

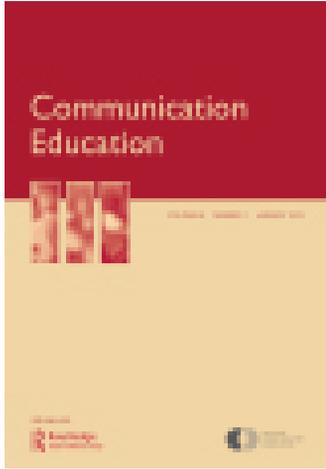
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Nonverbal communication performance and perceptions associated with reticence: Replications and classroom implications

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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION PERFORMANCE AND PERCEPTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH RETICENCE: REPLICATIONS AND CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

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Three decades of research on such reticence-related constructs as stage fright (Clevenger, 1959), communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1970, 1977, 1978), predispositions toward verbal behavior (Mortensen, Lustig & Arntson, 1980), reticence (Phillips, 1968, 1984; Phillips & Metzger, 1973), speech anxiety (Mulac & Sherman, 1974, 1975), and unwillingness to communicate (Burgoon, 1976b) have fostered the widespread impression that communication reticence is a seriously dysfunctional syndrome.¹ As expressed by Siegman (1978, p. 213), “. . . the effects of anxiety on speech can only be of a disrupting and disorganizing nature.” Indeed, an abundance of evidence has demonstrated that communication reticence can negatively affect everything from teachers’ expectations of student performance (McCroskey & Daly, 1976), classroom seating and instructional preferences (Burgoon, 1976a; McCroskey & McVetta, 1978), actual classroom performance (Powers & Smythe, 1980; Scott & Wheelless, 1977), occupational choice and job attitudes (Daly & McCroskey, 1975; McCroskey & Richmond, 1979) to expectations and perceptions of others while communicating (Andersen & Coussoule, 1980), perceived attractiveness and leadership potential (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond & Cox, 1975; McKinney, 1982), and possibly even dating patterns (McCroskey & Sheahan, 1978; Parks, Dindia, Adams, Berlin & Larson, 1980; Prisbell, 1982). Moreover, concern over this syndrome has been stimulated by its pervasiveness. Estimates are that between ten and twenty percent of college students and at least twenty percent of the elementary school population suffer from communication apprehension serious enough to require treatment (Harris, 1980; McCroskey, 1972).

The negative consequences notwithstanding, there is some reason to question whether reticence is as constantly manifest and debilitating as has been thought. In one of the few efforts to look at multiple nonverbal indicators of reticence, Burgoon and Koper (1984) conducted two studies of the actual nonverbal cues exhibited by reticents under varying levels of stress and the perceptions of those behaviors by dyadic partners. Although they found a consistent nonverbal behavior pattern associated with reticence, as predicted, the correlations in the less stressful conditions were sufficiently modest to suggest that the reticent’s communication style did not

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call serious attention to itself. One reticent subgroup—those who hold negative attitudes toward communication—in particular showed few noticeable behavioral manifestations. Moreover, in the case of interactions with friends, more positive evaluations were assigned to the behavior of reticents than to nonreticents.

These findings challenge two longstanding assumptions: (1) that communication reticence routinely produces pronounced behavioral manifestations during communicative performance, and (2) that the reticent's communication style is both noticed and evaluated unfavorably by observers or interaction partners. To the extent that reticence fails to produce a detectable and sizable impact on actual communication behavior, the communication performance may not be the mediating agent accounting for negative consequences. As Mulac and Wiemann (1984, p. 107) note, "the speaker's experienced anxiety is consequential only to the extent that the audience perceives that anxiety and makes attributions about the speaker based on those assumptions." If reticent behaviors go unnoticed by others, if reticents are successful at masking their symptoms, or if others do not denigrate such performances, the severity of the syndrome may be overstated. This has important implications for the extent to which remediation is attempted in communication courses and how that remediation is approached in the classroom.

The current two studies were undertaken to replicate and extend the Burgoon and Koper (1984) findings with these objectives in mind: to determine if the same profile of nonverbal behaviors would continue to appear in new contexts varying in degrees of stress and familiarity, to provide more knowledge about the evaluations and relational meanings people attach to the nonverbal communication style of reticents (the Burgoon and Koper effort being the first to consider the relational interpretations assigned to reticents' communication), and to expand the range of behaviors under consideration beyond kinesics to include vocalic and proxemic behaviors. Although the Burgoon and Koper (1984) studies were improvements over past efforts in looking at several behaviors simultaneously, the omission of many critical behaviors left open the question of whether results were attributable to the nonverbal behaviors that weren't measured.

Regarding the first question of impaired *communication performance*, evidence on verbal behavior reveals demonstrable anxiety and avoidance: reticents speak less often and for shorter durations (Burgoon, 1976a, 1976b; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Fenton & Hopf, 1976; Jordan & Powers, 1978; Knapp, Hart & Dennis, 1974; Lerea, 1956; Lustig, 1974, 1980; Lustig & Grove, 1975; McCroskey, 1976; Mortensen & Arntson, 1974; Murray, 1971; Paivio & Lambert, 1959; Wells & Lashbrook, 1970). Their language also tends to be less comprehensible, less immediate, and less intense (Burgoon & Hale, 1983; Conville, 1974; Freimuth, 1976).

However, less is known about the nonverbal profile. Self-report data and descriptions of how reticents "behave" nonverbally (e.g., Clevenger, 1959; Daly, 1978; Gilkinson, 1942; McCroskey, 1976; Phillips, 1968) outstrip actual empirical confirmation of those behaviors. Based on a review of a variety of anxiety-related literature, not all of it concerned with the reticence syndrome, Burgoon and Koper (1984) advanced as propositions that reticents (1) exhibit more negative forms of arousal (e.g., anxiety leakage, tension, and unpleasant affect) and fewer forms of positive arousal (e.g., enthusiasm, expressiveness and, animation) and (2) that their nonverbal patterns express relational messages of detachment, nonimmediacy, nonintimacy, dissimilarity, nonassertiveness, submissiveness, noncomposure, and

nonreceptivity. Ratings by trained observers of several kinesic behaviors largely supported the hypotheses: reticents displayed more bodily tension, self-touching, postural rigidity, protective behaviors such as body blocking and face covering, leaning away, gaze aversion, and indirect head orientation and less facial pleasantness, nodding, and animation. The behavioral patterns were more pronounced as stress increased. Other research on communication anxiety (e.g., Behnke, Beatty & Kitchens, 1978; Burgoon & Burgoon, 1974; Gilkinson & Knower, 1940) has likewise produced evidence of more body tension and constrained posture, more trembling, and more fidgeting.

Research on vocal correlates is more spotty, but if inferences can be drawn from findings related to situational and chronic anxiety, social withdrawal, and introversion, then communication reticence should produce more nonfluencies (Freimuth, 1976; Hunter, 1935; Knapp, Hart & Dennis, 1974; Lerea, 1956; Levin, Baldwin, Gallwey & Paivio, 1960; Mahl, 1959; Siegman & Pope, 1965), higher pitch levels (Scherer, 1972), and less vocal variety (Argyle, 1967; Lerea, 1956; McCroskey, 1976).

Regarding the second issue of *perceptions* of reticent communication, knowledge of how others receive, interpret, and evaluate the reticent's actual communication behavior is likewise limited. On the one hand, McCroskey (1978, p. 197) has advanced the proposition that "as a result of their oral communication behavior, high oral communication apprehensives are perceived less positively by others than are less apprehensive people." Research has demonstrated that reticents are sometimes seen as less trustworthy, competent, dynamic, socially attractive, and physically attractive, and as more tense, uncomposed, and nondominant (Fenton & Hopf, 1976; McCroskey et al., 1975; McCroskey & Richmond, 1976; Porter, 1982; Mulac & Sherman, 1975; Quiggins, 1972; Wissmiller & Merker, 1976). But these findings have not been consistent within and across studies and contexts (see, e.g., McCroskey, 1977). Moreover, the finding that observers are able to detect only a fraction of the reticence experienced by a communicator (Clevenger, 1959; Dickens & Parker, 1951; McCroskey, 1984; Williams, 1950) casts doubt as to whether reticence always translates into highly noticeable communication manifestations. Finally, it has been claimed and documented that reticence is often less evident and debilitating in informal, nonpublic, nonevaluative, and nonstressful circumstances (Burgoon, 1976a; Parks, 1980; Phillips & Metzger, 1973; Porter, 1981; Richmond, 1978; Sorenson & McCroskey, 1977). This conclusion is bolstered by Burgoon and Koper's (1984) finding that only strangers rated reticents as less attractive and credible and attributed negative relational meanings to their behavior, while friends actually assigned more favorable evaluations to the behavior of reticents as compared to nonreticents.

These mixed findings argue for further research that combines direct observations of multiple nonverbal behaviors with receiver perceptions of those behaviors. The two studies reported here measured a wide range of kinesic, proxemic, and vocalic behaviors under conditions that permitted further examination of the relative effects of stress and familiarity on performance and perceptions. The first study, which had as its primary objective examining persuasive strategies used in interpersonal contexts, involved a videotaped dyadic advocacy/decision-making task similar to Study One in Burgoon and Koper (1984) and as such, should have been less stressful than the second, which required subjects to present a videotaped public speech in class. The first study produced relational communication interpretations from

strangers; the second produced credibility ratings from acquainted classmates. The general hypotheses tested were that (1) nonverbal manifestations of anxiety, tension, avoidance, nonimmediacy, nonexpressiveness, and negative affect would increase as reticence increased, (2) the reticent's communication would be interpreted as expressing less relational intimacy/similarity, less immediacy, less dominance, and more negative arousal/noncomposure, and (3) credibility ratings would decline as reticence increased.

STUDY ONE

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects ($N = 110$) were undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory communication course at a large midwestern university who received extra credit for their participation.

Procedure

Upon arrival at the observation site, participants completed a battery of scales including the reticence measures, a rationality scale (used for another purpose), and demographic questions, and were randomly paired with another student from a different class. The pair was then given a description of a hypothetical teaching position, a description of the school board's past failures to satisfy affirmative action guidelines, and background information on two applicants for the job—a married male with a family and a single female. Subjects were randomly assigned to advocate one of the two candidates and told their task was to persuade their discussion partner to change allegiances to their candidate by the end of a ten minute discussion period. The interactions were videotaped and each dyad was asked to state a consensus choice at the end of the interaction.

The credentials of the two candidates were pretested for balance and desirability in qualifications and modified to achieve equality. The choice of an affirmative action issue and the counterbalancing of gender and marital status were intended to motivate involvement in the topic.

Following the discussion, participants were separated to complete dependent measures rating the preceding interaction, their partner's persuasiveness, their private opinion as to who should really have been hired, and the perceived relational messages of their partner. The nonverbal behaviors were subsequently coded by trained raters.

Reticence and relational measures

Reticence was measured with the Unwillingness to Communicate Scale (UCS) (Burgoon, 1976b), a 26-item Likert-type measure consisting of two dimensions: approach-avoidance (AA), which reflects a person's tendency to participate or avoid and fear interpersonal and group interactions, and reward (R), which reflects whether a person has positive or negative attitudes about the truthfulness, spontaneity, and value of communication. Coefficient alpha reliabilities were .89 and .75 for the two respective dimensions.

Relational communication was measured by a four-dimensional version of a Likert-type scale developed by Burgoon and Hale (1981, 1987) to tap perceptions of twelve relational themes. The four clusters of themes and their respective reliabilities

in this investigation were (1) intimacy/similarity (messages indicating trust, depth, affection, friendliness, and perceived similarity), .78; (2) nonimmediacy (messages of detachment, distance, aloofness, boredom, coldness, superficiality, lack of intensity, and their opposites), .72; (3) dominance (messages of assertiveness, persuasiveness, ingratiating, and attempted control), .71; and (4) emotional arousal/composure/informality (expressions of anxiety, emotional states, composure, receptivity to stimulation, and formality), .74.

Nonverbal behaviors

The behaviors selected for observation were those that (1) had been used and validated in previous studies entailing anxiety and arousal or (2) were theoretically relevant and (3) were easily observable on videotape. Ratings were made for each two-minute time segment to maximize ease of coding then averaged across the total length of the interaction. Pairs of trained coders ($N = 10$) were each responsible for rating a subset of related behaviors and received 20 to 30 hours of supervised training on videotapes before beginning actual coding.

Among *proxemic behaviors* observed, body orientation and distance adjustments were chosen as possible indicators of arousal and involvement (Burgoon & Aho, 1982; Patterson, 1968; Mehrabian, 1971). Directness of orientation was measured on a seven-point semantic differential from very direct to very indirect. Frequency counts were made on proxemic shifts (closer, farther, and reorienting). *Kinesic behaviors* included frequency counts of illustrators; shrug emblems; brief and long face, head, and object adaptors; total amount of gestures, as defined and validated by Friesen, Ekman and Wallbott (1979); and ratings on amount of random movement, rocking and twisting, and degree of gestural animation, using seven-point scales taken from Burgoon and Aho (1982). *Vocal behaviors* included seven semantic differential scales measuring fluency, variety, clarity, and pleasantness (which form a pleasantness dimension) and loudness, tempo, and intensity (which form a potency dimension) taken from Burgoon (1978), and a frequency count on nonfluencies, following Cook's (1965) categories of speech disturbances. Smoothness of turn exchanges was measured by computing percentages of smooth exchanges, talkovers, and interruptions (following Jaffe & Feldstein's [1970] definitions) for each two-minute period and rating the amount of backchanneling on a 1 (none) to 7 (frequent) scale. Finally, more global measures of the tone and style of the combined verbal and nonverbal behavior were taken with McCroskey and Wright's (1971) *Interaction Behavior Measure*, which is a twelve-item semantic differential scale incorporating the dimensions of verbosity, tension, interest, relevance, task-social orientation, and flexibility.

Because analyzing numerous measures separately risks Type I error and ignores the interrelatedness among nonverbal behaviors, exploratory factor analysis was used to reduce the variable set to a smaller number of independent clusters of behaviors.² The clusters that resulted, along with their respective interrater and coefficient alpha reliabilities (where computable), were: (1) proxemic shifts, .84, .93; (2) attentiveness (directness of orientation, brief face and body adaptors, long object adaptors), .84, .75; (3) animation (illustrators, shrugs, general animation, total gestures, interruptions), .94, .85; (4) long face and head adaptors, .96; (5) brief body adaptors, .61; (7) arousal (rocking and twisting, random movement, brief object adaptors), .85, .67; (8) vocal pleasantness, .76, .74; (9) vocal intensity, .89, .88; (10) smooth turn exchanges, .97; (11) interaction relevance and task-social orientation,

.86, .93; (12) interaction verbosity and interest, .91, .92; (13) interaction flexibility, .82, .89; and (14) interaction tension, .71, .92.

RESULTS

Significant or near significant effects are summarized in Table 1. Reticents showed only four noticeable differences in nonverbal performance. Those who are communication avoiders (AA scale) were less gesturally and vocally animated ($r = -.21$, r corrected for attenuation = $-.22$, $p < .05$), showed weak tendencies to be more tense ($r = .14$, corrected $r = .15$, $p < .10$) and to use fewer long face/head adaptors ($r = -.14$, corrected $r = -.15$, $p < .10$), while those who see communication as nonrewarding (R scale) tended to be less flexible ($r = -.10$, corrected $r = -.12$, $p < .10$). The use of fewer adaptors is opposite of the Burgoon and Koper (1984) findings.

Partner ratings of perceived relational communication also showed little impact due to reticence. Nonreward reticents (R scale) were perceived to express less intimacy and similarity ($r = -.28$, corrected $r = -.36$, $p < .05$) and showed a weak trend toward communicating more nonimmediacy ($r = .11$, corrected $r = .15$, $p < .10$). Contrary to Burgoon and Koper (1984), reticent avoiders (AA scale) were not perceived to differ from nonreticents in their relational communication.

DISCUSSION

These meager results reveal that in this situation, reticence did not seriously debilitate performance nor did it result in widespread negative attributions regarding relational communication. The only sizable relationship was between negative attitudes toward communication and less expressed intimacy and similarity. Failure to detect more significant effects could not be attributed to low power: $1 - B = .89$ to detect medium effect sizes and $.55$ to detect moderately small ones.

One explanation for the marginal effects of reticence is that the task itself, which allowed participants to refer frequently to the task information sheets and was less involving than had been hoped, may have mitigated against people demonstrating a lot of kinesic and vocal activity. Yet it was the combined kinesic and vocal animation and other kinesic behaviors that did yield any differences. Moreover, the voice should have still leaked tension and anxiety had the situation been a highly arousing one.

The alternative conclusion is that there are some circumstances under which reticents can perform as effectively as nonreticents, and this was one of them. Consistent with prior conclusions, the one-on-one, relatively informal setting appeared to minimize the communication difficulties for reticents, despite the fact that they were interacting with strangers, were being videotaped, and were asked to attempt persuasion, a more demanding communication task than merely sharing opinions. The second study, entailing a more formal, public, and difficult type of performance, permitted further examination of the reticent's response under stress.

STUDY TWO

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 60 undergraduates (18 males and 42 females) enrolled in five randomly selected sections of a communication fundamentals course required across several colleges at a large southwestern university.

Procedure

Three to four weeks into a semester, subjects completed the reticence measures. Approximately seven to eight weeks later, during a unit on public speaking, students delivered a persuasive speech in class that was videotaped as a requirement. After each presentation, speakers were rated by half the class (on a rotating basis) on credibility measures. Class size ranged from 22 to 35. Subsequently, the videotaped speeches were coded on nonverbal behavior by two trained coders who made ratings after the first two and middle two minutes of the speech.

Reticence and credibility measures

To maximize comparability with Study One, Burgoon and Koper (1984), and previous research, reticence was measured with the Unwillingness to Communicate Scale (Burgoon, 1976b) and a short form of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) (McCroskey, 1978). The Likert-format PRCA introduces items related to public performance (as well as group and dyadic interaction) and includes more items reporting on experienced anxiety. It is the most widely accepted measure of communication reticence. Coefficient alpha reliabilities were .97 for the UCS-AA, .95 for the UCS-R, and .98 for the PRCA.

Credibility was measured by fifteen semantic differential items validated by McCroskey, Holdridge and Toomb (1974) as measures of five dimensions of source credibility in public speaking contexts. The five dimensions and their respective alpha reliabilities were: competence, .93; sociability, .92; composure, .92; character, .92; and extraversion, .91.

Nonverbal behaviors

Thirteen vocalic and nine kinesic indicators that were readily observable in, and appropriate to, a public speaking context were coded, resulting in some changes from Study One. As a more precise measure of nonfluency, the five categories of speech disturbances (sentence changes, repetitions, sentence incompletions, nonfluencies and stuttering) were coded separately; four kinesic behaviors that were more visible from the frontal camera angle—amount of eye gaze, amount of backward lean, facial pleasantness and facial expressiveness—were added as possible indicators of nonimmediacy and nonaffiliativeness; and gestural categories were collapsed into illustrator gestures, face/head/body adaptors, object adaptors, and random limb movement/rocking and twisting for ease of coding.

Exploratory factor analysis was again used to identify composites of interrelated behaviors. The resultant measures and their respective interrater and interitem reliabilities were: (1) *fluency*, .69, .86; (2) *vocal pleasantness*, .57, .71; (3) *vocal potency*, .53, .58; (4) *immediacy and expressiveness* (backward lean, eye contact, facial pleasantness, facial expressiveness, and illustrator gestures), .79, .77; (5) *postural tension/rigidity* (single item), .69; (6) *face/head/body adaptors* (single item), .79; (7) *object adaptors* (single item), .72; and (8) *random movement/rocking and twisting* (single item), .60.

Training for the two coders consisted of 40 hours of instruction and supervised practice coding on sample speech tapes.

RESULTS

To differentiate the arousal common at the outset of a speech (see Porter, 1974) from more sustained indications of stress, results for the initial and intermediate two-minute segments were analyzed separately. The significant effects, summarized in

Table 1, reveal that reticence again had limited impact on performance. Communication avoiders (UCS-AA scale) demonstrated less vocal potency, but only during the initial minutes ($r = -.24$, corrected $r = -.32$, $p < .05$), and fewer adaptors during both time periods ($r_1 = -.20$, $r_2 = -.28$, corrected $r_1 = -.23$, corrected $r_2 = -.32$, $p < .05$). Nonreward reticents (UCS-R scale) showed only a decrease in object adaptors in both time periods ($r_1 = -.22$, $r_2 = -.25$, corrected $r_1 = -.26$, corrected $r_2 = -.30$, $p < .05$) and a trend toward more postural tension/rigidity ($r = .18$, $p < .10$). Apprehensives (PRCA scale) also used fewer adaptors during both time periods ($r_1 = -.23$, $r_2 = -.30$, corrected $r_1 = -.26$, corrected $r_2 = -.34$, $p < .05$) and less random lower trunk movement during the initial minutes ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$).

Credibility ratings supplied by acquainted classmates at the end of the speech showed an impact of reticence only among avoiders and apprehensives and on only two dimensions. Avoiders were seen as less composed ($r = -.30$, corrected $r = -.32$, $p < .05$) and less extraverted ($r = -.32$, corrected $r = -.34$, $p < .05$). The same pattern held for apprehensives (composure $r = -.29$, corrected $r = -.30$, $p < .05$; extraversion $r = -.33$, corrected $r = -.35$, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

These results are consistent with Study One and bolster the claim that the reticence syndrome does not inexorably debilitate speaker performance. Although reticents do exhibit some behavioral indicators of avoidance, anxiety, and negative arousal, these indicators are few, and in some cases, transient.

Moreover, the cue patterns differ by dimension of reticence. The most pronounced behavioral manifestation is reduced vocal potency (loudness, tempo, intensity and variety) among avoiders, but this occurs primarily at the beginning of the speech. Avoiders (UCS-AA scale) as well as apprehensives (PRCA) also exhibit fewer

TABLE 1
SIGNIFICANT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN RETICENCE MEASURES AND COMMUNICATION PERFORMANCE AND PERCEPTIONS, STUDIES ONE AND TWO

	Study One		Study Two		
	UCS-AA	UCS-R	UCS-AA	UCS-R	PRCA
<i>Nonverbal Behaviors</i>					
Gestural/vocal animation	-.22				
Postural tension/rigidity	.15			-.22 ¹	
Face/head/body adaptors	-.15		-.27		-.30
Object adaptors				-.28	
Random movement					-.29 ¹
Vocal potency			-.32 ¹		
Flexibility		-.12			
<i>Relational Message Perceptions (Study One)</i>					
Intimacy/similarity		-.36			
Nonimmediacy		.15			
<i>Credibility Perceptions (Study Two)</i>					
Composure			-.32		-.30
Extraversion			-.34		-.35

Note: The tabled coefficients are all corrected for attenuation. All corrected coefficients above .30 are significant at the .01 level. In Study Two, where both time periods produced significant correlations, the correlations have been averaged.

¹Time period one only.

adaptor behaviors, and apprehensives display less random movement at the outset. Finally, nonreward reticents (UCS-R scale) display fewer object adaptors throughout the speech and more postural tension at the outset. Overall, the nonverbal pattern across subgroups is one of greater restraint and “tightness” and less expressiveness and animation, which is the same general pattern found previously.

That this pattern emerged despite the public speaking task being a more difficult and potentially stressful one suggests either that inwardly experienced apprehension and cognitive predispositions to withdraw from communication do not always translate into outward decrements in performance or that reticents learn to ameliorate behavioral manifestations.

The results of this study also indicate that communication reticence does not consistently produce unfavorable speaker evaluations. Reticents only received lower credibility ratings on composure and extraversion, the two most likely to be associated with activation and anxiety behaviors. However, research elsewhere suggests that these dimensions exert less influence than either the competence or sociability dimensions on speaker persuasiveness (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1986), which may mean that the lower credibility ratings are relatively inconsequential.

SUMMARY

The combined results from these two investigations and the two from Burgoon and Koper (1984) can be viewed as the case of the half empty or half full cup. On the “empty” side of the ledger, the preponderance of evidence to date on the detrimental consequences of reticence cannot be discounted. Reticents do present a consistent and perceptible profile of nonverbal behaviors characterized by more negative forms of arousal (e.g., face-covering, body-blocking, and postural tension), more rigidity and stiffness (e.g., less random movement, less gesturing, less head turning and sometimes less adaptor behavior), less expressiveness (e.g., less vocal potency and gestural animation), and less immediacy and involvement (e.g., less eye contact, head nodding, facial pleasantness, and direct orientation). The result is that the reticent’s communication style may be interpreted by strangers as expressing nonintimacy, detachment, submissiveness and noncomposure. It may also reduce credibility and attraction among strangers.

On the “full” side of the ledger, this behavioral profile typically does not appear in full strength. Any one individual may only exhibit a few of the cues and to only a slightly greater degree than nonreticents. Rather than being a pattern of highly visible anxiety cues, it is one of damped behavior, making nervousness less noticeable. Moreover, the pattern is least apparent in informal, interpersonal or familiar circumstances. Finally, it may have negligible interpersonal consequences once reticents break through the first impressions barrier. Acquaintances merely see the reticent as less composed and extraverted, not as less competent, trustworthy or sociable, while friends, possibly out of sympathy, may actually compensate for a reticent’s avoidant and anxious behavior and perceive the reticent as more attractive, competent and intimate than nonreticents.

These results have important implications for the classroom. They demonstrate that a reticence predisposition need not inevitably lead to poor performance and negative consequences. Thus, reticent students should be reassured that their communication style is neither so glaring nor so deficient that it is readily noticed and denigrated by others. To the extent that they come to believe their behavior is not markedly different than others and that outward manifestations of anxiety or

awkwardness generally dissipate rather quickly, they may become less self-conscious and set more reasonable expectations for their own behavior.

These results also identify features of the reticent's communication style that can be easily remediated. For example, reticents can be encouraged to increase eye contact, to increase speaking tempo, and to give more positive feedback to others in the form of more facial pleasantness and nodding. As more knowledge becomes available about the actual nonverbal and verbal styles of reticence, it should further facilitate making specific recommendations for improved performance. The important conclusion at this point is that reticents are capable of performing in a relatively normal fashion and that deficiencies in behavior are readily correctable.

NOTES

¹We have adopted Burgoon and Hale's (1984) use of the term "communication reticence" to refer to the collection of predispositions related to communication anxiety, avoidance, fear, reticence, and negative evaluations

²Criteria for retaining factors and items from the varimax rotated solutions were that (1) the eigenvalue associated with a factor exceeded 1.0, (2) the factor contained at least two items with primary loadings exceeding .50, and (3) the Scree test demonstrated satisfactory incremental variance accounted for by the factor.

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