A STUDY OF THE PROBLEM
OF STAGE FRIGHT

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF STAGE FRIGHT

Almost every individual who has ever faced an audience has experienced, and probably still experiences, a nervous fear reaction, commonly called stage fright. Experienced speakers manage to control this affliction to a satisfactory degree in most cases; but there often arises a critical occasion where the heart pounds, the legs and hands tremble, breathing becomes difficult, and one is stricken with feelings of alarm and a fear of failure. These reactions are not restricted to inexperienced or poorly prepared speakers; they are experienced by even the most accomplished performers. In fact, many otherwise outstanding performers have been forced into other occupations because of stage fright; and, in spite of the fact that the history of the problem dates back over 2000 years, no one has yet discovered a completely satisfactory explanation for the phenomenon or developed a method which has been consistently successful in overcoming or controlling it.

Background of the problem. While searching for a suitable topic for the Master's thesis, the writer became interested in the problem of stage fright and submitted it as a possible subject for the research. He desired to try to
discover what objective or scientific work had been accomplished in the field of stage fright. After some discussion, it was decided that the work should be limited to an analysis of the published writing dealing with the problem of stage fright.

The research was begun with this objective; but, as the work progressed, it became apparent that a number of significant factors had been uncovered by experimental work in the field. To the writer, these factors appeared to fall into a logical pattern leading to a satisfactory explanation of stage fright. However, most authorities tended to treat the factors individually rather than trying to relate them into a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon. The author felt that he could assemble these factors into a synthesis which would provide the basis of a theory for the cause of stage fright. Hence, he changed his objective to that of seeking a logical and satisfactory explanation for the phenomenon of stage fright.

Importance of the problem. Almost everyone experiences symptoms of stage fright at one time or another, and about 75 percent of the people experience them during all audience situations. In an experiment with 100 University of Southern California students, Parker measured the pulse and blood pressure rates of students during normal activity and
immediately before and after presenting short speeches. He found that over 90 percent of the subjects were measurably affected by the speaking situation.¹ In two surveys of University of Minnesota students, Knower discovered that 56 percent of one group of 210 students and 61 percent of another group of 277 students reported stage fright as a speech problem.² A similar result was reached by Greenleaf. In one group of 384 students at the University of Iowa, 86 percent reported stage fright; and, in a second group of 789 students, 89 percent experienced some form of stage fright.³ In a survey of successful contemporary public speakers, Kniseley found, "...approximately three-fourths of the subjects experience stage fright of varying intensities and frequencies in their present speaking activity."⁴


Hence, it is safe to predict that whenever one is thrust into the public regard, he will suffer some of the symptoms of stage fright. As Lomas states, "The facts are that stage fright, in moderate form at least, is a virtually universal experience."\(^5\)

Not only is stage fright an important problem because it is experienced by so many people; it is also important because its effects are so far reaching. The complexity of our society has resulted in a requirement for increased numbers of people to appear in public. No longer is the stage restricted to professional public speakers, actors, and musicians. To be successful, everyone, the professional individual, the businessman, and the tradesman, must take part in community and business organizations, service clubs, fraternal groups, parent teacher associations, and a multitude of other organizations. Frequently, the average citizen is required to organize, direct, and explain activities to members of his group. When this occasion arises, he will, probably, experience some form of stage fright; the degree to which he can control these reactions will determine his success or lack of it. Not only will these experiences affect his ability to perform; they will also determine his

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feelings of competence, prestige, and status within the

group. His entire personality development is shaped by the

results of these trials; consequently, the experiences di-
rectly affect the measure of success attained in life. In

speaking of those with severe stage fright, Greenleaf says:

The effect of speech fright on the social
and economic life of the individual is apparently
considerable....The extent to which this condition
seemed to affect their social and economic life
varied considerably with each individual, but
practically all the subjects mentioned occasions
when they failed to do things they wanted to do
because of their speech fright. Several stated
that they were purposely preparing themselves for
positions which would require practically no con-
tact with people. In nearly every case, the inter-
viewer could trace an increasing number of activities
which had been closed to the individual by his fears
and related evaluations, as his speech fright had
developed over a period of years.6

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study
is to analyze recent experimental work in the study of stage
fright in order to develop (1) a logical and satisfactory
explanation for the cause of stage fright and (2) a practical
approach toward overcoming or controlling it.

Method of procedure. In order to approach the problem
in a systematic fashion and to ensure as complete a review as
possible, the author began the research by compiling a bibli-
ography of books, researches, essays, and articles pertaining

to the subject of stage fright. This step was accomplished by reviewing the textbooks of public speaking, acting, and music in the Sacramento State College and California State Libraries. Next, he extracted all the listings of articles on stage fright from the Readers Guide to Periodical Literature, The Education Index, The Music Index, The Bibliography of Speech Education, Abstracts of Dissertations, and Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities. Upon completion, the original bibliography included 35 textbooks, 15 researches, and 82 articles and essays. All of these publications had been written in the past twenty-five years and were concerned with the problem of stage fright.

After compiling the bibliography, the author reviewed each book, research, article, and essay to discover what new developments, if any, had taken place. Extensive notes were taken with the intention of preparing a synthesis of current knowledge of the subject into a scientific explanation of stage fright.

Definition of stage fright. Webster's International Dictionary defines stage fright as "nervousness felt at appearing before an audience." This terminology is a good general definition, but it may help to establish a common referent if we examine some of the definitions given by authorities in the field. Elwood Murray feels that stage fright is a lack of poise. He states, "When there is a lack of poise, the entire speech personality is disturbed and made less efficient in its adjustments. This lack of poise is known as stage fright in the larger audience situations." Greenleaf says, "...the basic disturbance may be designated as anxiety-tension occasioned by misevaluative reactions to speech situations." In their treatment of the subject, Sarett and Foster propose:

The first difficulty which many a speaker has to overcome is excessive self-consciousness, timidity, apprehension of failure—all those mental restraints on freedom of utterance which, for want of a better term, we call stage fright.

Hollingworth quotes Goodhue as follows, "Stage fright is the association of fear with inferiority rising insidiously to

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10 Greenleaf, op. cit., p. 327.
the surface and expressing itself in great mental and bodily
suffering."\textsuperscript{12} Eisenson feels that stage fright is intel-
lectual disorganization, and Woolbert says that "Stage fright
is a matter of too much musculature."\textsuperscript{13&14} Almost all of
these authorities feel that stage fright is a fear response,
but their definitions leave something to be desired. There­
fore, for the purposes of this study, we shall define stage
fright as any physiological or psychological reaction mani-
fested as a result of the audience situation.

\textbf{History of stage fright.} The recorded history of stage
fright goes back to the writings of the early Greeks and Ro-
mans. Probably, the most famous of these statements is that
which Cicero attributes to Crassus in \textit{De Oratore}:

\ldots the better the orator, the more profoundly
is he frightened of the difficulty of speaking,
and of the doubtful fate of a speech, and of the
anticipation of an audience\ldots .I very often prove
it in my own experience, that I turn pale at the
outset of a speech, and quake in every limb and
in all my soul.\textsuperscript{15}

Many famous English and American speakers experienced these

\textsuperscript{12} H. L. Hollingworth, \textit{The Psychology of the Audience}

\textsuperscript{13&14} Jon Eisenson, \textit{Basic Speech} (New York: The Mac-
millan Co., 1950), p. 252; Charles Henry Woolbert, \textit{Fundamentals}

\textsuperscript{15} Marcus Tullius Cicero, Books I & II, translated by
E. W. Sutton, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,
same reactions. Lomas quotes William Mathews' statement of
the trials of famous speakers as follows:

It is well known that Erskine, the great fo­
rensic advocate, was at first painfully unready
of speech. So embarrassed was he in one of his
maiden efforts that he would have abandoned the
attempt to harangue juries, had he not felt, as
he tells us, his children tugging at his gown,
and urging him on, in spite of his boggling and
stammering. Sheridan and Disraeli, as all the
world knows, "hung fire" in their first speeches,
and Curran was almost knocked down by the sound
of his own voice when he first addressed his
"gentlemen" in a little room of a tavern. The
first speech of Cobden, also, who afterward be­
came one of the most powerful champions of the
Anti-Corn-Law League, was a humiliating failure.

It is said that Canning was sure of speaking
at his best if he rose in a great fright. To
feel his heart beating rapidly, to wish the floor
would open and swallow him, were signs of an
oratorical triumph. At a Mayor's dinner in Liver­
pool, he was so nervous before he was called on to
speak, that he twice left the room in order to
collect his thoughts.16

Mathews also mentions experiences of other famous Americans
such as Patrick Henry and Daniel Webster, and Lomas adds
William Jennings Bryan, George Arliss, and Madam Schumann­
Heink to the list. Ethel Barrymore said that she suffered
from stage fright at every first night all her life.17 Eva
Le Gallienne, after completing her 1000th performance, when
asked if she experienced stage fright, replied, "Yes, and it

16 Lomas, op. cit., p. 484.
17 "Royalty of the Theater," Newsweek, April 11, 1955,
p. 114.
gets worse every year." Boris Karloff said, "I shudder and shake before every scene."18

It would seem that the history of stage fright dates back to the time when men began gathering in groups; and, although it is such an ancient malady, no one has yet discovered a scientific explanation for the phenomenon or a means of overcoming it.

**Experimental work in the area of stage fright.** For many years psychologists, professional public speakers, actors, and musicians have searched for a logical and workable explanation of stage fright. However, the amount of true scientific work that has been accomplished is quite meager. Utterback sums up the situation as follows:

The story of our psychological research during the past twenty years is not one of impressive accomplishment. In large part, it is a story of misdirected effort...A few members of the Association have gone to the psychologist for experimental method and have applied that method to the study of our own problems. These men have already done some excellent work, and their success suggests that experimental work in the psychology of speech is a fruitful field.19

Although most writers have been content to restrict themselves to obvious generalities rather than trying to dis-

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18 Janet Lane, "Take a Deep Breath," *Collier's*, October 9, 1937, p. 18.

cover real evidence through scientific investigation, a few men, Elwood Murray, Howard Gilkinson, Franklin Knower, and Charles Lomas, have been responsible for most of the scientific advancement in this field.

The experimental work related to the study of stage fright can be tentatively classified into three areas: the relationship between speaking ability and personality, the measurement of stage fright reactions, and the study of the psychological aspects of stage fright. Naturally, these classifications are not separate and distinct; they tend to overlap. However, they are used for the sake of convenience.

By far, the greater amount of experimental work in connection with stage fright has been directed toward trying to discover its relationship to personality. Since 1928, Elwood Murray has been conducting a series of researches and experiments to discover this relationship. He holds that speech development and personality are closely related and that what affects one affects the other. Furthermore, he has concluded that proper speech training can bring about profound personality changes and assist the individual to develop increased maturity and an integrated personality.20 However, in one of the studies fostered by Murray, that of

Hunter, the author concluded that speech personality behavior is not differentiated and clearly characteristic among high school students. In other words, Hunter was unable to discover any relationship between personality and speaking ability. In addition, Knower, in an earlier study, found little relationship between a well adjusted personality and good public speaking. He reported, "An investigation of individual test scores indicated that many of those emotionally unstable were compensating for this condition by an aggressive form of compensation." In simple terms, emotional instability sometimes provides an incentive to excel in public speaking. This conclusion was substantiated by Thorn in a study of good and poor speakers. She reported that 50 percent of the good speakers indicated instability as compared to only 22 percent of the poor speakers. On the other hand, Moore substantiated Murray's findings in a study where he concluded that better performers excel in dominance, emotional stability, confidence, and


sociability. In an attempt to solve this controversy, Gilkinson and Knower carried on a study to analyze individual differences among students for a period of three years. They concluded that "The inter-correlation of the speech skills are generally low, and in many cases, negligible and inconsistent from index to index." 25

Another type of study that has been attempted frequently is one in which the researcher tries to measure the number and intensity of stage fright symptoms. The technique for this type of experiment can be of two types: using rating scales, either for the subjects or for observers, or using scientific instruments to measure physical changes. The rating scale is the most popular type of experiment and is the primary tool for the studies of Gilkinson, Greenleaf, and Holtzman. 26 Gilkinson is the leader in the study of the measurement of stage fright, and most of the other researchers use his Personal Report on Confidence as a Speaker (PRCS) as the rating scale. Generally, in this type of study, the

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subjects fill out the form before taking a course in speech and after completing it. In some cases, two groups are used: one group is given training in speech, and the other is not. After the training, the two groups are compared. In every study of this type, it was demonstrated that training in speech reduced the effects of stage fright. Other studies have compared the rating scales with personality inventories to try and determine the relationship of personality to speaking ability. As discussed above, the question as to this relationship has not been answered; however, a valid measuring instrument is a valuable tool in research, and excellent progress has been made in this area.

There have not been many studies in connection with the psychological aspects of stage fright, and most of these efforts actually deal chiefly with physiological reactions. However, the physiological symptoms can be accurately and scientifically measured, and it is in this area alone that specific, concrete facts have been uncovered. We know exactly what bodily changes take place whenever an individual experiences stage fright, and we have been able to analyze them in terms of other emotional reactions. Lomas has summarized this knowledge under five concepts listed below:

1. The physiological picture differs little in fear, rage, excitement, or vigorous physical action. The principal chemical agent in this picture is adrenalin.
2. Adrenalin alone, or adrenalin and thyroxin together, while they may produce all of the physiological changes common in emotion, do not produce the conscious states known to emotion except in rare instances.

3. The physiological changes produced in the body at critical moments are of such a nature as to contribute to the efficient use of muscles, to cause an increase in the available energy and to protect the body against loss of blood.

4. The organization of emotional responses takes place on a subcortical level, probably in the thalamus.

5. The degree of integration of behavior under emotional stimulation varies widely.

6. Stage fright does not differ in chemical or visceral components from the strong emotions characteristic of vigorous and effective speech.27

 CHAPTER II

THE CAUSE OF STAGE FRIGHT

Usually, in the case of illness or of any malfunction, it is necessary to discover the cause of the trouble before steps can be taken to correct the condition. Therefore, a great deal of effort has been directed toward discovering the underlying reasons for stage fright reactions. A certain amount of knowledge has been uncovered; and, from this knowledge, a number of theories as to the cause of stage fright have been developed. In this chapter, we shall examine these theories and attempt to assemble the concrete knowledge into a scientific explanation of the cause of stage fright.

I. THEORIES OF THE PROBLEM

Many theories have been proposed as to the cause of stage fright. However, in a study of this type, there is not enough space to discuss all of them. Furthermore, most authorities tend to fall into one of three classifications; therefore, we shall restrict our discussion to these three: fear phenomenon, emotional neurosis, and redintegration. Naturally, these three classifications do not embrace all theories; neither are they completely different and separate from one another; they tend to overlap. However, they are
the best classifications available. Hollingworth explains them by stating:

Stage fright may be a direct fear phenomenon, in which servicable manipulation gives way to flight, tremor, paralysis, collapse, or aggressiveness.

Or stage fright may be an emotional neurosis, occasioned by the conflict of two competing tendencies or instincts, of approximately equal strength.

Or stage fright may be a simple emotional redintegration, in which some disabling emotion is re-instated by the presence of some feature of the more complex situation in which the emotion originally arose—whether the emotion be that of shame, inferiority feeling or fright.28

Fear phenomenon. The belief that fear, real fear, is the basis of stage fright is probably the most popular explanation for the problem and it forms something of a base for the other classifications. Eisenson explains this theory by proposing:

True fear of an audience may develop out of heightened feeling if the speaker fails to evaluate the physical changes occurring within him for what they are worth. A speaker may suddenly become aware of a palpitating heart or a dry mouth. He may also, consciously or unconsciously, recall that these symptoms were also present when we were frightened. If he fails to recognize that the cause of his old fright is nonexistent in his present situation, he may give way to fear. In effect, such a speaker is responding to two elements—palpitating heart and dry mouth—as he originally did to a total but different situation which happened to include these two elements. The other fear symptoms such as

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28 Hollingworth, op. cit., p. 217.
trembling and excessive perspiration may make their appearance. If the speaker then becomes overwhelmed with the physical changes taking place within him, he may forget what he has to say. Random talking and random, disorganized movement may take the place of organized thoughts and gestures. True fear—stage fright in a real sense—has set in.29

Sarett and Foster in their treatment of the subject say, "In all cases of emotional instability there is one basic cause: fear. Fear of a crowd, fear of an unfamiliar, complex situation, fear of the loss of standing with others."30

Another authority, Anderson states:

The most tenable theory is that the behavior pattern known as stage fright is in reality correctly named because it does represent a form of fear reaction in which all of the symptoms can be traced to the typical 'fight or flight' activity controlled by the autonomic nervous system and arising from physiological changes taking place within the body.31

On the face of it, the theory of stage fright as a simple case of fear reflex appears to be quite valid. Certainly, the individual expresses all the symptoms of fear; hence, he must be afraid. Unfortunately, this theory neglects to state why the individual is afraid. Furthermore, inasmuch as so many people experience this reaction, what is the common

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30 Sarett and Foster, op. cit., p. 56.

factor that brings it about? In other words, the theory of stage fright as a fear phenomenon does not completely solve the problem as to the cause of stage fright.

**Emotional neurosis.** The theory of emotional neurosis as the cause of stage fright is based on the belief that the individual is suffering from an emotional upset. Hollingworth explains:

...the two tendencies, to crave an audience and to fear a crowd, both represent opposed instinctive urges, and that the particular reaction to an audience will depend on the relations of conflict on the one hand and the reinforcement on the other, of these two trends.32

Lomas believes that emotional disorganization is the fundamental factor in stage fright. He contends:

It is now generally accepted by psychologists that the physiological conditions present in fear and other forms of strong excitement tend to energize the body and make it capable of better performance. When a speaker retains full control over all of his faculties, a better performance does occur. In acute stage fright, however, the speaker has lost control of the situation. The peculiarly disorganized quality of the emotion is due not to the presence of physiological changes, but to the inability of the organism to perceive clearly how to utilize them. The situation is too complex; there are too many unknown or misunderstood factors. Conflicting tendencies are set up, and instead of pursuing a single course of action with abundant energy and enthusiasm, the speaker falls into aimless movements

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and violent tensions. As was the theory of stage fright as a fear phenomenon, the theory of emotional neurosis appears to be plausible. Certainly, there is emotion present in stage fright, regardless of whether or not there are elements of conflict present.

Redintegration. Redintegration is a process of responding to the audience situation with the same emotional reflexes aroused in an earlier experience. Eisenson quotes Goodhue and Hollingworth when they state:

Stage fright is a 'learned form of behavior,' an emotional redintegration, in which some disabling emotion is reinstated by the presence of some feature of the more complex situation in which the emotion arose.

Van Riper contends:

The cues which set off situation fear are the perception of the following factors in each speech situation: similarities to a situation in which speech unpleasantness has been experienced, the unexpectedness of the situation, expectation or interruption or help with difficult words, pressing need for immediate or efficient communication, the probabilities of such social penalties as laughter, mockery, and impatience or rejection, and many others.

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The theory of redintegration, reduced to its basic elements, offers a good explanation of the cause of stage fright: the individual associates his present situation with an earlier occasion which was complex and unsuccessful; hence, he expresses fear.

II. STATE FRIGHT SYMPTOMS

Although only a small amount of factual information concerning the problem of stage fright is available, we have a thorough knowledge of the symptoms that are expressed. Many experimenters have reported on the symptoms, but we shall use the list compiled by Greenleaf in his study of 789 University of Iowa students. He reported:

1. Dryness of throat or mouth
2. Forgetting
3. Tension in the abdominal region
4. Inability to produce voice
5. Stuttering or stammering
6. Tremors of knees and hands
7. Weak voice
8. Excessive perspiration
9. Accelerated heart rate
10. Speech rate too fast or too slow
11. Stomach upset
12. Difficulty in breathing
13. Inability to look at audience
14. Feeling that the audience is disapproving
15. Inability to finish speaking
16. Excessive hesitation
17. Dread before speaking

Greenleaf found that the number and intensity of the symptoms increased with the severity of stage fright, and he discovered that symptoms 15, 7, 13, 6, 14, 5, 4, and 8 were differentiated most clearly. It is assumed that these symptoms are listed in
order of clarity of differentiation.\textsuperscript{36}

As is evident, these symptoms are both psychological and physiological. Unfortunately, it is difficult to distinguish psychological from physiological symptoms and most experimenters have demonstrated a tendency to confuse the psychological reactions with the physiological. Hence, several so-called psychological studies have dealt almost exclusively with physiological reactions. As a result, our knowledge of the physiological picture in stage fright is fairly complete and exact although we are still in doubt as concerns the psychological reactions.

\textbf{Physiological symptoms of stage fright}. Although the number and intensity of the symptoms in stage fright vary, depending upon the individual and the occasion, the following physiological changes take place: The adrenal and thyroid glands release fluids into the bloodstream which result in increased visceral and muscular activity; the liver releases sugar, a source of energy. The individual's breathing becomes difficult, his heart beats rapidly, and his face becomes flushed. His abdominal muscles are tensed, his mouth feels dry, and he perspires freely. His hands and legs tremble, and his stomach becomes upset.

Actually, these physiological reactions are no different

\textsuperscript{36} Greenleaf, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 327.
than those which take place during any emotional reaction: fear, hate, love, anger, etc.\textsuperscript{37} Visceral response is typical of all strong emotion. The heart pounds, the digestive functions are stopped, the blood supply is directed to the voluntary muscles (the emergency muscles), and one shakes and trembles. The reason for this condition is that the body is being prepared to meet an emergency situation. The heart beats at an increased rate to provide more blood for the muscles; blood sugar is released from the liver to provide extra energy for heavy tasks; the bronchioles dilate to make it easier to breathe and to provide a greater supply of oxygen; and the adrenal glands secrete adrenalin into the bloodstream to counteract fatigue, to increase the coagulation of the blood, and to contribute to body efficiency.\textsuperscript{38} Another significant discovery is the fact that these reactions are constantly taking place. Lomas, in his summary of the experimental work in this area, explained that the difference in sensation depends upon the degree of the reaction. In strong emotion, the response is violent; under ordinary circumstances, it is so mild that it goes unnoticed. However, the same


physiological symptoms are produced when an individual exerts himself physically as occurs during strong emotion. Lomas concluded, "The physiological picture differs little in fear, rage, excitement, or vigorous physical action."39

The fact that the physiological reactions are identical in all emotions has been demonstrated by experiments where the visceral pattern has been produced artificially through the injection of adrenalin. Maranon was one of the first to study the physiological effects produced by the injection of adrenalin; he stated that the injection produced only a "cold emotion," a feeling "as if afraid," or "as if about to cry." Although a few true emotions were aroused, he concluded that the injection of adrenalin was not sufficient to cause a genuine feeling of emotion.40 However, this conclusion was modified by experiments of Cantril and Hunt and Landis and Hunt.41&42 Cantril and Hunt demonstrated that the injection of adrenalin could produce all the symptoms of an emotion; but they concluded, "In general the injection of adrenalin is not sufficient to produce an

39 Lomas, op. cit., p. 36.


emotion. A 'cold emotion' may be aroused, but the lack of any object or reason for the emotion usually deprives it of its genuineness. In short, the physiological condition establishes a state of preparedness for an emotion, but a genuine emotion is not present unless there is a reason or an object for it.

It is quite interesting to examine the testimony of the subjects in these experiments involving the injection of adrenalin. Listed below are some of the reported "cold emotions:"

"Whole reaction seems localized in chest. Feel like breathing deeply to shake it off. Heavier and more like a feeling of great apprehension, except entirely localized. More accurately, chest feels as it does during great apprehension, but this feeling so localized that I can introspect detachedly as if I were considering a slightly injured finger. This reaction was dominated by a lack of confidence, a desire to withdraw, in short all the elements of fear except mental pain."

"Felt a bit pleasant a moment ago. This succeeded by a disturbed feeling now, neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Decided predisposition to an emotion. Only a constant conscious attempt to keep calm prevented an emotion. It was an effort to keep calm."

"Tenseness. The feeling as though something were going to happen that I expected to be disagreeable. An overwhelming desire to have something happen through which I might relieve the suspense."

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43 Cantril and Hunt, op. cit., p. 306.
44 Ibid., p. 304.
In three of the four cases of genuine emotion which resulted from the injection of adrenalin, the emotion was fear:

"The sound of my own voice trembling acts as context for fear. Feel extremely worried. Not exactly anxiety, but a forboding which is unpleasant. Whenever, without my mind on the symptoms, I do something like putting my hand to my face, the trembling of the hand gives me---on its perception---an extreme anxiety---not fear---but forboding. No definite object, but nevertheless an emotion."

"I seem oppressed with a vague fear of something---feeling much the same as when I've lain awake all night, frightened that Bill might die. In spite of knowing the cause of his illness the fear was not specific, and neither is this. I am oppressed with a nameless fear. I want to get away from it just as the night of Bill's illness, I wanted to relax and sleep, and tried to rationalize my fears. But that was impossible then, and it is impossible now. It is decidedly unpleasant."

"Extreme fear was present, but no content for it at the time. Probably an unconscious reason, but, at the time, nothing but fear. The strongest reaction yet. I found myself shaking, chest trembling, building up rapidly in intensity, whereupon I abruptly recognized that I was intensely afraid."

The subjects of this experiment were all intelligent individuals, psychology students, medical students, graduate students in physics and law, and even the authors of the experiment. These people were familiar with the problem, and they were interested in the experiment. Hence, they were in a good position to exercise mature judgement and to evaluate

their reactions in the light of what they were expecting. As a consequence, they should have been able to control their reactions to prevent the occurrence of a genuine emotion to a much greater extent than the average individual would have been under similar circumstances. In spite of this fact, they were unable to do so in many cases. From the reports, it appears likely that they would have given way to genuine emotion if they had not been aware of the purpose of the experiment. Furthermore, it is deeply significant that, in almost every case, the emotion was fear.

**Psychological reactions of stage fright.** Because of the confusion between physiological and psychological reactions in stage fright, very little experimental study has been given to the psychological aspects of the problem. This situation is doubly unfortunate because it is the psychological symptoms which form the basis of our difficulties. Inasmuch as physiological reactions are constantly taking place during all types of emotion and activity, these reactions can be considered normal and useful. The psychological symptoms, forgetting, a feeling of dread or foreboding, a feeling that the audience is disapproving, the inability to control one's actions, and a desire to withdraw, are abnormal and harmful; hence, it is these reactions that must be overcome.

Another significant difference between physiological
and psychological symptoms of stage fright is that, although the physiological reactions are similar to those manifested in all emotions and in vigorous activity, the psychological reactions are similar only to those experienced in fear and anxiety.

III. GENESIS OF STAGE FRIGHT

We have seen that the physiological symptoms can bring about the psychological symptoms; and, undoubtedly, the reverse is true as well. Therefore, does the audience situation produce a physiological or a psychological reaction? This question becomes more puzzling when we realize that young children rarely experience stage fright. In fact, it is common knowledge among musicians that child prodigies do not experience nervousness until they get older. For example, Braine states, "Children rarely suffer from stage fright. They do not see anything to be afraid of." In addition, George McNabb says:

At the age of six or seven they (children) have little or no fear of appearing in public. They have barely any consciousness of themselves. But there comes a day when they arrive at the "more-conscious" stage in which doubts and fears are presented and absorbed through faulty suggestions; and, if em-

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couraged, these doubts and fears multiply. 47

Phillip Gordon proposes:

The young child is not a victim of stage fright. He becomes subject to it at about the age of fifteen, and, if it is not routed out in a few years, it will probably become a fixed and almost incurable habit. 48

Richard Crooks informs us:

I began my public singing as a boy of ten, and at that age, I was quite unconcerned with the unhappy aspects of nervousness. I had confidence in my teachers and in myself; I was well coached in my songs; I loved to sing—so I simply went out and sang without worry. In the years since then, I have learned more of the difficulties of the task of public singing, and of the responsibility a performer owes to the audience that comes to hear him. And awareness of this kind has, naturally, robbed me of much of my casualness of my boyhood approach. 49

The fact that children rarely experience stage fright gives us a point of departure because, if stage fright is not inherent in the human animal, it must be a learned response. Most authorities accept this idea, and Jones reports, "...we find from the survey of the theories of stage fright, that the primary cause of stage fright is the response to fear


which comes at the beginning of the learning period."^50

Hence, as this condition is so universal, there must be a common factor in our experience which produces this type of behavior; if we can uncover this factor, we may be able to isolate the cause.

Basic human desires. In order to discover the common factor in our experience, let us examine the fundamental desires common to all. Although many classifications have been made of basic desires or wishes, they are generally classified as innate and social. Innate drives are physiological in nature such as hunger, sex, self preservation, and activity; and they are observed in animals as well as humans. However, the social drives of recognition, security, prestige, and new experience appear to apply only to humans.

At birth, the infant has no social desires. However, he soon encounters competition in the form of his brothers and sisters; and, in many cases, he is forced to compare himself unfavorably with them in regard to his parents' attitudes or his own attainments. Inevitably, he encounters increased competition when he begins to form social contacts outside the family. As he grows older, he is thrust into

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competition with strangers, and occasions arise where he is obliged to compare himself unfavorably with others. As Sherman says:

Conflicts of insecurity and inferiority arise because he believes himself in jeopardy of being relegated to an inferior position. He is likely to exaggerate some lack in himself and to believe that society, as represented by his parents and friends will judge him, not by his abilities, but by his lacks and failures. 51

Conflicts of status arise when the child begins to understand social relationships and their competitive nature, and security can be attained only if the individual can compare himself favorably with those who are recognized successes. Gesell says the child begins to worry about not being liked by his parents, teachers, and playmates about the age of seven. 52 The more competitive the environment, the stronger are the desires for prestige and recognition. With age, the methods of satisfying these desires change, but the desires increase in intensity.

**Inception of stage fright symptoms.** Let us return to the child who performs without manifesting symptoms of stage fright. It is this writer's assumption that when this child

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reaches the point of mental maturation where he recognizes the competitive nature of society (this may be a gradual process of unfoldment), he will react to the importance of each occasion. As he faces the audience, he may desire to increase his prestige and recognition, but he may also realize a danger of losing status already attained. At this point, there may, or may not, be elements of conflict present. However the case, the child should be able to recognize an emergency situation. Hence, a physiological reaction should take place. His heart pounds; blood sugar is released to provide extra energy; the adrenal glands secrete adrenalin; his muscles become tense; his mouth feels dry; he perspires, and his hands and legs tremble.

By this time, the child has experienced many emotional reactions, and he should be able to identify the three basic patterns: fear, anger, and love. Fear is a violent emotion that has been experienced frequently, and the child can usually describe his feelings of fear in great detail. Therefore, it is logical to assume that he will identify the pounding of his heart, the sinking feeling in his stomach, the shaking and trembling, and the perspiration with the emotion of fear. The association of these ideas, plus the audience situation (which provides a reason for fear), may produce a genuine emotion of fear, and the child experiences stage fright.
As a result of his fear, the child may be emotionally disturbed to the point where it is reflected in his performance, which results in a loss of prestige or status. Repetition of such failures probably reinforces the fear, and the stage fright symptoms increase and become more intense.

In some cases, the child may be able to control his fear to the extent that he experiences success in the audience situation; and, as stated above, each success probably reduces the number and intensity of the symptoms.

To review, it may be that our social structure places such importance upon the desires for recognition and prestige that any audience situation is a challenge. When the individual reaches the point of maturation where he recognizes this challenge, he will probably react physiologically—the "cold emotion." This "cold emotion" may be incorrectly identified as fear, and the audience situation designated as the reason for the fear. Hence, the "cold emotion" becomes genuine; and, as the experience is repeated, the response to the audience situation may be conditioned into the behavior pattern of the individual.

IV. HEIGHTENED FEELING TONE VERSUS REAL STAGE FRIGHT

At this point, it is necessary to differentiate between what is, and what is not, stage fright. We have discussed the fact that the physiological symptoms of stage fright are identi-
cal to those occurring in all emotion and vigorous activity. Therefore, those people who experience only the physiological symptoms may not be suffering from stage fright; they may be experiencing heightened feeling tone. Only those individuals who manifest the psychological symptoms as well as the physiological symptoms should be said to suffer from real stage fright.

**Heightened feeling tone.** Many of the individuals who believe that they suffer from stage fright are intensely stimulated and excited, but they are able to retain control of their mind and actions. They may shake and tremble, and they may perspire; but they remain intellectually organized and are able to give good, and frequently outstanding, performances because they are alert and alive. As Eisenson says:

> Stage fright is a much-used term for a comparatively rare phenomenon...A fear-like element is undoubtedly present. But the same element is present when we are experiencing pleasurable, and when we anticipate, good things. 53

An individual who does not experience psychological symptoms may be suffering from what Eisenson calls faulty evaluation. This contention is supported by the findings of Wrenchey in her study of experienced and successful speakers. Although

77 percent of the subjects stated that they experienced stage fright, their testimony shows that they do not. Some of their responses to the question, "If you do have stage fright, what are the symptoms?" are listed below:

Oberholtzer: Shortness of breath and pulse increase. Usually my voice doesn't come out evenly and naturally. I am more nervous when I am called on extemporaneously.

Cortwright: I have a dryness of the mouth. Never had it, though, badly enough to be blocked.

Carr: At first I have an empty feeling in the stomach. Unless I have a good reason to talk, I have stage fright in the Nth degree. I have learned to cover this so the audience has no idea.

Gleaves: I have a nervous feeling, I'm just not relaxed. I have learned to control this feeling. Different people are affected differently.54

From the evidence, it is possible that these experienced and successful public speakers are not manifesting stage fright; they may be experiencing the "cold emotion" (physiological reaction) which is our normal response to an emergency situation.

"Real" stage fright. The people who suffer from "real" stage fright are those who experience the psychological as

well as the physiological symptoms. It is imperative that we overcome the symptoms of forgetting, the inability to control one's actions, foreboding, the feeling that the audience is disapproving, and the desire to withdraw. An individual who manifests these reactions is intellectually disorganized and truly frightened. The condition may vary in degree or intensity; but, in every instance, it will affect the performance adversely, and it may warp the individual's entire personality. In his survey of speech fright, Greenleaf reported that, in cases of acute stage fright, "The anticipatory period was characterized by a general feeling of alarm, confusion, inability to organize the speech, worry, and anticipation of unpleasantness." Furthermore, he found that most individuals who experienced severe stage fright could recall one or more unpleasant experiences in audience situations in early life, and they could recount the incidents in detail.\(^5\) These incidents conditioned the person so that he grew to respond fearfully to all audience situations.

Although most people report some form of stage fright reactions, a few individuals state that they do not experience any symptoms. There are two possible reasons for this phenomenon. First, some individuals do not suffer from faulty

\(^{55}\) Greenleaf, op. cit., p. 327.
evaluation. They react physically to the audience situation, but they accept the reaction as a pleasant stimulation which accompanies the event. These individuals utilize their tensions to give outstanding performances. In the second case, there may be people who are content with a small measure of success; and, as they are not striving to excel, they are content to settle for mediocre performances. Naturally, these two instances will not provide the answer in all cases.
CHAPTER III

OVERCOMING STAGE FRIGHT

From the published writing about the subject, there appear to be almost as many remedies for stage fright as there are people who experience it. These remedies range from the quackery of burning the back of the throat with a red hot needle to a somewhat scientific attempt to arrest the physical reactions by dosing the subject with medicine. In this chapter, we shall discuss the currently accepted theories on controlling stage fright and attempt to develop a scientific method of accomplishing this objective.

Theories about overcoming stage fright. Most of the intelligent work in regard to overcoming or controlling stage fright can be summarized under a few classifications. Lomas' summary of this work can be paraphrased as follows:

1. The vigorous action theory. This theory has its basis in the early work of Cannon, and assumes that the chemical condition responsible for the emotion can be worked off. The later work of Cannon, however, shows that the opposite is true, that the chemical concentration actually is increased, or at best maintained, by vigorous activity.

Further, we have demonstrated that the chemical composition of the blood with its visceral accompaniments is not responsible, except in rare instances for the condition of stage fright.... If the suggestion has merit, it lies in directing the activity toward a definite goal. If the vigorous action is developed as a means of carrying a message, it undoubtedly will help to assert cortical control and divert the emotion to its proper useful purpose.

2. The shift-of-attention theory. This theory argues that it is possible to master the stage fright situation by handling objects on the stage, taking deep breaths, walking, etc., most of the suggestions being at least partially extraneous to the speech situation. These suggestions also will undoubtedly help to master stage fright, but they do not seem to the writer to be helpful solutions to the problem of developing good speech. They are developing cortical control and integration of activity toward a goal, but the goal is not the one of presenting the message of the speech. Nothing is gained by elimination of stage fright if the resultant product is dull, indirect, or aimless in development.

3. The have-a-message theory. History is full of examples of inarticulate men who became speakers by having a message to portray. Moses was said to be slow of speech, the twelve disciples were unprepossessing enough, Joan of Arc was a simple peasant girl.... Every teacher of speech can cite instances of students who were complete failures until a particular topic caught their fancy and aroused lagging interest. This method suggests the theory of cortical control at its best, and should be the goal of every teacher of speech.58

To these three classifications, let us add the preparation theory. Almost all authorities list preparation either as the single most important factor in overcoming stage fright or they place it high on the list. And there is good reason to

58 Lomas, op. cit., pp. 42-43.
do so. Adequate preparation is fundamental to success in any type of endeavor. Furthermore, if the individual has not prepared adequately, he has good reason to fear failure. However, no amount of preparation will solve the problem for an individual who has been conditioned to manifest "real" stage fright. Such a person becomes intellectually disorganized in the audience situation; he becomes confused and forgets what he is supposed to do. Therefore, although adequate preparation is basic to good performance, it is not the complete solution to the problem of stage fright.

Although the theories present many suggestions for overcoming the problem of stage fright, only two methods have been proven successful in overcoming these reactions. They are: the have-a-message-theory and training or experience in speaking. As Lomas stated, every teacher of speech has seen how an individual can suddenly forget his speech problem and become a convincing speaker when his interest is aroused to a pitch of excitement. In the second case, every experiment in the field has demonstrated that speech training reduces the intensity and number of symptoms of stage fright. In an experiment with 205 students at Iowa State Teachers College, Henrikson found that speech training promoted confidence in the audience situation and that these feelings were generalized to include all speaking situations, not only the type of speaking in which the student participated during his train-
ing. Kniseley, in his study of prominent speakers, discovered that all but three of 60 subjects experienced stage fright reactions in their earlier speaking activities; however, the reactions decreased rapidly in from less than a year to three years after their public speaking activities began. Among 11 subjects, the reactions disappeared entirely. He concluded:

The only factor which seems to coincide consistently and positively with the decrease of stage fright among the subjects is that of frequent and regular speaking experiences. The majority reported that their stage fright diminished or disappeared within less than a year after beginning a regular speaking schedule.

Many other authorities, such as Lomas, Greenleaf, Moore, Jones, and Henrikson, have found that experience in speaking definitely aids in reducing stage fright and aids in increasing the individual's self-sufficiency, dominance, and emotional stability. Unfortunately, none of them has provided a reason for this improvement.


60 Kniseley, op. cit., p. 22.

Extinction of conditioned responses. Theories are both interesting and helpful; but, if we are to discover a cure, we must return to the cause. As we have stated, "real" stage fright is apparently a conditioned response. Therefore, we must take action to extinguish or recondition this response.

Pavlov classified the process of extinction into internal and external inhibition. External inhibition results when a disturbing factor is presented during the conditioning. This disturbance directs the subject's attention to the new stimulus and inhibits the conditioned reflex. Pavlov said that frequently an experimenter would invite him to witness a demonstration of a new conditioned reflex in a dog, and then everything would go wrong. The dog would not react at all. The reason for this situation is that the presence of a stranger presented an extra stimulus which inhibited the conditioned response. Pavlov states:

It was I who presented the extra stimulus: the investigatory reflex was immediately brought into play: the dog gazed at me, and smelled at me, and of course this was sufficient to inhibit every recently established reflex. Another example is very similar. If one experimenter had worked with a dog and established some firm and stable conditioned reflexes, conducting numerous experiments with them, when he handed the animal over to another experimenter to work with, all the reflexes disappeared for a considerable time. The same happened when the dog was changed over from one research room to another.  

The most striking factor about external inhibition is that it is produced immediately; the extinction of the conditioned response is instantaneous. Unfortunately, this type of extinction is only temporary in most cases. If the new stimuli act upon the subject repeatedly, and are not reinforced, they lose their inhibitory properties. As Pavlov informs us:

No sooner does any extra nervous excitation occur in the central nervous system than it immediately makes its presence felt in diminishing or abolishing conditioned reflexes, but temporarily only, as long as the causative stimulus or its after-effect is present.63

External inhibition explains the elimination of stage fright symptoms in the case of individuals who lose themselves in their presentation—the have-a-message-theory. Inarticulate people, who suddenly become persuasive speakers, do so because their interest in the subject excites them to a point where they concentrate all their thoughts and actions on their goal rather than on themselves. This extra stimulus inhibits the conditioned reflex—stage fright. As Lomas says, this method demonstrates cortical control at its best, but, as the condition is only temporary, this method is not the complete answer to the problem. As soon as the individual is obliged to address an audience on a subject that does not provide this intense

63 Ibid., p. 47.
stimulation, or if he continues to speak on the same topic without some type of reinforcement, the conditioned response ---stage fright---will return.

In contrast to external inhibition, internal inhibition develops progressively, quite often very slowly. The process, although quite simple, is quite difficult to accomplish successfully. One simply presents, repeatedly, the conditioned stimulus and insures that it is not followed by the unconditioned stimulus. In other words, the learning is not reinforced. Pavlov says, "In extinction, the positive conditioned stimulus is temporarily transformed into a negative or inhibitory one by the simple method of repeating it several times in succession without reinforcement."\(^6\) The process of internal inhibition can be strengthened by associating the feared object with a stimulus which is pleasant. This procedure is called reconditioning. For example, a hungry child is given food, and a feared object is placed some distance away. Gradually, the object is moved closer to the child each time he is given food. In this fashion, it is possible to overcome the fear; and, in some cases, the child will respond positively to the object. However, one must follow this procedure with great care. If the child exhibits intense fear, or if the object is introduced too rapidly,

the conditioning may reverse, and the child may develop a fear of eating. However, with care, the conditioned reflex becomes progressively weakened, and in some cases will disappear entirely. 65

The difficulty of extinguishing the conditioned reaction is directly proportionate to the intensity of the response, and often the progress of reconditioning will fluctuate because of external and internal factors. Hence, if one is to succeed, all the environmental conditions must be held constant. Pavlov proposes:

To obtain a smooth curve of extinction of a conditioned reflex, it is necessary to maintain the unreinforced conditioned stimulus rigidly constant in character and strength: the environmental experimental conditions also must remain absolutely constant. 66

The nervous systems of different individuals are never of the same intensity. Therefore, one cannot prescribe a standard amount of reinforcement, or lack of it, necessary to extinguish a conditioned response. Pavlov says:

...the more vigorous a conditioned reflex, or in other words the greater the intensity of the excitatory process the more intense must be the inhibitory process in order to overcome it, and therefore, the greater the number of unreinforced repetitions necessary to bring about

65 Boring, Langfield, and Weld, op. cit., p. 176.
66 Ibid., p. 50.
In addition to the above difficulties involved in the process of extinction, it is possible for the conditioned reflex to recur instantly if the unconditioned stimulus should be applied—a process called spontaneous recovery. As Kniseley reported in his study of prominent speakers, "Among thirty-seven of the subjects (total of 60), stage fright tends to recur in increased intensity on infrequent occasions."68

From the above discussion, the author deduces that speech training or experience in speaking reduces the symptoms of stage fright because the training or experience is actually a process of internal inhibition. It may be that inasmuch as the unconditioned stimulus (audience situation) is presented without the conditioned stimulus (failure, loss of status, etc.), the conditioned response becomes progressively weakened.

Training alone, however, does not always prove successful in inhibiting the reactions. Greenleaf tells of a student who said, "I was told that I needed more experience in public speaking, so enrolled in a course in debate and a course in discussion. It was torture and my stage fright is no better."69 The reason for this situation, it appears, is that the in-

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67 Ibid., p. 61.
68 Kniseley, op. cit., p. 22.
69 Greenleaf, op. cit., p. 329.
tensity of the subject's fear, plus the fact that each public appearance resulted in failure, resulted in a process of reinforcing the conditioned response rather than inhibiting it. Training will not eliminate stage fright reactions unless the subject experiences success in the audience situation.

**A practical approach to the control of stage fright.** The logical answer to the problem of stage fright appears to be to attempt to bring about the extinction of the psychological symptoms through a combination of external and internal inhibition. That is, we should discover some topic in which the subject is intensely interested, a subject that will focus his attention toward attaining a goal rather than on himself. All beginning speeches should be about such a topic (external inhibition). In some cases, the individual may overcome his fright from the first experience. In addition, we should prepare a program of successful speaking experiences for the subject (internal inhibition). The conditioned response should be progressively weakened by presenting the unconditioned stimulus (audience situation) without the conditioned stimulus (failure). In fact, we should recondition the individual to a completely new stimulus of success in the audience situation.

As each individual differs in the intensity of his stage fright reactions, it would be impossible to establish
any set number of experiences which would extinguish these responses. Furthermore, the greatest care must be directed toward ensuring that the speaker does not experience failure or simultaneous recovery. He must be able to associate success and pleasure with each appearance; hence, the audience should be carefully selected and coached as to how to respond.

Environmental conditions and external factors should be controlled to as great an extent as possible. The speaker should be familiar with the surroundings in which he is to perform, and he must be adequately prepared and painstakingly coached in the correct techniques of speaking and gesturing.

At first, the speeches should be extremely short and presented to very small audiences. Gradually, the length of the speeches and the size of the audience can be increased. However, each individual should be allowed to progress at his own rate. The training should be divided into steps; when he can satisfactorily perform the beginning task, the speaker should be advanced to the following step. In cases of extremely severe stage fright, this process of reconditioning or extinction can be planned over a period of years.

It may be impossible to extinguish the conditioned reactions in some subjects. However, with careful planning, we may be able to assist most individuals to overcome their psychological symptoms; and, with a thorough understanding of the
physiological reactions, they should be able to give an adequate performance.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were derived from this study:

1. Stage fright symptoms are both physiological and psychological; and, although it is difficult to differentiate between the two classifications, the physiological reactions appear to be identical to those experienced in any of the strong emotions, vigorous activity, or by the injection of adrenalin. Therefore, these reactions may be considered useful to the speaker in accomplishing the task of getting his message across to the audience. Physiological reactions should not be detrimental to the speech; they should be expected, recognized, and used for the purpose for which they were intended---to meet an emergency situation.

2. Stage fright appears to be a learned response. When the child reaches an age where he recognizes the competitiveness of our society, the audience situation may present a challenge. Hence, the child should react physically to meet this challenge. If he identifies his sensations as fear, he will probably designate the audience situation as the reason for the fear. As a result, the "cold emotion" could develop into genuine fear, and the child would experience stage fright.
3. Stage fright is apparently brought about through a process of conditioned learning. If the child, in his early experiences, fails in his performances, he may associate his failure with the audience situation. This fear may become generalized to include all forms of audience situations; and, the more the experience is repeated (reinforced), the stronger may become the conditioned response.

4. Many performers who experience only the physiological symptoms may not be suffering from stage fright; they may be experiencing heightened feeling tone. Although most people who manifest the physical symptoms believe that they are experiencing stage fright, they may not. If, in spite of the fact that they shake and tremble, that they perspire freely, and that they have a cold feeling in their stomachs, their actions are goal directed, they are probably only experiencing a normal physiological reaction to a challenging situation. In many cases, the increased muscular tension may aid in giving an outstanding performance. Such performers should not try to overcome their physiological reactions; they should endeavor to utilize them to attain their goals.

5. It appears that "real" stage fright is experienced only by those individuals who manifest the psychological as well as the physiological symptoms. Inasmuch as the physiological reactions are taking place constantly in all types of
activity, they should not be detrimental, but useful, to a good performance. On the other hand, a person who forgets, who cannot control his movements, and who is intellectually disorganized is genuinely frightened. These individuals are the ones who require our help. Fortunately, the number of people who fall into this category is small.

6. It is believed that the reason that training in speech and the **have-a-message** theory have been successful in reducing or overcoming the effects of stage fright is because these procedures are actually the processes of internal and external inhibition. Inasmuch as these two methods are the only proven procedures that have been discovered, they substantiate the theory of stage fright as a result of conditioned learning.

7. If stage fright is truly a conditioned response, it should be possible to overcome the response through the process of extinction. Therefore, a carefully planned program of speaking experiences, incorporating all the factors of preparation, interest, training, etc., should be devised to recondition the speaker to associate the stimulus of success, rather than the stimulus of failure, with the audience situation.

This study is only the first step in the formulation of the theory that stage fright is the result of conditioned learning. In order to test the validity of the hypothesis,
a great deal of additional experimental work is needed. Some of the areas indicated are:

1. A number of experiments should be conducted with groups of individuals who manifest severe stage fright in order to test the validity of the theory outlined in this study.

2. A study should be conducted of non-competitive cultures to determine whether these peoples manifest symptoms of stage fright. Is the phenomenon restricted to competitive societies?

3. An investigation should be made of the possibilities of preventing the conditioning process. Can we develop specific measures which can be employed by teachers and parents during the formative years of the child?
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