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Public Speaking in a Pandemic: A Situational, Compensatory, and Resilient Undertaking

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Abstract

The introductory public speaking class includes topics such as audience analysis, credibility, organization, visual aids, and delivery. While the pedagogy I employ in this class tends to be very interactive and require a lot of group work, 2020 will forever be known as the year of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which produced social distancing, stay-at-home-orders, and mask wearing. This study examines the impacts of pandemic precautions on public speaking practice, specifically situational communication apprehension. In addition to recording my own observations throughout my face-to-face public speaking class, I also periodically interviewed students about their experience taking the course during a pandemic. The paper ends with a discussion of a situational approach to public speaking, with pedagogical possibilities for instructors.

Keywords: COVID-19, pedagogy, classroom, speech, communication apprehension.

It was during spring break of spring semester 2020 that I, along with faculty around the country, learned that we would be transitioning from in-person instruction to strictly remote and virtual learning. The challenges posed by the pandemic to students and instructors (College Pulse, 2020; Son et al., 2021; St. Amour, 2021) are well-documented. At my school, students were surveyed about their experience with

distance learning at the end of the semester, and the results had overwhelming consensus, as they expressed strong preference for in-person learning.

During the summer of 2020, all faculty at my institution were given the opportunity to choose their method of instruction: face-to-face, online, or hybrid. This posed a dilemma for myself as well as many of my colleagues. Choosing virtual options was certainly a lot safer for us, our students, and those we live with. However, I also felt an obligation to provide the most optimal education for my students as possible. While this is certainly a false dichotomy, from many of my students' vantage point, the consistent message was, "Please have class in person." I ended up structuring my section of Media Writing as an online asynchronous class and my senior capstone on immigration as a hybrid offering, holding small group discussions outside. The only class I felt I could not reconfigure as a virtual offering without a substantive negative impact on achieving the learning goals for the course was public speaking. It is within this unpredictable and uncertain context that the need for developing adaptable strategies for channeling communication apprehension emerged. This article documents my students' experience with this face-to-face course during the pandemic, examines public speaking theory from this unique lens, and proposes pedagogical possibilities post-pandemic.

Literature Review

Considering 16-20% of college students have high communication apprehension (CA), and as many as 61% students have a fear of speaking in front of a group (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012), public speaking classes are usually designed with the intention, and achieve the results, of increasing not only students' competency, but confidence in speaking in front of an audience (Dwyer et al., 2002; Foutz et al., 2021; Kinnick et al., 2011; Robinson, 1997). CA refers to the fear or anxiety that a person has in anticipation of an actual or potential communication situation, whether that be in a dyadic, group, or public setting (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). Situational variety in speaking contexts is a strong predictor of audience-based CA, even more predictive than trait predisposition (McCroskey et al., 1986). Stage fright is a common, yet often persistent, result of context-based CA (McCroskey, 1984; Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). Strategies for channeling CA include breathing exercises, skills development, and visualization.

Public speaking classes have been shown to foster growth mindsets in students, including less anxiety toward public speaking, more individualized thinking, and sensitivity to audience adaptation (Stewart et al., 2019). Students' growth, though, is

either fostered or impeded by the social and contextual factors in both the classroom and surrounding environment, for example whether their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and connection are being met (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to extant research, instructors are able to partially meet these needs through autonomy-supportive instruction, as well as meaningful and applicable assignments (Baker & Goodboy, 2018; Goldman & Brann, 2016). Students who are able to progress to the end of the semester of the basic public speaking course tend to report lower CA scores (Finn et al., 2009).

Public speaking pedagogy is predominantly comprised of instructing students in how to research, write, and organize their speeches. These different stages of speech creation are correlated with students' articulations of CA (Munz & Colvin, 2018). Additionally, the introductory public speaking course cultivates students' abilities in demonstrating nonverbal immediacy (NVI). NVI, such as vocal variety, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions, is linked to positive audience evaluation, in the areas of social attraction, competence, character, and overall persuasiveness (Burgoon et al., 1990; Mehrabian, 1981). Recent scholarship has found that NVI behaviors have a negative correlation with public speaking anxiety (Foutz et al., 2021). What has yet to be investigated by scholars is how obstacles that limit one's capacity to demonstrate NVI impact the speaker's CA.

Pedagogy employed in these basic public speaking courses can be quite diverse with foci that include core competencies (Engleberg, 2016), civil discourse (Keith & Lundberg, 2019), and ethics (Wrench, 2011). Some public speaking classes include service-learning (De la Mare, 2014; Hoops, 2017), flipped classrooms (Gehrke, 2016), and even virtual reality (Davis et al., 2020). Despite this pedagogical plurality, public speaking textbooks tend to emphasize the discipline of writing a speech manuscript over the skills of orality (Gehrke, 2016) and listening (Clifton & Sam, 2010). Furthermore, other than perhaps ceremonial speeches and situational CA (McCroskey, 2009), introductory public speaking classes are often unable to cover the contextual public speaking variables speakers might encounter *insitu*. But as Bitzer (1968) noted, "It is the situation which calls the discourse into existence" (p. 2). Oratory never exists within a vacuum, and thus should not be viewed as such. Instead, public speaking should be understood as precipitated by the various environmental factors on the ground, such as the exigence of the situation: "Rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 4). For novice public speaking students, a situational approach to public speaking has

the potential to develop skills in the area of topic selection, audience analysis, critical thinking, and channeling CA. Contextual factors like audience size (Finn et al., 2009) and virtual reality (Davis et al., 2020), for example, impact a speaker's situational CA. Davis et al. (2020) argue, "Overcoming situational apprehension is an important part of public-speaking education" (p. 82). In their experimental study, they found that students who delivered informative speeches in a virtual environment reported higher situational apprehension than those who presented in front of other students. As such, they recommend VR as a way to simulate speaking environments with situational nuance and thus develop students' skills in this area. Similar to the educational value of simulation, the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to examine students' responsiveness to the situational nature of the speech event.

In summary, public speaking classes help students increase their confidence, as well as their growth mindsets, yet context, such as environmental factors that facilitate and/or restrict NVI, affect speakers' situational CA. Thus, I pose the following RQ: How did students taking the basic speech course during a pandemic articulate situational communication apprehension?

Method

The following section incorporates my reflections during the fall semester of 2020. After each class period, I would write down my observations of how the pandemic precautions were impacting the class. There were 14 students enrolled, all of whom consented to participate in the study, which was approved by my school's Institutional Review Board. Nine of the students identified as white, three as black, and two as Latinx. My class was evenly divided by students who identified as male and female ($n = 7$). Five times throughout the semester, I surveyed the students about how they felt the precautions were impacting their experience in the class, both during preparation and delivery of their speeches. These five data collection periods were evenly spaced out throughout the semester, including on the first day of class, after three of their major speeches, and on the last day of class.

The observation notes were combined with the interview responses to form one data set, marked to differentiate the students' perspectives from my own. I conducted a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the data, first organizing the data into broad categories such as positive, negative, and neutral responses. I then generated specific codes to differentiate and break up the various passages, for example *mask difficulty* and *visual aids*, taking note of the time in the semester when each response was uttered. I then aggregated these codes into the overarching

themes I outline in the next section. The thematic analysis finished with a review of the different themes, specifically focused on the cohesion of each coded passage with the overarching theme as well as the other passages that had been included under the individual theme.

Results

A situational approach to public speaking highlights the relevance of contextual nuances to the speech event. Students articulated many complex and divergent experiences with navigating the pandemic precautions and implementing the public speaking principles amid those conditions.

A small percentage of students felt the pandemic had minimal impact on how they went about crafting and delivering their speeches, how anxious they felt prior to giving their speeches, and how their audiences responded to their speeches. After their first major speech, one student said, “I don't think [the pandemic] affected my speech much, sure my voice sounded a bit muffled, but, overall, I felt like I gave a good speech, and I am happy with it.” Some of the reasons students attributed to this lack of impact were because they do not tend to use a lot of facial expressions when they speak or, on the other side of the spectrum, they naturally employ a lot of vocal variety, whether they are wearing a mask or not. As one student commented, “Even though people couldn't see me smiling I still do it since I'm used to smiling during more lighthearted parts of my presentation.” After their final speech, students also felt that speaking in front of the class with their masks had become instinctive. However, even as some students downplayed the impact, they would qualify their remarks by noting the ways their masks and social distancing diminished their projection, with students having to “push [their] voice through [their] mask.”

Experimental Experience

A theme that developed amongst the class was that this semester's “experimental” experience put public speaking theory and research, such as conceptualizations of situational CA, to the test:

I think our current situation will be experimental due to the fact that none of us have gone through these times before. The class audience isn't able to see our expression, which could possibly cause some sort of confusion depending on the subject matter. I think it will change my approach on the fact that my words may sound mumbled and my

articulation may be distressed. Another issue that could come up is the speaker not talking loud enough and the people in the back of the class can't hear. (Student on the first day of class)

The experimental nature of this year's course was correlated with a heightened sense of anxiety due to the ubiquitous uncertainty. A variety of factors influence speaker anxiety, including audience size, the demographics and psychographics of the audience, and the awareness of being evaluated and graded (Beatty et al., 1978). The uncertainty of this semester though was heightened by the perpetually palpable sense of potential isolation and quarantine, which contoured the flow of information and students' processing of class content:

Our current situation leaves everything we do up in the air. Will I come to class this week? No one really knows where we will be at even within the hour. Will I be saying my speech on Zoom next week? Again, it's all up in the air. From speaking with a mask on to limiting group work and social distancing, COVID-19 is likely going to make the class less enjoyable than it has been in the past as we will be playing everything by ear. Our approach to public speaking will be more so based on what we can do that day and where we are able to be that day. (Student on the first day of class)

While helping students develop strategies for working through their anxiety toward public speaking is an important objective for these classes, environmental uncertainty-induced anxiety is often not a factor in the college classroom, which is somewhat of a predictable environment. Yet the experience of having to alleviate one's anxiety "not only produces better performances but also makes them more enjoyable and satisfying to speakers" (Witt & Behnke, 2006, p. 176). In their experiment, Witt and Behnke (2006) found that anxiety can be fostered by particular types of assignments, such as differing speech deliveries (manuscript vs. extemporaneous, etc.). Furthermore, they found that students hold expectations on how anxious they will be under various sets of circumstances. Through my research, though, I found that an unexpected, experimental context, such as that provided by a pandemic, can dismantle some of students' expectations with positive outcomes, which I will elucidate later in this article.

Handcuffed Delivery and Compensation

A third articulation of pandemic-induced situational CA by students pertained to how social distancing and mask mandate precautions had handcuffed their delivery, in particular the use of facial expressions, which thus contributed to their CA. The smile was the expression most often cited. On the first day of class, a student said, “For public speaking, a smile can go a long way in letting the audience know if the speaker is excited or enthused by what the speaker is presenting.” While cultural display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1969) also regulate the verbal and nonverbal expression of universal emotion, as dictated by contextual factors, the pandemic precautions placed physical constraints on that display, producing cognitive dissonance for my students. According to Ekman and Friesen (1969), cultural display rules lead to individuals exaggerating, minimizing, or masking their expressions. For my students, the feeling that their nonverbal tools were limited translated into them feeling like they had to focus even more intently on their use of gestures, movement, and vocal variety, especially volume, to compensate for what had been constrained. On the first day of class, a student shared,

I have a pretty small voice and struggle as it is with projection, so I’m positive a mask will make me think really hard about how loud I’m speaking. I also don’t have the most confidence to start either, and I’ll have to work even harder for that because of social distancing rules.

Students reflected on how wearing masks constrained their fluidity, their *pathos*, their capacity to demonstrate their passion for their topics, and their ability to engage their audiences. As one means of coping, students relied even more upon their visual aids and gesturing. This is an important finding, as gesturing stimulates brain functioning, including retention of one’s speech, resulting in more fluid articulation and alleviation of CA (Yapp, 2004).

In addition to delivery, students felt their ability to adapt to their audiences was also impaired. For example, it was more difficult to read their peers’ expressions, their level of interest in their topics, what they took away from their speeches, and whether they needed to inflect more energy and volume into their vocalics. “It was slightly intimidating to look out at all of them and to not be able to see anyone smiling at me,” a student said after their third major speech. Whereas most textbooks

include sections on audience analysis but devote more time to writing the speech manuscript than on how to adapt and interact with an audience (Haynes, 1990), the pandemic environment provided an apposite context for students to wrestle with this critical aspect of effective public speaking. Students shared that the precautions impacted their audience analysis methods, moving from their preferred use of directly interviewing people inside and outside of the class to online surveys so that social distancing could be preserved. Students also reflected on how wearing their masks affected their focus during their speeches, making it difficult to adjust to their classmates' reactions:

Covid has forced me to wear a mask and during the speech it was very distracting. I was unhappy about having to keep adjusting my mask because I felt like I was losing focus on what I was talking about. (Student after the third speech)

Some students' masks routinely fell below their noses, precipitating the need to reposition their masks as they were giving their speeches. Not only did this disrupt the flow of their presentations, but this resulted in students having to think about their masks, rather than focusing on the audience, which is one strategy for channeling one's CA.

The assignment students felt was most constrained by the pandemic precautions was the demonstration speech. Often students will involve their audience members in their speeches, which was not possible. A few students did food demos, such as cookies, protein shakes, and chocolate dipped cherries, but could not share their final products with the class. Negotiating simple tasks like how to distribute food became difficult questions during the semester. The student who did the cherries demonstration expressed, "I also didn't know if they would even want to eat them because I made them myself and that seems a little risky with the virus." A student who made iced coffee for her demonstration speech had difficulty looking down at her ingredients because her mask blocked her vision. Another student gave a speech on American Sign Language and wanted to demonstrate how the signs correlate with how someone speaks. While her goals were prevented by her mask, the experience gave her new insight into individuals who rely upon reading lips in addition to using sign language to communicate.

While most students appreciated the opportunity to have class in-person rather than online, they simultaneously felt that their "true personalities" were not able to

be displayed to the audience. The oratorical expression of one's "true self" results from self-perceptions of autonomy and having control over one's behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which was certainly imperiled during this timeframe. As one student commented at the end of the course, "I feel like during this pandemic, it impacted a lot on how I speak, especially towards others. I feel more reserved under my mask, like I'm hiding, which I don't like because I feel masked." This student's experience inverted Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of impression management, as the idealized public identity we tend to perform to others was buried underneath the mask, yet this suppressed identity was also not a facsimile of the inner "authentic" self, manifesting a version of what Rogers (1961) termed "incongruence." In the final speech of the semester, students seek to persuade their classmates to take action on some issue they are passionate about. However, one student felt the precautions limited the efficacy of the calls to action: "the pandemic probably has halted us from taking these issues and creating actual change. For example, if we wanted to get a big group together to make change, it would be tougher due to social distancing standards." Thus, students experienced incongruence not only in their delivery but in their efforts to achieve their speech objectives as well.

As for me, the instructor, I felt the impact of the pandemic precautions on my pedagogy immediately as I sought to provide exercises that would help students channel their CA. On the first day of class, I had to adjust how I went about doing icebreakers and small group activities, which usually involve movement and proximity. It also took quite a bit of trial and error to calibrate my volume and balance my natural movements in the classroom with the safety of my students. The restrictive health measures, not to mention the increased body temperature engendered by the mask, created a less personal and interactive dynamic, which are critical to creating a safe space for undergraduate students who might experience moderate to high CA. One student even noted, "With the spacing out of desks, the atmosphere feels more isolated, which makes it harder to feel involved with classmates." Recognizing that a connected classroom is related to the achievement of student learning goals (Johnson, 2009), I too sought to compensate for my perceived limitations, such as my glasses fogging up, with intensified vocal variety, eye contact, and gestures. This compensatory communication was geared at filling the gap caused by various impediments to demonstrating NVI, and the psychological closeness between speaker and audience - instructor and students (Andersen, 1979; Andersen et al., 1981).

Increased Comfort

While most students in the class highlighted the additional challenges posed by the pandemic precautions, a small contingent of students felt that they were more comfortable and experienced less situational CA taking the class under the current conditions than in a “normal” semester. For example, social distancing meant a smaller class size, making it easier for them to get in front of their audience: “It gives everyone a chance to get more comfortable in front of a small audience instead of jumping straight into a large one.” Ironically, these physical (and social) boundaries created separation between the public and private selves, the classroom and the political sphere, emboldening many of the students to act with more impunity while “enabling them to retreat from the unwelcome scrutiny of others” (Arendt, 1998, p. 5). As Arendt (1998) argued, the establishment of well-defined boundaries between our public and private lives creates space for individuals to flourish individually and collectively. A second student felt the mask made it easier to focus on extending eye contact, rather than having to worry about facial expressions. And the chairs, which were spread out six feet apart, enabled speakers to systematically look around the room at everyone in the audience. Thus, the pandemic precautions helped students to reap the benefits of higher levels of eye conduct, namely positive audience evaluations of their character and personality (Wagner, 2013). Finally, some students felt the precautions, especially the mask, provided a protective buffer from their audience, resulting in them feeling less vulnerable giving their speeches. “I honestly think it made me more comfortable because I felt a little covered with my face mask. Public speaking can be hard for me, knowing I am exposed and possibly being judged” (Student after her third speech).

Heightened Meta-Discussion

One of the most intriguing developments that emerged out of the pandemic precautions was a heightened meta-discussion of public speaking, prompting higher levels of self-reflection, and thus students articulated a collective alleviation of situational CA. They became more conscious of their delivery, such as volume, and the need to adjust to the circumstances by being more dynamic and expressive, for example intentionally incorporating facial movement since the audience could not see their mouths: “I think that these skills, tools, are expected, important without the pandemic. It’s just now we are more aware of them because of our masks” (Student on the last day of class). Another student added that he would consciously move to a

place in the front of the room where everyone could see his gestures, which might not have been as visible to his socially distanced classmates. While gesturing is an important skill we develop in the class, this student's comment highlights his increased awareness of his gesturing tendencies. A third student shared about being more cognizant of their vocalics, both their strengths and weaknesses, because they were intentionally seeking to overcome the reality that audience members were missing the communicative cues found in watching speakers' mouths. Teaching, learning, and practicing public speaking in a pandemic also encouraged students to become more independent learners and orators. "I think [the set of precautions] challenges me to focus more on myself rather than relationships with my classmates where in the past I was big on interacting with new classmates" (Student on the first day of class). The unique setting even encouraged some students to self-reflect on communication in other mediums, such as phone calls and email, as these channels also lack many of the nonverbal cues we addressed during this unorthodox year.

Increased Resiliency

Finally, students articulated becoming more resilient after taking public speaking during a pandemic, as their situational CA had subsided. As recent critical scholarship has elucidated, resilience has become an imperative characteristic for individuals living in neoliberal societies (and the uncertainty that comes with it) to have. In the classroom, a climate of vulnerability goads students to engage in self-improvement and self-empowerment, components of resilience (Ciccone, 2020). For some, this resilience entailed tapping into their creativity to present compelling speeches, such as finding innovative ways to use their bodies, and not allow their masks to prevent them from achieving their objectives. For other students, it meant extra practice in their dorms wearing a mask, which they felt was a daunting enterprise. The additional challenge also instilled a deeper sense of confidence in students. As one student shared,

I feel as if it will not only allow us to be more confident, but it will also allow us to be more organized since we not only have to focus on what we do in class but rather our health aspects as well. It will change, as well, our approach to public speaking because we will learn to project our voice in an effective manner, which is an

important aspect of public speaking. And we will have to learn to communicate and read a person without facial cues.

As the semester progressed, students felt the class was able to work through the challenges engendered by the safety guidelines and the restrictions to public communication and face-to-face interactions. In the end, the precautions just became the “new normal” for students, one that they felt was good preparation for the adaptability that would be desirable in their future professions.

Discussion

This study on teaching public speaking during a pandemic has illuminated some interesting theoretical developments on both the art of oratory, as well as some pedagogical possibilities for public speaking instructors. Students articulated, in contradictory fashion at times, myriad ways the pandemic had impacted their situational CA, from how the precautions had handcuffed their delivery to increasing their comfort and developing resilience. Considering the experimental nature of this year’s course, it was an opportunity to examine introductory public speaking concepts like communication apprehension, highlighting a situational approach to oratory. As an example of Bitzer’s (1968) rhetorical constraints, the safety precautions constricted students’ decision-making as they adapted to the pandemic exigence. Wearing a mask, for example, and the need to continually reposition it on one’s face, diverges from the common guidance to avoid fidgety, credibility-reducing behaviors. The situational nuances of this year also foregrounded public speaking as impression management and the inverted struggle of incongruence between the public and private, idealized and inner selves, and the “true personality” buried beneath the mask.

Theoretical Implications

This study has elucidated public speaking as a compensatory exercise, in which the orator must counteract that which is deficient, whether it be the incorporation of audience participation, the feasibility of various calls to action, or the barriers to achieving nonverbal immediacy, and the psychological closeness between speaker and audience. Rather than NVI facilitating an alleviation of CA (Foutz et al., 2021), for my students the feeling that one’s nonverbal tools were limited translated into heightened focus and intentional use of gestures, movement, and vocal variety, as they sought to overcome the absence of various communicative cues audiences glean

from watching speakers' mouths. Furthermore, this deliberate intentionality translated into a resource for channeling CA. During this semester, I could acutely empathize with my students as I too needed to (re)calibrate my volume and movement to engage my students while simultaneously remaining sensitive to their safety, compensating for my perceived limitations, such as the muffling mask and foggy glasses, with intensified vocal variety, eye contact, and gestures. Compensation did not result in a defeatist desperation, but translated into resiliency, which is not just an academic disposition, but is intertwined with one's self-concept and self-esteem (Peters et al., 1998). Illustrative of the positive impact of autonomy-supportive instruction on persistence (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2013), students became more adaptable, independent learners and orators in a socially distanced environment, which became the "new normal." The construct of compensation personifies extant research that has found a relationship between the basic speech course and the development of growth mindsets, including reduced CA and focus on audience adaptation (Stewart et al., 2019). As such, students deduced new insight into their topics as a result of the redesigned procedures required by the pandemic. While a student's growth can certainly be impeded by threats (such as a pandemic) to their connection with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this study has illuminated a complex relationship between environmental restrictions and public speaking development.

Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical developments showcased by a situational approach to public speaking, I will also suggest some lessons this year might offer for public speaking instructors post-pandemic. While hopefully COVID-19, with its periodic quarantines, is a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon, I believe there are some long-lasting pedagogical possibilities. First, navigating uncertainty, which is albeit situational apprehension-inducing, is an important skill for students to develop. Students enter the introductory public speaking course with complex expectations, some realistic and some unrealistic, about what skills they will develop by the end of the term (Munz & Colvin, 2019). While designing classroom activities and assignments that help students work through uncertainty-induced anxiety may be a challenging endeavor, there is an opportunity to have students prepare speeches with perhaps at least one unknown contextual variable, which the instructor will introduce on the speech day. And while I will not avow that this particular assignment *must* be

graded, this decision could be assessed as the instructor develops rapport with each new group of students. Uncertainty can be frightening for students, but I found in this study that students felt their anxiety was reduced during a semester with high uncertainty, which was consummated with better speeches for both the speakers and audience members. While instructors must be very strategic in the crafting of an assignment of this nature, I am convinced that the tempered disorientation of students' expectations can produce positive learning outcomes, as outlined in the results section. The use of simulation in the basic public speaking course increases student motivation to develop their skills in public speaking (Miller, 1997).

Public speaking instructors seek to balance many different goals in their classes, from building student competence to confidence, which may make incorporating a situational approach to be somewhat prohibitive. For instructors who may be inclined, however, there is an opportunity to employ a pedagogy that examines the function of different contextual nuances on speech events, similar to class discussions on audience analysis. Situational analysis, as illuminated by this pandemic period, is interwoven with audience interaction and adaptation (Haynes, 1990). A situational approach highlights the physical (and social) boundaries that create separation between the public and private selves, protective buffers that shield speakers from vulnerability, and meta-discussion of public speaking, which prompts greater self-reflection in students. My students became more conscious of their delivery choices, and the need to adjust to their circumstances. This meant being more dynamic and expressive, like incorporating additional facial movement. While requiring students to wear a mask for one of their speeches might not be a sensible take-away lesson, certainly there is space for instructors to innovate with adjusting situational variables, whether that be location, stage set up, attire, and so on. Finally, a situational pedagogy targets building resiliency in students as one of its learning objectives. Resilience is a crucial attribute for students living in economic and political systems that are precarious. Creating assignments and activities that are imbued with a layer of vulnerability encourages students to engage in self-improvement and self-empowerment, with the benefit of instilling a deeper sense of self-confidence.

Limitations and Future Research

There are two primary limitations to this study. The first is that this is a case study of one particular group of students that may not be generalizable to other

classrooms. Thus, the results of this study are useful for heuristic reflection rather than generalizable application. A second limitation of this study is that the COVID-pandemic may function as a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon and therefore the results cannot be applied to other circumstances. I have chosen to view the physical, social, and emotional difficulties engendered by the pandemic as an opportunity to re-evaluate my pedagogy in the introductory public speaking class. Future research should examine other consequential contextual variables that impact students' situational CA and compare and contrast with the articulations described in this paper.

Conclusion

The COVID pandemic provided an opportunity to examine public speaking theory, especially situational communication apprehension. Through observation and interviews, I have articulated public speaking in terms of impression management and compensation. Furthermore, this study has illuminated new and complex intersections between environmental variables and public speaking development, with potential opportunities for public speaking instructors to modify assignments that capitalize on contextual variation both in speech analysis and delivery, with the intention of cultivating resiliency in students.

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