Instructor Disclosures of Communication Apprehension and Student Perceptions of Instructor Credibility in the Public Speaking Classroom

Andrea Meluch and Katie Feehan
Indiana University South Bend

Shawn Starcher
Kent State University

The purpose of this study was to examine whether instructor disclosures of personal communication apprehension in the public speaking classroom are beneficial to students as they manage their own nervousness related to public speaking. Participants (N = 233) in the present study included students enrolled in public speaking courses at a medium-sized Midwestern university. Results indicated that participants rated instructors who disclosed personal experiences of communication apprehension to their classes as more competent than instructors who did not disclose this information. In addition, participants' open-ended responses suggested that students perceive supportive instructors who share their personal experiences of communication apprehension with their students to be an important resource to students as they work on overcoming their fears related to public speaking. The implications of these findings in the public speaking classroom, other higher education classrooms, and in relation to general instructor disclosures are discussed.

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2015), oral communication skills remain one of the most highly desired learning outcomes for all college students. To achieve this learning outcome, college students may be required to complete public speaking courses or deliver presentations in courses offered by diverse disciplines (e.g., psychology, business). Researchers studying human fears have found that college students fear speaking in public settings more than death (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012). Thus, students commonly experience communication apprehension related to public speaking in any course that requires presentations. Logically, college students are not alone in their fear of speaking in public, and even college instructors, who speak in public regularly as part of their job, may have struggled with communication apprehension when speaking in public. Although student experiences of public speaking anxiety are well-known (Bodie, 2010), less is known about whether college instructors disclosing their own struggles related to public speaking, past or present, can help students to feel more at ease with the understanding that they are not alone in their communication apprehension and have the ability to overcome this fear.

Researchers have examined teaching strategies designed to help students manage their communication apprehension related to the public speaking (e.g., Beatty & Friedland, 1990; Bodie, 2010; Dwyer, 2000; Finn, Sawyer, & Schrodt, 2009). These teaching strategies include instructors sharing personal examples to help clarify course concepts. As such, instructors who assign presentations may find their students can benefit from instructor self-disclosures of struggle related to public speaking. The present study investigates students' perceptions of instructor disclosures of communication apprehension regarding public speaking and whether students perceive such disclosures to be helpful when working to overcome their own fears of speaking in public.

Instructor Credibility

Student perceptions of instructor credibility have broadly been examined by researchers (e.g., Brann, Edwards, & Myers, 2005; Myers, 2001; Schrodt & Turman, 2005; Semlak & Pearson, 2008). Myers (2001) asserted that instructor credibility is one of the most important variables influencing the student-instructor relationship. That is, if a student does not perceive that the instructor is credible, it is unlikely that the pair will develop a meaningful relationship, which could inhibit the student's ability to learn. Credibility is defined as "the attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by the communicator" (McCroskey & Young, 1981, p. 24). McCroskey and Young's (1981) definition of credibility is multidimensional in that the attitude held toward the source of the communication (e.g., the instructor) is composed of multiple dimensions. That is, when determining whether any source is credible the receiver will evaluate multiple aspects of the source of the information.

McCroskey and associates have forwarded five dimensions of credibility: (a) competence, (b) character, (c) composure, (d) sociability, and (e) extroversion (Beatty, 1994; McCroskey & Young, 1981). Although all five dimensions of credibility have been examined in extant literature, researchers commonly focus on the competence and character dimensions when examining instructor credibility (Beatty, 1994). Specifically, instructor competence and character are critical components students use when considering the overall credibility of their instructors (Beatty, 1994). Instructor competence refers to perceptions of the instructor's knowledge and expertise (McCroskey, 1998). Instructor

character refers to an instructor's trustworthiness or honest nature (Frymier & Thompson, 1992).

Researchers have examined the relationship between instructor credibility and a variety of variables, such as instructor style of dress (Lightstone, Francis, & Kocum, 2011), use of instructional technologies (Schrodt & Turman, 2005), and instructor age (Semlak & Pearson, 2008). Several studies have examined the relationships between student evaluations of instructor credibility and gender (both student gender and instructor gender). Research has indicated female instructors are often evaluated differently, and often less positively, when compared to their male peers (Basow & Howe, 1987; Basow & Silberg, 1987). In addition, Basow and Silberg (1987) reported that male and female students rated female instructors lower in course organization and teaching ability when compared to their male peers. As such, understanding student perceptions of instructor characteristics and behaviors that may influence student perceptions of credibility, such as self-disclosure of struggle, has important implications for both teaching strategies and instruction evaluation.

Student Perceptions of Instructor Disclosures

In recent years, researchers have investigated the relationship between instructor disclosures and student perceptions of instructor credibility (e.g., Imlawi, Gregg,& Karimi, 2015; Klebig, Goldonowicz, Mendes, Miller, & Katt, 2016; Miller, Katt, Brown, & Sivo, 2014). An instructor often has to balance the need of self-disclosure and privacy in the classroom when sharing private information with students (Cayanus & Martin, 2004, 2008; Cayanus, Martin, & Goodboy, 2009; Kaufmann & Frisby, 2017). Whereas sharing personal examples may lead to a more immediate classroom environment and a better learning experience for students (Gorham, 1988; Kaufmann & Frisby, 2017), students may view instructors who reveal too much information as exhibiting inappropriate behaviors. Petronio (2002) confirms this notion, posits that there are benefits and drawbacks regarding disclosure, and offers the understanding that the decision of managing private information is centered on a rule-based system that differs for each individual depending on their own specific privacy-related criteria. Furthermore, Petronio (2002) states that the "balance of privacy and disclosure has meaning because it is vital to the way we manage our relationships" (p. 2). The revelation of private information, or any information that may make an individual feel vulnerable, is a risky proposition for not only those that offer the disclosure of the private information, but also for those that hear the private information and their relationship overall (Petronio, 1991). This dynamic may be especially prevalent in the academic environment and the relationship between an instructor and their students.

When considering the benefits of disclosure, research has found that instructors who use self-disclosure and personal narratives at a higher rate to clarify course content are rated more highly when compared to their counterparts who do not use self-disclosure or personal narratives as often (Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988). Conversely, some disclosures may lead to a "negative impression that diminishes the other person's respect and a basically satisfactory relational status quo" (Rosenfeld, 2000, p. 8). Sidelinger, Nyeste, Madlock, Pollak, and Wilkinson (2015) found that students have lower communication satisfaction with their instructors when instructors offer too many disclosures or have conversations that the students deem as inappropriate. Miller et al. (2014) found that negative self-disclosures (e.g., instructor sharing information about personal failures and character weaknesses) or self-disclosures of struggle can contribute to classroom incivility. However, Kaufmann and Frisby (2017) have found that students do not perceive a high frequency of instructor disclosures negatively if the content of the disclosures are relevant to the course. Thus, the content of the disclosures may be viewed positively by students if they view such disclosures related directly to the course material.

Determining when to reveal or conceal private information may become a dilemma for instructors when considering a disclosure with students. Instructors may feel that there is a balancing act between the proper amount of disclosure and revealing too much. McBride and Wahl (2005) found that instructors may feel the need to reveal some private information to create a comfortable learning environment while avoiding disclosures that may not be suitable for the classroom setting. Any disclosure that may impact the relationship between the instructor and the student may have significant consequences for the learning experience of the student or the perceived effectiveness of the instructor (Frymier, 1994; Nussbaum & Scott, 1980).

Pensoneau-Conway (2009) offers that navigating interpersonal boundaries could be a difficult process for instructors as they may struggle with finding the perfect ratio of privacy and disclosure, which may be different for each class depending on the makeup of the students in that course. That is, instructors continuously must decide what they can disclose and with whom based upon the specific needs of each individual class. While there have been many studies that have examined instructor characteristics and their relationship to student perceptions of instructor credibility, no known studies have examined the impact of instructor disclosures of communication apprehension on student perceptions of instructor credibility.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) is understood as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). Although CA can be conceptualized as a relatively enduring trait, much of the research on CA has focused on context-based (or state-based) CA (Spielberger, 1966). Students' CA with public speaking in the college classroom is considered context-based. Thus, the requirement of students to speak in front of the class can, for most students, create CA directly related to the experience of public speaking.

Scholars have developed a vast amount of literature to aid instructors in helping students to overcome their nervousness or anxiety related to classroom speeches (e.g., Ahlfeldt & Sellnow, 2009; Bodie, 2010; Duff, Levine, Beatty, Woolbright, & Sun Park, 2007). Bodie (2010) states that the most popular techniques developed by researchers and public speaking instructors in the treatment of public speaking anxiety include: (a) systematic desensitization (altering the individual's negative association with public speaking and anxiety), (b) cognitive modification (replacing negative appraisals of public speaking with positive views), and (c) skills training (teaching specific techniques, such as selecting the correct organizational structure for a speech and ways to enhance verbal and nonverbal delivery). The use of treatment options for public speaking anxiety in the classroom has varied results that can often be dependent on various classroom constraints (Bodie, 2010). Thus, there are teaching techniques available for instructors to help students manage their public speaking anxiety, but these techniques often vary based on a variety of environmental factors.

Research Questions

To date, no known research has investigated whether instructor disclosures of their own personal CA in public speaking contexts – self-disclosures of struggle – are beneficial to students. Due to the importance of establishing instructor credibility to ensure a positive classroom environment, the following research question is posed to understand how students perceive instructor disclosures of CA related to public speaking:

RQ1: Do student perceptions of teacher credibility in public speaking classes differ between professors who choose to disclose their communication apprehension to students and professors who choose to not disclose their communication apprehension to students?

In addition, since previous research has identified that female and male instructors can be perceived differently, this study aims to understand student perceptions related to instructor disclosures of CA and instructor gender. To investigate these differences, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: Do student perceptions of teacher credibility differ between male and female professors who choose to disclose their communication apprehension?

Although some instructor disclosures can create a more immediate classroom environment, no known research has investigated whether instructor disclosures of public speaking CA help students feel more comfortable disclosing their own CA-related to public speaking with their instructors. Thus, the present study provides additional insight into whether students perceive instructor disclosures of CA to be useful by posing the following research question:

RQ3: What considerations inform a student's decision to disclose their communication apprehension to the professor?

Methods

Participants

Participants in the present study included 233 students enrolled in public speaking courses at a medium-sized Midwestern university. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 39 years ($M = 19.51$, $SD = 2.81$). Seventy-four participants self-identified as male, 152 participants self-identified as female, and seven participants did not indicate their gender or identified as non-binary. One hundred seventy participants were first-year students, 42 were sophomores, 14 were juniors, four were seniors, and three did not report their class standing.

Procedures and Instrumentation

Data were collected from multiple sections of a public speaking course. A public speaking course was selected for data collection purposes because all students are required to regularly present speeches for this course. This public speaking course uses a standardized syllabus and customized textbook. Students completed the survey after having been exposed to the concept of CA through course lectures, activities, and assignments.

Four vignettes were created for the present study. The vignettes consisted of short, hypothetical stories that described a public speaking professor's

behaviors. Vignettes are descriptive texts that are designed to present a hypothetical situation to readers, generally with some small differences written into different versions of the texts. Vignette methodology is used as a quasi-experimental design that randomly assigns participants to read one version of the story and then respond to questions based on the descriptive text to which they were assigned (Alexander & Becker, 1978).

In the present study, the vignettes were designed to describe the professor as exhibiting behaviors that sometimes indicate CA when speaking in the class. The vignettes were developed using McCroskey and associates' descriptions of external behaviors that indicate one is experiencing CA. Specifically, the vignettes used the terms "tense," "voice quivers," and "nervousness" to describe the hypothetical instructor's behaviors (see Appendix). Each version of the vignette used the same communication behaviors. One version of the vignette only described the instructor's behaviors (non-disclosure version), and one version of the vignette described the instructor's behaviors and also included the instructor disclosing to the class the personal experience of CA in public speaking contexts (disclosure version). The gender of the instructors was also different between the four versions of the vignettes (i.e., female non-disclosure, male non-disclosure, female disclosure, male disclosure).

After participants read the vignette, they completed McCroskey and Young's (1981) Teacher Credibility scale and McCroskey's (1970) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). The Teacher Credibility scale is a 15-item instrument that instructs respondents to indicate their evaluations of the instructor in the vignette. The instrument includes both sub-scales for teacher competence and teacher character. Prior research supports the reliability of the scale ranging from .84 to .93 (e.g., Beatty & Zahn, 1990; McCroskey & Young, 1981). The PRCA-24 is "the most popular and most valid measure of trait-like communication apprehension" (Beatty, 1994, p. 292). The scale is a 24-item Likert instrument designed to measure respondents' CA in public, small group, meeting, and interpersonal contexts (Beatty, 1994). The PRCA-24 has documented high reliability .93 to .95 (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985). In the present study, a reliability coefficient of 0.64 was obtained for Competence, 0.51 was obtained for Character on the Teacher Credibility Scale, and 0.73 was obtained for the PRCA-24.

Finally, participants responded to three open-ended questions designed to understand what instructor characteristics make them likely to disclose their CA to instructors, what considerations would inform their decision to disclose CA to a public speaking instructor, and how they would perceive an instructor's personal disclosures of CA related to public speaking.

Open-ended Data Analysis

Three researchers initially read all of the open-ended responses. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), the researchers independently engaged in line-by-line coding using a constant comparison approach (Charmaz, 2006). Once each coder reached theoretical saturation (i.e., no new codes emerging), they compared their codes and found that similar labels were used. In areas where the researchers coded a line of text differently, they discussed their differences until they reached a consensus. This process resulted in three key themes emerging related to RQ$_3$. The results of this process are discussed in the results section.

Results

Participants' CA scores were categorized into having high, moderate, or low public communication CA categorizations (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989). In the present study, 132 students (56.7%) were categorized as having high CA, 84 students (36.1%) were categorized as having moderate CA, and 17 students (7.2%) were categorized as having low CA.

Primary Quantitative Results

The first research question examined whether student perceptions of teacher credibility differed between professors who chose to disclose their own CA to students when compared to professors with CA who chose to not disclose their CA in the classroom. Results from a one-way ANCOVA test, where participants' public communication apprehension scores were controlled for, revealed a significant difference between the disclosure and non-disclosure conditions for teacher competence, $F(3, 221) = 7.07$, $p = .000$. Participants in the disclosure conditions reported significantly higher levels of teacher competence (female disclosure: $M = 30.39$, $SD = 4.16$; male disclosure: $M = 30.57$, $SD = 4.80$) than participants in the non-disclosure conditions (female non-disclosure: $M = 27.11$, $SD = 3.89$; male non-disclosure: $M = 27.59$, $SD = 7.01$). Post-hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the female non-disclosure and the male ($p = .003$) and female ($p = .006$) disclosure conditions and between the male non-disclosure and the male ($p = .024$) and female ($p = .012$) disclosure conditions. However, the ANCOVA test indicated no significant interaction between participants' public communication apprehension and teacher competence. Further, controlling for participants' gender

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Competence and Character by Disclosure Condition

	Teacher competence			Teacher character		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Female non-disclosure	27.11	3.89	55	23.91	1.93	56
Male non-disclosure	27.59	7.01	56	24.69	2.95	55
Female disclosure	30.39	4.16	57	24.36	3.12	58
Male disclosure	30.57	4.80	58	24.74	3.27	57

did not result in any significant interaction effects. Results from a one-way ANCOVA test did not indicate a significant difference between the disclosure and non-disclosure conditions for teacher character, $F(3, 221) = .966$, $p = .409$. Table 1 provides the cell means and standard deviations for each condition.

The second research question examined whether student perceptions of teacher credibility differ between male and female professors who choose to disclose their CA. The results of post-hoc tests revealed no significant difference between the female disclosure and male disclosure groups for teacher competence ($p = .949$) and teacher character ($p = .534$), although the male non-disclosure and disclosure groups had slightly higher mean scores than both female groups in both teacher competence and credibility (see Table 1).

Open-Ended Data Results

The third research question examined the considerations that inform a student's decision to disclose CA to their professor. Open-ended data were coded by three researchers, and three key themes emerged from the qualitative analysis. The three themes included: (a) professor immediacy and supportiveness inform students' decision to disclose CA; (b) students perceive a professor can provide assistance and resources when students disclose CA; and (c) students perceive professors who also experience CA related to public speaking to be more empathetic than professors who do not share their personal struggles.

Professor immediacy and supportiveness. Although some participants noted that they did not have CA or believed that they could overcome their CA "on their own" without the help of an instructor, the majority of participants expressed that there were certain positive communication behaviors a professor could display that would make a student more likely to disclose their CA. Participants reported (a) "understanding," (b) "approachable," (c) "knowledgeable," (d) "relatable," and (d) "trustworthy" as the common characteristics that would inform their decision to disclose their CA to a professor.

Participants repeatedly used the terms "caring," "open," "encouraging," "kind," "friendly,"

"nonjudgmental," and "honest" to describe professor communication characteristics they need to observe in order to feel comfortable disclosing their CA to their professor. For example, participant 63 said, "They have to seem like they care enough. Compassion is key, and also trust." Participant 138 stated, "I would feel comfortable discussing my fears of public speaking if my professor was friendly . . . and clearly cared about the students." Similarly, participant 223 said, "Characteristics about a professor [that] would allow me to feel comfortable would be understanding, trustworthy, caring."

The professor characteristics that students listed are common behaviors associated with instructor immediacy (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987), supportiveness, (Burleson & Samter, 1990), and goodwill (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). That is, professors can demonstrate verbal and nonverbal behaviors that create immediacy, such as smiling, asking about student perceptions and opinions, and making eye contact, to help create a close and comfortable environment in the classroom (Frymier & Houser, 2000). In addition, many of the communication behaviors that students listed (e.g., understanding, open, encouraging) are supportive behaviors that can be enacted by a professor to communicate that they care about the student's well-being (Burleson & Samter, 1990). Finally, communicating caring to students through self-disclosures can be a beneficial technique to help instructors achieve relational goals (Kaufmann & Frisby, 2017).

Participants' responses indicated that their decision to disclose CA is dependent on whether a professor exhibits immediacy and supportive behaviors. That is, when a student observes a professor enacting immediate and supportive behaviors they feel more comfortable in their choice to discuss the sensitive issue of their CA with the professor. Participants frequently reported that their decision to disclose that, "[It]depends on how comfortable I am with the teacher" (participant 97), and, "[I]t depends if the professor can be trusted" (participant 139). Thus, the open-ended responses suggest that a student's choice not to disclose their CA to the professor occurs when a professor is exhibiting characteristics that do not meet the student's expectations of instructor caring.

Provision of assistance and resources. Participants noted that disclosing their CA regarding public speaking to their professors would be beneficial because the professor can assist the student in overcoming their CA. Participants believed that their public speaking professors in particular can offer specific suggestions to help them to overcome their fear of public speaking. For example, participant 152 stated the instructor "may have some helpful insight I have never previously thought about." Participant 10 said, "The only way to grow is to discuss [my fears] and ask for help."

Participants also made it clear that if they perceived that a professor was willing to help them to overcome their fear of public speaking, they would be willing to disclose. Participant 83 said, "If they expressed empathy towards students with anxiety and were willing to work with me [I would disclose my fears]." Similarly, Participant 129 explained, "[T]hey could perhaps help you control your apprehension and give you some peace of mind." Thus, participants believed disclosing their CA to a professor who is willing to work with them would be beneficial because they would gain access to specific advice and resources that they would not otherwise have had access to. Participants' perceptions of an instructor's ability to provide assistance suggest that students view their instructors as a vital resource when working to overcome CA. However, participants' beliefs regarding their professor's willingness to help also indicate that a student may not be open to asking for assistance if they do not believe the instructor truly cares about helping them.

Shared experience of public speaking apprehension. The open-ended data overwhelming indicated that participants viewed professors who disclosed their own public speaking fears to be able to relate to the student's similar experience. Participants also believed that knowing their professor has faced similar struggles related to public speaking but has overcome them to be able to be a competent speaker, made them feel more comfortable in the classroom and less alone in their struggles. Specifically, participant 233 said that if a professor had disclosed fears related to public speaking anxiety, "the students [would] feel comfortable." Participant 108 said, "[When a professor discloses CA it] shows vulnerability and makes me feel better/more normal about myself and my struggles." In addition, participant 135 stated, "Knowing that the professor has had the same issues in the past and has overcome them and succeeded is more reassuring that I can and will improve and overcome my fears." Thus, the findings indicate that a professor's decision to disclose their own struggles with CA may help the students to feel closer to the professor because they share a common experience. Furthermore, participants' reports suggest

that when they feel less alone in their fear of public speaking, then they are more confident that they will be able to become competent speakers in the future.

Students' perceptions of professors' CA disclosures indicate that instructors who choose to share their struggles with students may strengthen the instructor-student relationship. Prior research on instructor disclosures and credibility indicated that professors should be careful in their choices of disclosure in the classroom because negative disclosures, such as weaknesses, may be viewed less positively by students (e.g., Miller et al., 2014). Although struggling with CA could be viewed as a negative disclosure (i.e., having CA could be perceived to be a weakness), disclosing this information as a struggle that can be overcome seems to have a positive impact on the student-instructor relationship. That is, students feel less alone in their own fears of public speaking and may believe that their professor can empathize with them as they work on improving their public speaking skills.

Discussion

This study examined student perceptions of instructor disclosures of public speaking apprehension to understand whether these disclosures are a beneficial instructional tool and in strengthening the instructor-student relationship. Examining instructor disclosures and the subsequent impact on student perceptions of the instructor's disclosure in the classroom environment can offer practical insight into some of the factors that may help or hinder a student's ability to learn. The current study offers insight into several factors regarding instructor disclosures in this context regarding CA.

The first research question investigated whether student perceptions of teacher credibility in public speaking classes differed between professors who chose to disclose their own high CA to students when compared to professors with high CA who chose not to disclose their struggles in the classroom. Overall, students perceived an instructor's competence, but not character, to be higher based on their disclosure of CA in the context of the college classroom when compared against instructors who do not disclose their struggles with CA. Based on this evidence, it appears that instructors who have experienced CA and have openly disclosed those struggles with students are perceived as more competent because of the fact that instructors can relate to the students' own experiences and can readily offer advice for dealing with those struggles regarding CA. This offers further evidence for previous research that found instructors that use self-disclosure and personal narratives are rated more highly when compared to their counterparts that do not use self-disclosure or personal narratives (Downs et al., 1988).

Whereas some may consider the disclosure of CA negatively or as a weakness, based on the findings from this study, the context of the disclosure in the classroom environment was not found to be considered as a negative or inappropriate disclosure by the students. This may be the case in this context as some of the students may be currently experiencing CA themselves and can relate to the instructor's disclosure. The students may also feel that it is appropriate to discuss CA during a course designed to help foster public speaking skills. This finding is similar to other recent research that indicates that students perceive disclosures related to class content as helpful (Kaufmann & Frisby, 2017). In addition, the students' perceptions of the instructor's character did not change between the experimental conditions, which offers evidence that students may not necessarily see CA as a trait that applies to an individual's overall credibility. Beyond the public speaking classroom, these findings also suggest that any professor who assigns presentations to assess student learning may benefit from sharing their own experiences of CA (if relevant) to help students feel more comfortable speaking in the classroom.

The second research question examined whether student perceptions of teacher credibility differ between male and female professors who choose to disclose their CA. Overall, the results found that there was not a statistically significant difference between male and female instructors, but the male instructors did score higher in each experimental condition. These findings offer additional evidence that females are evaluated differently, and often less positively, when compared to their male peers (Basow & Howe, 1987; Basow & Silberg, 1987). Since credibility is one of the most important variables that may influence the student-instructor relationship (Myers, 2001), it is important to continue to examine issues related to gender and credibility to discover the root cause of these misconceptions.

Lastly, the third and final research question examined the considerations that inform a student's decision to disclose CA to their professor. Students reported that professor immediacy and supportiveness is often important for helping them to consider disclosing their own struggles with CA. Furthermore, findings uncovered that students who perceive an instructor to have experience with CA can be more empathetic and offer assistance and resources for dealing with their struggles. Based on these student perceptions, instructors who have experienced CA may be more prepared to help students with their own CA when compared to instructors who have never experienced CA. Instructors who have also experienced CA may be more immediate, more empathetic, and more supportive of students who are currently experiencing CA. In addition, instructors may

be perceived as more credible because they have overcome their own struggles with CA and can share their methods for overcoming their public speaking anxiety. Therefore, an instructor's disclosure that they have experienced CA and can relate to the student's struggles with CA may help to provide the perfect environment for helping students to overcome their struggles with speaking in public. These findings offer additional evidence to the previous research by McBride and Wahl (2005) and Gorham (1998), who found that instructors may feel the need to reveal some private information to create a comfortable and immediate learning environment that may lead to a better learning experience for students.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any research, this study has limitations. While there were patterns and saturation found with the open-ended data, a larger sample size may be able to offer more insight into the patterns that were uncovered. In addition, this study examines public speaking instructors in public speaking courses. Future studies may consider other courses or environments to determine how the revelation of CA may influence the student-instructor or superior-subordinate relationship. Researchers should also further examine the impact instructor disclosures of CA have on students' CA (e.g., whether instructor disclosures of CA lower student reports of CA). The amount of information that instructors disclose in the classroom regarding CA may also need to be examined to determine if there are times when sharing too little or too much information becomes problematic. As mentioned previously, Sidelinger et al., (2015) found that students have lower communication satisfaction with their instructors when instructors offer too many disclosures. Beyond exploring CA, future research studies should investigate additional self-disclosures of struggle to further understand whether these types of disclosures of struggle related to course concepts and/or skills help make the learning process visible to students.

Implications

The current study offers multiple implications for college instructors in helping students to overcome their struggles with CA. First, instructors who have experienced CA should consider sharing that private information with students in an appropriate manner. For example, when assigning a presentation assignment and discussing expectations of students' speaking, instructors could share their own personal experiences of communication apprehension in public speaking contexts and the techniques that worked well for them personally in managing their public speaking anxiety.

Students may perceive their instructor as more credible to speak on the subject of CA after hearing these disclosures and may be more apt to seek assistance and share their own struggles of CA with the instructor.

Second, instructors should attempt to be supportive and empathic when discussing the concept of CA while encouraging students to seek additional assistance from the instructor if necessary. Instructors should discuss CA sensitively in front of the entire class. In addition, instructors can show a willingness to help students experiencing CA by informing all students that the instructor is an available resource. In sum, the present study offers practical implications for instructors who require students to complete public speaking in their classes to help their students to manage CA. The study findings suggest that instructor disclosures of CA are, overall, beneficial to students.

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ANDREA L. MELUCH (PhD, Kent State University, 2016) is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Indiana University South Bend. Her research focuses on the intersections of organizational, health, and instructional communication. Specifically, she is interested in organizational culture, mental health, and social support. She has published in *Communication Education, Southern Communication Journal, Qualitative Research in Medicine & Healthcare, Journal of Communication in Healthcare,* and *Journal of*

Communication Pedagogy. She has also authored more than a dozen book chapters and encyclopedia entries.

SHAWN STARCHER (MA, The University of Akron) is a doctoral candidate at Kent State University in the College of Communication and Information. His areas of research include interpersonal communication, family communication, and health communication. More specifically, he examines how parents and children discuss topics and manage privacy regarding mental health and how that influences those family members. He is also a member of the National Communication Association, Eastern Communication Association, Central States Communication Association, and Ohio Communication Association.

KATIE FEEHAN obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in New Media at Indiana University South Bend. She is currently pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies at Indiana University South Bend. She also works as Assistant Director of Alumni Relations at Indiana University South Bend. Her research interests include communication in the nonprofit sector and higher education, and media studies.

Appendix

Vignette text:

Female non-disclosure condition: It is halfway through the semester, and you are taking a public speaking class with Professor Sara McConnell. You have noticed that Professor McConnell seems to always be tense when speaking in front of the class. When she holds papers you can see them shaking in her hands. She also seems very nervous when lecturing. Professor McConnell's voice quivers at times when lecturing, and at the end of the lecture she seems to be sweating a great deal.

Female disclosure condition: It is halfway through the semester, and you are taking a public speaking class with Professor Sara McConnell. You have noticed that Professor McConnell seems to always be tense when speaking in front of the class. When she holds papers you can see them shaking in her hands. She also seems very nervous when lecturing. Professor McConnell's voice quivers at times when lecturing, and at the end of the lecture she seems to be sweating a great deal. Close to the end of the semester, when lecturing about communication apprehension, Professor McConnell informs the class that she struggles with communication apprehension and, in particular, public speaking.