains that the trait is also made up of past experiences. He has neither examined how or when these past experiences culminate in a person's presumably stable level of apprehension, nor has he addressed how more recently past and even present experiences affect one's level of apprehension as measured by the PRCA-24. McCroskey maintains that the PRCA-24 measures a person's level of trait-like CA, but he does not clearly define what "trait-like" means, as opposed to "trait." Moreover, McCroskey (1982a) admits that situational CA is much easier to identify than trait-like CA because causes of situational CA lie outside of the individual.

In place of McCroskey's psychological explanation for CA, this study has employed a view of meaning as co-constructed by participants in particular communicative situations. Data from this study indicate that participants recall particular situations and the meanings co-constructed within those situations in responding to the PRCA-24, as opposed to generalizing across a series of situations within each of the PRCA-24's four contexts. Additionally, the data indicate that participants co-construct the meanings for their CA within the situation in which the instrument is administered rather than reporting some innate and relatively fixed trait-like orientation. Simply sitting down to fill out the PRCA-24 creates a shared meaning between the participant and the researcher that affects how the participant responds to each statement. The creation of meaning within past situations coupled with the creation of meaning through interaction in the test-taking situation affects one's CA as it is reported on the PRCA-24. CA is
clearly not independent of the context in which it is manifested, as McCroskey has purported; rather, as evidenced in this study, it is highly dependent on the interactions among participants within particular sets of circumstances. One’s level of CA as measured by the PRCA-24 at any point in time depends on the situational fluctuation across past experiences and on the measurement fluctuation occurring within the present moment of filling out the instrument. The evidence provided in this study suggests that CA is not an enduring, stable factor across a wide variety of contexts, that CA is not an individual predisposition independent of the context in which it is manifested, and that CA is created and maintained in particular interactions with others.

Several implications emerge from this study for the three main uses of the PRCA-24: separating individuals according to CA score prior to intervention, comparing group mean scores under various experimental conditions, and correlating CA with other variables. The use of PRCA-24 scores to delineate among high, moderate and low apprehensives presumes the instrument indexes a stable trait characteristic of an individual’s performance in all communication situations. This study indicates, instead, that situational and measurement fluctuation are both present in filling out the PRCA-24, hence CA scores are not stable indicators of a “trait.” The “situational constraints,” noted by McCroskey as sources of measurement error for moderate apprehensives, factor into one’s reported level of CA as measured by the PRCA-24 regardless of whether one’s generated score on the PRCA-24 deems a person low, moderate, or high in apprehensiveness. McCroskey argued against using single PRCA-24 scores to identify individuals on the basis of measurement error considerations. This study indicates that
situational and measurement fluctuation also affect an individual’s CA scores, and raise even more serious doubts about this primary use of the PRCA-24

Using PRCA-24 scores to compare average group CA scores under various experimental conditions, or using them to correlate CA with other variables, also appears problematic. The results of this study make evident that both situational fluctuation and measurement fluctuation, including the negative connotation associated with having a higher level of CA, are present when individuals respond to items on the PRCA-24 at any given point in time. Were an individual to be measured at multiple points in time, it is thus highly likely that his/her responses to any given item would form a distribution, rather than a consistent point estimate. Kellerman (2001) argues, however, that “when individuals have different underlying response distributions, they are no longer interchangeable and point estimates they provide take on different meanings both conceptually and mathematically” (p. 371). Kellerman’s argument implies that unless CA researchers can demonstrate that each person in a study has the same individual response distribution, then using the PRCA-24 to compare average group CA scores or using the scores to correlate CA with other variables is seriously problematic. Simply put, in view of this study scores generated in responding to the PRCA-24 do not adequately represent a person’s lived experiences with CA.

Researcher Effect

I recognize that I contributed to the creation of meaning within the interview process. Though it is often difficult to identify how one’s self affects the process of interaction, I realized several possible affects I had on the measurement fluctuation
involved in the interview processes. First, as mentioned earlier, I perceive high communication apprehension as a less positive characteristic than I do low communication apprehension. Indeed, in all of my interviews, I focused more heavily on responses indicating moderate to high apprehension than I did on responses indicating low or no apprehension. Second, I had a tendency to fill in pauses in the conversation rather than allowing participants more time to elaborate. I was, however, aware of my tendency to be uncomfortable with silences before conducting the interviews, so I did attempt to allow for more silence than I have in the past. Nonetheless, in listening to the audiotapes, I noted several places where I could have waited a few more seconds before picking up the conversation.

Finally, I recognize that my background in psychology may have played a role in how I co-created meaning within each interview. As an undergraduate, I believed that people possessed a series of traits or inherent predispositions residing within them. I had been socialized all of my life to view communication phenomena from a psychological perspective. Shifting from the psychological perspective was difficult for me at first. I was comfortable with the concept that traits could be neatly measured by instruments, and I was comfortable with categorizing myself in terms of such traits. Though I no longer believe that communication phenomena are the result of traits, it is easy for me to slip back into that unambiguous psychological framework when discussing communication with people outside of the discipline, as for example the participants in this study. The participants also seemed to be at ease in referring to communication phenomena resulting from traits. They appeared to be most comfortable in discussing the
PRCA-24 when they could neatly categorize their level of apprehensiveness. Many of the interviewees were quite frustrated with not being able to provide a definitive answer when asked the reasoning for a specific response. Thus, it is quite probable that as a result of my background in psychology, I influenced what I perceived as the interviewees' level of comfort associated with referring to CA as a trait.

Suggestions for Further Research

The goal of this study was to explore the “everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it” (Kvale, 1996, p. 30) and to examine “the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject,” (p. 30). The participants in this research provided rich data regarding their experience in filling out the PRCA-24, however, because of the in-depth nature of qualitative, conversational interviewing, and the extensive amount of time needed with each interviewee, this study was limited to only eight participants. Continued research using either the same or an alternative qualitative method focused on peoples' lived experience in taking the PRCA-24 is suggested, given that the themes evident in this study have direct implications regarding use of the PRCA-24 as it is currently being employed.

At the beginning of this study, I noted three questions of interest in leading to the exploration of participants' lived experiences in taking the PRCA-24. The first, “what experiences are people drawing from when taking the PRCA-24?” and second, “does a person have a difficult time choosing a fully representative answer because each item is tapping a wide variety of experiences?” were fully explored within the parameters of this study. However, the third question, “how does the test-taking situation affect one’s
responses to the PRCA-24?" needs further examination. Though one could speculate as to the answer to this question given the data garnered from this study, my interview questions did not focus on the interviewee's perception of how the test-taking situation affected his/her responses. The theme encompassing measurement fluctuation emerged as a result of how the test-taking situation affected the participants' responses, but participants were not asked this question directly.
References


Appendix A

Personal Record of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)


Directions: This instrument is composed of 24 statements concerning your feelings about communication with other people. Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Are Undecided, (4) Disagree, or (5) Strongly Disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Many of the statements are similar to other statements. Do not be concerned about this. Work quickly; just record your first impression.

___ 1. I dislike participating in group discussions.

___ 2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in a group discussion.

___ 3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.

___ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.

___ 5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.

___ 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.

___ 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.

___ 8. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings.

___ 9. I am very clam and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
13. While participating in conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
24. While giving a speech I get so nervous, I forget facts I really know.
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

This interview is being conducted in connection with my pursuit of a Master of Arts in Professional Communication at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The purpose of this research project is to explore people’s experiences in filling out a questionnaire that has been used to understand people’s feelings as they communicate with other people in a variety of situations. You will be asked to complete the instrument and then talk about the experiences you referred to while taking it. The interviews will last approximately 1-2 hours. All information obtained during the interview process will remain confidential.

Each interview will be audio taped and transcribed. The audiotapes will be kept locked in a file when they are not being used for research purposes, and Dr. Arundale, my advisor, and I will be the only people with access to the tapes. The tapes will be destroyed after the study is complete.

Your name will not be used in this research. A pseudonym will be used for the narrative story of your interview, and other potentially identifying factors, such as specified places of employment, will be changed. Although there are no known risks involved in the discussion of this subject, you are not expected to disclose information or discuss feelings about communicating with others that could potentially make you feel uncomfortable.
Signing this form acknowledges that your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. If, at any time, you feel the need to withdraw, you may do so without penalty simply by informing me.

Participant’s Signature ______________________________ Date ________________
Researcher’s Signature ______________________________ Date ________________

Thank you for your interest and participation in this research project. A copy of the research results will be available to you at your request. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at the Department of Communication.

Researcher: Karri C. VanDeventer
Office location: Gruening, 503
Department of Communication, UAF
Phone: 474-1876
Email: karrivan@hotmail.com

Advisor: Dr. Robert Arundale
Office: Gruening, 503G
Department of Communication, UAF
Phone: 474-6799
Email: ffrba@uaf.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, please contact Suzy Pence, Research Committee Coordinator, Office of Research Integrity, UAF at 474-7800 or s.pence@uaf.edu