

Countering Stage Fright

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Hello friends, I am here once again, Professor Smita Jha, to discuss countering stage fright. Now, today's topic is- is stage fright common? In the previous lecture, I explained in detail the very definition of stage fright because in knowing how to counter stage fright is very important to know what stage fright is or fear. And this is a very common word. In the course of the discussion, I elaborated that stage fright is a kind of self-obsession regarding one's image. It is a kind of apprehension for a future incident or accident, and it can be called performance anxiety, a kind of phobia and also a fear that is sometimes very, very irrational to define. The kind of nervousness that occurs during a stage performance needs to be addressed, and that is why it is very important to know how to define stage fright.

Well, this is a very prominent question. Is stage fright common? Because the fear that develops in oneself may give the impression that it is he or she who is suffering from the disease. And what is the disease? The fear, though, is not the right kind of thing because, in my opinion, it is a common fear, a common feeling. Yes, in terms of intensity, it differs from person to person, individual variation is very much there.

So, let us discuss today, is stage fright common? To strengthen the view that it is not only X or Y who are suffering from this kind of performance anxiety. Well, we all know that you know when we speak, it is coming from the brain, and we prepare ourselves for the future event, which is stage performance. Based on the memory storage in our brain, we try to perform well. Sometimes, memory is described in terms of three stages: encoding, storage, and retrieval. How much you retrieve while speaking depends on your caliber.

During encoding, information to be remembered is analyzed or processed. During storage, information to be remembered is put in a good place in the brain, and during retrieval, stored information is called back. That is recalled when it is wanted or needed. Wanted or needed means the time when you have to deliver your talk or lecture. So, when

we say that stage fright is common, this aspect is very important.

That is what is your caliber to contain the memory or to recall it at the time of performance. See, there is a term "problem solving," which refers to the ability to think or reason about things and may involve decision-making. Problem solving involves mainly five components because why is it common or is it common? This problem-solving aspect is very important to identify the problem. Suppose you are in crisis; how do you identify the problem? Identify all possible solutions to the problem, select the best solution, solve the problem, and make sure that the solution is working, worked, and adapted as needed. See, this depends on personal caliber.

Sometimes in the reality show we find someone falling down on the stage or committing some kind of mistake. If the artist is mature enough and smart enough, he or she can handle the situation very well without making the audience realize that something happened wrong. So, even it depends on a person how smart he or she is and how manageable he or she is. There is another term that is called "executive function." Executive function refers to the ability to plan, initiate, complete, and oversee goal-directed behavior and coordinate attention, memory, and problem-solving abilities to function creatively and how independent you are.

So, language may be viewed as another cognitive communication process. What is the cognitive communication process? The thought process is related to your brain with many parts. That includes auditory comprehension, verbal expression that is content, speech intelligibility, reading, writing, and social skills. Developmentally, thinking affects language, and language affects thinking. Yes, thinking is a very powerful tool.

That is why this stage of fear varies from person to person, whether we talk of thinking process, thought process, or cognitive component. In the last lecture, I described behavioral components also because the physics of a person is different from one to another. Behavioral component means, among other things, blunt or too expressive presentations, problems with presentation, rhythm, reading errors, and other behavioral changes such as irritation and audience avoidance alike. So, this is person-specific. How much he or she is involved in the task of this speech expression.

Suggestions for managing speaking anxiety are typically addressed- its cognitive and behavioral components, while the physical components are left unattended. Because physical is related to your mental problems during the time of stage performance, it is different from mental problems and also from person to person. As we learned earlier, we cannot block this natural and instinctual response. We can, however, engage in physical relaxation exercises to counteract the general physical signs of anxiety caused by cortisol

and adrenaline. I discussed in the previous lecture the kind of hormone and kind of release, which includes increased heart rate, trembling, flushing, high blood pressure, and speech disfluency.

So, the secretion of hormones like cortisol affects an individual entire personality. So, the question is, is it common to everyone? Maybe, yes, but the intensity is different. So, a fear of public speaking can make you feel tense, which negatively affects your body language. So, the best public speakers you know maintain proper posture, make eye contact with the audience, and move in ways that look natural. But it depends on the level of confidence a person has at the time of stage performance.

Good body language improves your performance and helps the audience take in and remember what you say. So, avoid putting your hands in your pockets or crossing your arms; instead, start with your arms at your side and use purposeful hand gestures as you make your points. This shows confidence. This is again individually specific; look out into the audience. Do not stare down at the ground or at your notes for long periods.

I have seen students who keep on reading the slides and are not even able to look at the audience sitting on the other side. That kind of presentation becomes very mechanical, and we generally say, well, this is not the right kind of presentation, and that can be possible, you know, this kind of attitude because of fear. So, as you build confidence, you may even start to make eye contact with individual people watching your presentation, and slowly, gradually, this will give you a feeling of confidence. For many people you know public speaking can warp their sense of time, making them speak faster than they normally would. Now, this is also a very important point because when we talk about whether it is common, it is common, but again, the rate of differences is very, very high.

So, beware of this phenomenon and keep a steady pace while presenting. So, it will help calm your nerves and allow the audience to better understand what you say. Also, breath control can help you. And you can do this. Practice using your stomach to push in and out to strengthen the lungs.

So, before you begin public speaking, it is very important to take 10 slow, deep breaths. Again, if I ask you or if you ask me if it is common to have stage fright or if it is I am the abnormal one who has this stage fright or performance anxiety, I would say yes, it is common. Approximately one in four individuals report feeling anxious about having to present their ideas in front of an audience. One in four- see, the ratio is very high. Fortunately, there are many techniques that can help people overcome their fear of public speaking.

Millions of people suffer from performance anxiety. Commonly called stage fright, and in fact, most people would rather get the kind of infection like the flu than perform. So, athletes, musicians, actors, and public speakers often get performance anxiety, and performance anxiety can prevent you from doing what you enjoy and can affect your career. I usually advise my students to listen to various talks and lectures, to feel the rhythm of good orators, and to know the very mechanics of giving a good talk while on the stage. Maybe not in one day, but with the passage of time, you may develop the quality and the guts to face the odd situation and defeat the horror of stage fright.

Well, when we talk of this problem, how many people can be affected by stage fright? The ratio is high because whether it is a speech at a professional meeting, a wedding party, or competing in a sports event, sweaty palms, and shaky knees are commonplace when speaking or performing in front of a group of people. In fact, most people experience some form of performance anxiety, even if it is only mild. A lot can be at stake since a good public showing might advance a career. For example, fear can trip anyone up with an increased heart rate and suddenly blank mind, which is called a blackout.

So, stage fright. It can be devastating both professionally and personally, but it is not considered a full-blown phobia. However, an extreme fear of public speaking is a phobia, which I discussed in the previous lecture, which is called glossophobia. Glossophobia is a subset of social phobia or the fear of social situations where one is being watched or judged by others. See, when you were in a school, remember your teacher was asking you to sing a song or to chant something or to read out a poem. What happened that time? If you can recall, recall it.

Didn't you find that some of your friends went to the stage, they read out poems so well or any kind of performance, but at your turn, you have all nervous system alert? See, this realization is very important. And if you ask those who went and performed well, they can also tell you that they have this kind of feeling. So, it is common, yes, higher or lower, but it is always advisable to talk to others to know the actual situation. When individuals are scared of public speaking, their fear arouses the autonomic nervous system, triggering a fight, flight or freeze reaction. In addition, false beliefs about public speaking and negative thoughts about oneself as a speaker can lead to poor performance.

Situational factors like a new location or different audience can also be detrimental, and the speaker's confidence in their skill level can play a key role in how well they perform. Some of the students, even in class performance, feel shy and shaky, and I always tell them that all of you sit together and discuss at this point where you feel weak when you feel it is devastating. And with the help of others, you counter because you all are in the

same boat. So, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that public speaking anxiety or glossophobia affects about 40 percent of the population. The underlying fear is judgment or negative evaluation by others.

So, public speaking anxiety is considered a social anxiety disorder. Now, when we move further to know about this problem, we should talk about evolution. Evolution psychologists believe there are primordial roots. This is genetic also and this also I mentioned in my previous discussion. Our prehistoric ancestors were vulnerable to large animals and harsh elements.

Living in a tribe was a basic survival skill. Rejection from the group led to death. Speaking to an audience makes us vulnerable to rejection. So, much like our ancestors feared when society was very, very unsafe. See, I am trying to relate to this because we all are human.

The evolution process is very important to make us sensitive toward something that is called fear. A common fear in public speaking is the brain freeze. The prospect of having an audience's attention while standing in silence feels like judgment and rejection. So, the prefrontal lobes of our brain shorten our memories and are sensitive to anxiety. I was just going through an article by Dr.

Michael DeGeorgia of Case Western University Hospital, who says that if your brain starts to freeze up, you get more stressed, and the stress hormones go even higher. That shuts down the frontal lobe and disconnects it from the rest of the brain. It makes it even harder to retrieve that memory. See the phobia kind of situation, the brain becomes completely frozen, and the more it is frozen, it is to retrieve the memory we store in our brain, and again, it depends on the individual. The fight or flight response activates complex bodily changes to protect us.

A threat to our safety requires immediate action. We need to respond without debating whether to jump out of the way of an oncoming car while in an intersection. So, speaking to a crowd is not life-threatening. The threat area of the brain cannot distinguish between these threats.

Yes, the brain can give only indications. A stage performance is not a question of life and death, as people consider it. And the more you make it horrific, the more you will be unable to get the confidence required for a good orator or for a successful public speaker. So, again, it depends on the individual and how extroverted you are. The more you have public experience, the more you have this knack for making friends and talking to people, and the more you will be successful in your life in stage performance or in your

professional life.

See, we want our brains to be alert to danger. We are alert every time. The worry of having a brain freeze increases our anxiety. Ironically, it increases the likelihood of our minds going black, as Dr. DeGeorgia described. We need to recognize the fear of brain freezing is not a life or death threat like a car barreling towards us while in a crosswalk.

So, we need to find out, you know, the level of fear, and this is what Dr. DeGeorgia also described; otherwise, the brain would be frozen. I know about this because I am also an expert in neuro-linguistic programming. I was just going through some of the case studies, and I read out, though I am not mentioning the name here, how they were explaining their feeling or their emotion related to stage fright. People feel nervous as they know that the entire audience is watching them, and if they make a single mistake, it will be remembered forever.

Another reason is when you are less prepared and you face a crowd that is above your level of intelligence, you tend to feel nervous. It goes away when you take part in many such activities more often, and you know your subject well. See, this is the expression of a student who faced a stage performance with stage fear, and whatever comes to the mind of that student is written here share. Do enough research, this is by another person who went through the same trauma. Do enough research and practice before you go to the stage and feel as if you are the only one present here and also think that even if you make a mistake, will those people remember the mistake 5 years down the line.

That is what I think every time I go to the stage and face the crowd, and it actually helped me up to a certain extent. There is still a long way to go. Another student is saying this, and I like that when you go to deliver the talk, you think that you are the boss of that space. And people are not going to remember the mistake, you know, lifelong.

It is just momentary. Having to be the focus of attention can produce a lot of anxiety in humans, especially if you are not accustomed to it. This is by the third student. There was a time as a young man. When I acted in many plays, played clarinet, sang with a band, and in musicals, and after a while, I no longer had much stage fright. Your focus turns away from thinking about yourself to performing the role or the music.

The focus has to be on entertaining the audience. See, this is a very neutral kind of expression, and this is also from the writing of one of the students from the case study. Read the mind that in most of the students, this fear is common. But how did they address this fear that is important? Mind can be divided into conscious mind and unconscious mind. The conscious mind works on logical analysis and makes decisions.

So, when we sleep, our consciousness also goes to sleep. The unconscious mind stores information and emotions. However, emotions are felt at a conscious level. The unconscious is working 24 by 7, but its power is not felt when the conscious is awake. Unconscious is creative and imaginative. He is like a fertile soil he does not argue and accept the idea as it is dreams come from our unconscious mind.

So, the mind and brain mind are abstract, while the brain is a biological phenomenon. So, the unconscious is a lot more powerful and resourceful compared to the conscious. Conscious is like a passenger sitting in a car that is life, and unconscious is like a driver who has all the resources like brakes, accelerator, and navigation system to drive the car. So, the two functions go on and on. And this also plays a vital role while giving a talk on the stage.

So, as a student here, I would like to stop because I have given some case studies also to strengthen the argument that stage fright is common. Yes, the ratio is high. But how to address this is individually specific, and with this, I must say thank you very much and have a nice day ahead. Thank you.