# Interpersonal Orientations of Speech Anxious Students Bob Ambler

During the past decade concern for students who have difficulty with the communication process has emerged in the Speech Communication field. Special instructional strategies and programs now exist to remedialize what has been classified as stage fright, communication apprehension, communication anxiety, reticence, speech anxiety, and shyness. The symptoms of and the helping strategies for those persons whose behaviors and attitudes generally fall within the above list vary, but they all tend to avoid communicating at least in some specific situation because of perceived punishments related to the act of communication. The programs for instructional improvement, one of which has been recently described in this journal<sup>2</sup>, have varied at the several schools where they have developed, at least in part because of the type of student for which the program was designed to serve, as well as the nature of the rest of the curriculum into which the specialized program had to fit. The procedures for identifying and notifying students for whom the specialized courses or programs would be appropriate also vary. Paper and pencil tests (most frequently some form of the PRCA) and announcement of a specialized program followed by instructor interviews are two of the most popular means of selecting students for enrollment into specialized classes for communication avoidant students.

One ramification of the varying nature of the selection process is that the communication tendencies of the students in the different programs may vary considerably, necessitating the application of different instructional strategies for helping a particular group of students in a given program. This essay presents results concerning the communication orientations of students in one such class for communication avoidant students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and examines the implication of the students' communication orientations for instructional strategies. Specifically, the article examines the differences between FIRO-B's scores for students selected for a special communication avoidant class and scores for students enrolled in the regular section of the basic course. Both were sections of a large multi-sectioned basic speech course in Public Speaking. Since the instructional program mentioned in this study focuses on public speaking anxiety, the discussion section will compare the results obtained with a previous report of communication orientations, as measured by the FIRO-B, in an instructional program that focuses on reticence.<sup>6</sup>

# Context of the Speech Anxiety Program

The Public Speaking Course at the University of Tennessee is multi-sectioned, and serves the curricular requirements of a number of colleges, including Agriculture, Business, Communication, Education, and Human Ecology. The course focuses on developing the ability to prepare and present an oral presentation before an audience. Students must present at least three graded speeches to the class. In the Spring of 1977, a special section of this class was developed for "Speech Anxious" (SA) students. The course was designed to incorporate the basic purposes of the traditional classes, and to provide special training in techniques for reducing and coping with the nervousness experienced during and in anticipation of speaking. Ultimately, the goal of the class was that students would develop greater confidence and competence in performing the skills necessary for achieving an effective oral presentation. The course was designed to accommodate students required to take the Public Speaking class as part of their curriculum, but whose excessive fear of the formal speaking situation would reduce their liklihood of completing the course. Since the specialized program supports and is an integral part of the Public Speaking class, efforts have been focused on speech anxiety as opposed to reticence or other difficulties more related to the interpersonal level of communication, and while our special section for speech anxious students probably includes a certain percentage of students who are reticent, or more generally apprehensive about communication, there is also a substantial number of students enrolling in the class who report that they feel uncomfortable about communicating in other situations than giving a speech.

Students in the special section of the Public Speaking class either identify themselves during the preregistration period for the subsequent quarter (the class is designated in the timetable of classes for registration/preregistration as being for speech anxious students only) or they are identified by the Personal Report of Public Speaking Apprehension (PRPSA)<sup>8</sup>, which students in the regular sections of the class take and self score on the first day of the term. In the latter case, students with higher scores are advised to consider enrollment in the special section for speech anxious students (though they may stay with the regular section). In any case, a student encrolling in the special section class is required to obtain the instructor's permission. The instructor of the special section class<sup>9</sup> attempts to screen students to assure the appropriateness of the class for the student. The instructor makes a subjective judgment (based on his discussion with the student) as to whether the student is indeed "speech anxious" or whether he/she is seeking enrollment in the class for inappropriate reasons, i.e., supposed ease of the class.

# Procedure and Design

During 1981, I decided to begin administering the FIRO-B questionnaire at the first of the quarter in the special section for speech anxious students. Dr. Roy Ambrester<sup>10</sup> of the UTK Speech Dept., and I had found the FIRO-B

particularly useful as a tool for developing insight concerning one's interpersonal communication behaviors in the Interpersonal Communication course, and I felt that it might have potential for some diagnostic work in the special section of the Public Speaking class. The initial results using the FIRO-B in the SA Public Speaking class yielded results that were interesting because of their comparisons with averages we had found in the Interpersonal Communication class. The comparisons with the Interpersonal Communication class were not completely appropriate because Interpersonal Communication is not required as is Public Speaking, and Interpersonal Communication requires student presentations which are graded. What was needed was a comparison with students enrolled in the regular Public Speaking classes. Subsequently, I asked students enrolled in the regular sections of the class during the Summer of 1981 (N = 105) to complete the FIRO-B to provide a more appropriate comparison. I continued to administer the FIRO-B at the first of the quarter for the special SA Public Speaking class. The data for the special section class reported in this analysis is based on the completion of the FIRO-B by 96 students enrolled during the Winter, Spring, and Fall quarters of 1981, in the special SA Public Speaking class.

Before presenting the results, an explanation about the FIRO-B is in order. The FIRO-B is based on William Schutz's theory of interpersonal behavior. Schutz claims that people relate to other people to fulfill three different needs (1) inclusion, (2) control, and (3) affection. We have a need to be a part of the group (inclusion), we have a need to influence and be influenced by others in the group (control), and we have a need to be close to certain other members of the group (affection). Each of these need areas includes both an expressed and a wanted component, the latter being less manifest that the expressed area. Schutz hypothesized that different persons have varying levels of each of these needs. Consequently, the test yields six different scores, each of which can vary from a low of 0 (representing very little of the stated need) to a high of 9 (representing a large amount of the stated need): (1) Expressed Inclusion, i.e., "I try to be with people," (2) Wanted Inclusion, i.e., "I like other people to invite me to things," (3) Expressed Control, i.e., "I take charge of things when I'm with people," (4) Wanted Control, i.e., "I am easily led by people," (5) Expressed Affection, i.e., "I try to get close and personal with people," and (6) Wanted Affection, i.e., "I like people to act close toward me."

No a priori predictions about differences between non speech anxious (NSA) students and speech anxious students (SA) were hypothesized, but the same comparisons which Rosenfeld and Frandsen had made in comparing the FIRO-B scores of reticent versus non-reticent students were conducted.<sup>12</sup> They had predicted that non-reticent students would score higher than reticent students on all dimensions of the FIRO-B, that reticents would want more control than they express, and that reticents would want more affection than the Rosenfeld and Frandsen Study, independent t tests were used to compare each dimension (expressed inclusion, wanted inclusion, expressed control, wanted control, expressed affection, and wanted affection) of the FIRO-B. Dependent t tests (t test for paired differences) were used to compare the expressed against the wanted needs for inclusion, control, and affection for both speech anxious and non speech anxious students. Unlike the Rosenfeld and Frandsen study, though, comparisons were conducted separately for male and female students as well as for the whole group together.

# Results

Table 1 compares the means of the FIRO-B scores for the regular sections of the Public Speaking class and the special SA Public Speaking sections. These are broken into means for male and female students because our previous work with the FIRO-B in the Interpersonal Communication class had suggested gender differences on the measure. Such differences are also suggested by the normative data which Schutz presents for male and female high school students.<sup>13</sup>

TABLE 1

	Public S Regular	Speaking Sections		Public Speaking Anxiety Sections	
FIRO-B SCALE	Males (n=46)	Females (n=59)	Males (n=45)	Females (n=51)	
	4 04		2.60	/ 00	
Expressed Inclusion	4.24	4.59	3.69	4.92 4.04	
Wanted Inclusion	4.02 3.50	4.10	3.96 1.69	1.76	
Expressed Control Wanted Control	2.59	2.46	3.58	3.16	
Expressed Affection	3.52	3.92	3.02	3.84	
Wanted Affection	4.72	5.51	4.69	5.82	

Results of the t comparisons between means as shown in Table 1 are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Table 2 presents the comparisons for the total group (both male and female), while Tables 3 and 4 present the results for males and females, respectively.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show that the only dimensions of the FIRO-B on which non speech anxious and speech anxious students differed are the expressed control and wanted control dimensions. Note, however, that while both expressed and wanted control differed significantly between the two groups for the males, the females only approached significance on the wanted control comparison ( $\underline{t} = -1.783$ ; df = 108; p <.10). Reference to the means for the different groups in Table 1 demonstrates that speech anxious students have higher wanted control scores and lower expressed control scores. These differences appear to be greater for the males than for the females.

Comparisons between expressed and wanted scores on each of the three need areas showed that all subgroups (male and female, nonspeech anxious and speech anxious) wanted more affection than they expressed, but this was particularly true for the SA females. The SA groups, but not the NSA ones, wanted a higher level of control than was expressed. Finally, there were no significant differences between expressed and wanted inclusion for any of the groups though the difference for SA females approached significance (t = 1.926; df = 49; p t < 0.10), with the expressed scores being slightly higher than the wanted scores for that group.

#### Discussion

The results of the present study are in some ways consistent with the findings of Rosenfeld and Frandsen's comparison of reticent and non-reticent students on the FIRO-B. (See Table 5 for comparison of overall means between studies.) In both studies, the "communication avoidant" group wanted more control than they expressed, while the comparison group did not. In both studies, the "communication avoidant"

TABLE 2

COMPARISONS OF FIRO-B SCORES: NON SPEECH ANXIOUS AND SPEECH ANXIOUS STUDENTS [TOTAL GROUP: MALES AND FEMALES]

	Α.	Indepen	dent	t Comparison	s for Tot	al Gr	oup (	N=2	01)
EInsa	vs.	$\mathrm{EI}_{\mathtt{sa}}^{}1}$	=	.323	$\mathtt{WC}_{\mathtt{nsa}}$	vs.	WCsa	-	-2.806**
WI nsa	vs.	WI <sub>sa</sub>	=	.147	EA <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	$\mathtt{EA}_{\mathtt{sa}}$	=	.851
EC <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	ECsa	=	4.261***	$\mathtt{WA}_{\mathtt{nsa}}$	vs.	$WA_{sa}$	=	378
		B. <u>D</u>	epend	dent t Compar	isons for	Tota	1 Grou	p	
EI <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	$wi_{nsa}^{2}$	=	1.307	EIsa	vs.	WIsa	=	1.030
EC <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	WC <sub>nsa</sub>	=	2.070*	EC <sub>sa</sub>	vs.	WCsa	=	-4.848***
EAnsa	vs.	WAnsa	=	-6.280 <sup>***</sup>	$^{\mathtt{EA}}\mathtt{sa}$	vs.	$WA_{sa}$	=	-7.583 <sup>***</sup>

To be read: "expressed inclusion of non speech anxious compared with expressed inclusion of speech anxious."

To be read: "expressed inclusion of non speech anxious compared with wanted inclusion of non speech anxious."

group wanted more affection than they expressed to a greater extent than the comparison group. In both studies, "communication avoidant" students expressed less control than the comparison group.

There the similarities end, since Rosenfeld and Frandsen found that their reticent students expressed less inclusion and affection than non-reticents as well as wanted less inclusion than non-reticents. No such difference in inclusion an affection scores (expressed or wanted) emerged in comparing non speech anxious and speech anxious students. In fact, it should be noted that differences between inclusion and affection scores for reticents and non-reticents were large enough that Rosenfeld and Frandsen felt justified in using a combination of the expressed inclusion and affection score (but not expressed control) as a potential identification measure for reticent students. On the contrary, the results of the present study would suggest that the expressed and wanted control dimensions of the FIRO-B

# COMPARISONS OF FIRO-B SCORES: NON SPEECH ANXIOUS AND SPEECH ANXIOUS STUDENTS [MALES ONLY]

	Α.	Indepe	ndent	t Comp	arisons	for To	tal G	roup	(N=	91)
EInsa	vs.	$EI_{sa}^{1}$	=	1.120		WCnsa	vs.	WCsa	=	-2.134*
WI <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	WI <sub>sa</sub>	=	.087		EAnsa	vs.	EAsa	=	.986
EC <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	ECsa	==	3.787*	**	$WA_{nsa}$	vs.	$WA_{sa}$	=	.055
				lent t C		ons for	Tota	1 Grou	ıp	
EI <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	$WI_{nsa}^{2}$	=	.546						560
		$WC_{nsa}$		1.889						-3.795***
EAnsa	vs.	WAnsa	=	-3.210*	*	EAsa	vs.	$^{\mathtt{WA}}_{\mathtt{sa}}$	=	-4.530***
		1								

<sup>1</sup>To be read: "expressed inclusion of non speech anxious compared with expressed inclusion of speech anxious."

To be read: "expressed inclusion of non speech anxious compared with wanted inclusion of non speech anxious."

would be better predictors of speech anxious students. It is, of course, necessary to keep in mind that these results were derived from different types of programs. There is every reason to believe that Rosenfeld and Frandsen's 'reticent' students differed significantly from our "speech anxious" students. It seems likely that Rosenfeld and Frandsen's reticents and non-reticents are each more homogeneous groups (Note the means in Table 5). While the exact selection process they used is not clearly stated, their article implies a highly selective process for assigning reticents to their special classes. Note also in Table 5 that their non-reticent group expresses and wants more

TABLE 4

COMPARISONS OF FIRO-B SCORES: NON SPEECH ANXIOUS AND SPEECH ANXIOUS STUDENTS [FEMALES ONLY]

	Α.	Independ	lent	t Compariso	ons for Tot	al Gr	oup (	N=1	10)
EI <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	${\tt EI}_{\tt sa}^{}$	=	861	WCnsa	vs.	WC <sub>sa</sub>	=	-1.783
WInsa	vs.	WI <sub>sa</sub>	=	.090	EAnsa	vs.	EAsa	=	.184
EC <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	ECsa	=	2.456*	$WA_{nsa}$	vs.	$WA_{sa}$	=	717
		B. <u>De</u>	pen	dent t Compa	arisons for	Tota	1 Grou	р	
EI <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	$WI_{nsa}^{2}$	=	1.223	EIsa	vs.	$WI_{sa}$	=	1.926
		WC <sub>nsa</sub>							-3.059**
EA <sub>nsa</sub>	vs.	WA <sub>nsa</sub>	=	-5.712***	EAsa	vs.	$WA_{sa}$	=	-6.287***

To be read: "expressed inclusion of non speech anxious compared with expressed inclusion of speech anxious."

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inclusion than our non speech anxious students by almost a point and a half, while their reticents expressed and wanted less inclusion than our speech anxious students. This reflects the possibility of a more highly selective process for discovering the "communication avoidant" students for special classes, but it also suggests that their non-reticent group was assigned more selectively. The process of defining the non speech anxious group was not selective (students in the regular sections of the Public Speaking class were simply asked to complete the measure), and there are reasons to believe that there may have been a few students in the sample who might otherwise have been in the special section for speech anxious students. The reason for this is that the sample was taken during the Summer quarter, and this is the quarter in which University of Tennessee Knoxville does not

MEAN FIRO-B SCORES FOR STUDENTS IN PRESENT STUDY
AND ROSENFELD-FRANDSEN STUDY

	Ambler (198 (Comparing Speaking A	Public	Rosenfeld-Frandsen (1972) (Comparing Levels of Reticence)		
FIRO-B SCALE	Non Speech Anxious $(n = 105)$	Speech Anxious $(n = 96)$	Non- Reticent $(n = 58)$	Reticent Students $(n = 38)$	
Expressed Inclusion Wanted Inclusion Expressed Control Wanted Control Expressed Affection Wanted Affection	4.44 4.07 3.20 2.51 3.74 5.16	4.34 4.00 1.73 3.35 3.46 5.29	5.79 5.50 3.45 4.92 4.18 5.03	3.24 3.21 2.00 5.16 1.76 3.95	

offer a special section of the Public Speaking class for speech anxious students due to limited enrollment. In the Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters, when the speech anxiety class is offered, there are students who report high speech anxiety (as measured by the PRPSA) but who choose to remain in the regular section of the class. Thus, given the fact that there was no special section option, there probably was a higher percentage of speech anxious students mixed in the group that the present study has been referring to as the regular section group. This is a methodological difficulty which can be resolved by collecting the FIRO-B data during a quarter in which the speech anxiety class is offered.<sup>15</sup> The overall figures for the Rosenfeld and Frandsen non-reticent group is still much larger than for the non speech anxious group, which suggests that the non-reticent group may have been more than a random draw from a basic communication course.

The results of the present study, combined with the Rosenfeld and Frandsen study, suggest that in a program where the primary concern in dealing with communication avoidance is with public speaking, the control dimension of the FIRO-B may be a more important predictor of whether a person is qualified for the program, while in a program where a broader range of communication avoidance behaviors are the concern, the expressed inclusion and affection scores are better predictors of qualification for the program. One way of testing this general hypothesis would be to compare scores on the FIRO-B with scores on measures of public speaking anxiety (such as the PRPSA) and with scores on more general measures of communication apprehension (such as the PRCA-24<sup>16</sup> without the public speaking items) with a population that exhibits a broad range of scores on the different measures. If the hypothesis suggested is valid, then public speaking anxiety should be more related to the control scores on the FIRO-B, specifically smaller expressed scores and larger wanted control scores, and communication apprehension, or similar tests of interpersonal avoidance or apprehension, should be more related to the inclusion and affection dimensions than is the measure of public speaking anxiety.

# **Implications for Teaching**

Let us assume that, as the data in this study suggest, persons with high public speaking anxiety are characterized by relationship orientations toward others in which they do not attempt to influence others every much, and would prefer that others influence them. This implies that there are ways in which we as speech teachers may relate effectively to the highly speech anxious student.

Speech anxious students have a difficulty with the public speaking situation at least partially because the situation is one that **commands** attention; it is a position of assumed responsibility. A number of speech anxious

students do not see themselves as exercisisng control effectively, nor do they see themselves as assuming responsibility because the speaking situation in class is by its nature a position of influence, they are quite understandably uncomfortable. The position is inconsistent with the interpersonal rhetorical strategies they have developed to navigate their transactions. Being low in expressed control, they do not care to tell anybody what to do. This makes the situation in which they are asked to deliver a **persuasive** speech (as opposed to an informative speech) especially difficult (even to find a topic).

Speech teachers can encourage the speech anxious student to cope with these inconsistencies. First, we can help them with the matter of topic selection. We already encourage students to give themselves plenty of lead time, thinking about topics early, and picking a topic about which they care. But, these ideas are particularly important for the speech anxious student, and should receive special emphasis. I explain these suggestions to the anxious students in light of my own experience, because I think they have been helpful to me. My FIRO-B, scores indicate that I am low on expressed control, and high on wanted control. I believe that I am speech anxious to some degree. I am not enthused about telling other people what to do. It even takes a bit of extra energy generating this essay which I am presently sharing with you. So, I have to convince myself that the work is worth the effort, and should be done regardless of any external reward or punishment system. That is never easy. Right now, I think the ideas I am developing are worthwhile, but there are many past research projects I have attempted that failed, thus allowing me to avoid the communication situation. I share my experiences, therefore, with my students as I share them with you. I let them know that I have some strategies that work for me in certain situations, and I encourage them to try them. I do not present my answers as their answers, but I encourage the students to examine their experiences and other people's experiences with the idea that they will get their answers about what works best for them from a variety of sources.

I think it is also important that students recognize their tendencies and preferences in relating to other people and how these may affect thinking, feeling, and behaviors in all the activities which are required to give an effective oral presentation. In this sense, a speech teacher can use the FIRO-B not only as a diagnostic tool, but as an insight tool which will allow students to perceive how personal orientations can maintain a person in a systematic pattern of avoidance. Presently I ask the students to take the FIRO-B at the first of the course, and later I return it to them and discuss the implications of their scores to the process of preparing for and delivering oral discourse. It is important in this process that the appropriate kinds of reservations about the test scores be made (they may tell you something about yourself, but they may not). I have found that this kind of insight about one's communication, coupled with a discussion of the way one's own self-talk contributes to anxiety can be immensely helpful to many students in the special section class.

We must remember that the different programs at colleges and universities designed to help students with communication difficulties are not working with the same population of students. This is the case partially because they operate in differing social and curricular structures and because the programs have different goals and therefore will tend to identify different types of students as those most in need of assistance. "Communication avoidance" is a multi-faceted problem, and we are only beginning to understand the breadth of potential tools for encouraging students to develop a positive approach to communication. If we recognize fully the teaching value of the experiences of ourselves and other people, then we will come closer to getting the full learning value from the available teaching tools.

# **NOTES**

'See for example Gerald M. Phillips (ed.), "The Practical Teachers' Symposium on Shyness, Communication Apprehension, Reticence, and a Variety of Other Common Problems," Communication Education, 29 (1980), 213-263, and Gerald M. Phillips (ed), "Coming of Age in the Academy: A Symposium," Communication Education, 31 (1982) 177-223.

<sup>2</sup>Bob Ambler, "The Speech Anxiety Program at UTK: a Class for Students with High Public Speeaking Anxiety," The Journal of the Tennessee Speech Communication Association, 11 (Spring, 1985) 1-6.

<sup>3</sup>Differences in procedures for identifying communication avoidant students for the different programs are reported in the Symposium in the July, 1982 issue of Communication Education, by Jan Hoffman and Jo Sprague, "A Survey of Reticence and Communication Apprehension Treatment Programs at U.S. Colleges and Universities," Communication Education, 31 (1982) 185-193 and Karen A. Foss, "Communication Apprehension: Resources for the Instructor," Communication Education, 31 (1982) 195-203.

<sup>4</sup>Hoffman and Sprague, 1982, 187, and Foss, 1982, 196-197.

'The FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation-Behaviors) is a test devised by William C. Schutz, **The Interpersonal Underworld** (Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior Books, 1966), which is designed to examine the extent of a person's needs for other people in three broadly defined need areas. The general nature of the test is described later in this paper.

<sup>6</sup>Lawrence B. Rosenfeld and Kenneth D. Frandsen, "The 'Other' Speech Student: An Empirical Analysis of Some Interpersonal Relations Orientations of the Reticent Student," The Speech Teacher, 21 (1972) 296-302.

<sup>7</sup>This special section of our Public Sspeaking class for speech anxious students is described in more detail in Ambler, 1985, 1-6.

\*The PRPSA and the initial version of the PRCA for college students can be found in James C. McCroskey, "Measures of Communication-Bound Anxiety," Speech Monographs, 37 (1970) 269-277.

<sup>9</sup>The author of this paper is and has been the instructor of the special section of Public Speaking for speech anxious students since its initiation in the Spring of 1977. In that sense, the program is very much like most of those reported by Hoffman and Sprague, 1982, 187, which are directed by a single faculty member.

<sup>10</sup>The concepts incorporated in the FIRO-B test have been valuable enough to our Interpersonal Communication class that Professor Ambrester, who teaches most of our courses in that area, has included a substantial discussion of the test and its relationship to interpersonal behaviors in his book: Marcus L. Ambrester and Glynnis Holm Strause, A Rhetoric of Interpersonal Communication, Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1984, pp. 227-240, 251-264, 289-301.

11Schutz, 1966.

<sup>12</sup>Rosenfeld and Frandsen, 1972, 298-299.

<sup>13</sup>Will Schutz, FIRO Awareness Scales Manual (Palo Alto, California: Counsulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1978).

<sup>14</sup>Rosenfeld and Frandsen, 1972, 300-302.

13Since this study has been completed, additional data on the relationship between the FIRO-B and communication apprehension has been collected on a larger sample. A paper by the author of this article summarizing the updated results, "Communication Apprehension and People Orientations," will be reported at the SCA 1986 Annual Convention in November in Chicago.

<sup>16</sup>See Virginia P. Richmond and James C. McCroskey, Communication: Apprehension, Avoidance, and Effectiveness (Scottsdale, Arizona: Gorsuch Scarisbrick, Publishers, 1985), 111-112.