

The Influence of Self-Disclosure on School-Age Children ' s Perceptions of Children Who Stutter

Previous research [25] has suggested that the formulation of negative stereotypes regarding persons who stutter evolve for at least two reasons. First, the observer is projecting the anxiety, nervousness, and/or uncertainty s/he experiences during moments of _____ and assumes that those same feelings apply to the person who stutters during instances of stuttering. _____ second reason is that the observer feels anxious and uncomfortable when s/he is listening to a person who stutters and assumes that the speaker who stutters is feeling the same way. Despite research indicating that atypical nervousness and/or anxiety are not causal contributors to stuttering [26] the stuttering stereotype persists. To minimize the negative and inaccurate perceptions towards persons who stutter, speech-language pathologists encourage clients who stutter to self-disclose the fact that they stutter when engaging with new communication partners.

Self-disclosure has been suggested as a strategy for persons who associate with groups at risk for stigmatization with the outcomes indicating that disclosing to others leads to self-empowerment and decreases vulnerability to the stereotype threat [27,28]. Although empirical evidence is needed, self-disclosure should presumably provide the same _____ to persons who stutter. Research completed

[39], purposeful self-disclosure is conducive to overcoming fears associated with stuttering

In summary, the act of self-disclosure facilitates the child's ability to acknowledge, in an open, straightforward manner, the fact that s/he is

two speakers. To quantify the speakers' secondary behaviors, 14 trained undergraduate research assistants analyzed the stimuli videos using the physical concomitants section of Stuttering Severity Instrument for Adults and Children - Fourth Edition (SSI-4; Riley, 2009). Each speaker was rated on a scale of 0 to 5 (0=none, 1=not noticeable unless looking for it, 2=barely noticeable to casual observer, 3=distracting, 4=very distracting, 5=severe and painful looking) on the following behaviors: 1) distracting sounds, 2) facial grimaces, 3) head movements, and 4) movements of the extremities. An average score across the four physical concomitant types was computed for each rater and a total score averaged across raters was obtained for each

participant with neutral intonation, and recording the child's verbal responses verbatim onto the survey. The survey portion of the experiment was audio recorded to allow for post-session review of the child's verbal responses by the researcher to ensure that the responses were recorded completely and accurately. The recording was also reviewed to ensure that participant responses were not influenced by his/her parent or the researcher.

either viewing the same video with only the self-disclosure statement edited out, or they were viewing one of the genders self-disclosing and comparing it to the other not self-disclosing. In either case, there were no differences in the percentage of positive responses produced by the speakers between the two videos and yet observers reported “less stuttering” in the self-disclosure video recordings.

In general, the results of the present study suggest that children perceive other children who stutter more positively in terms of establishing interpersonal relationships (i.e., friendlier) and also more engaging in their overall communication when they self-disclose (i.e., less distracting). Present findings are consistent with the results of past research conducted with adults, which suggests that observers prefer to interact with adults who stutter who acknowledge their stuttering. For example, Collins [29] concluded that when a male speaker who stutters acknowledged his stuttering during an initial interaction, the observer was more comfortable and responded to the speaker more favorably.

Furthermore, the results of the present study demonstrate consistencies with the findings of Healey et al. [32], who conducted a follow-up study to Collins, et al. [29], that also investigated the impact of self-disclosure on observers’ perceptions of an adult who stutters.

When viewing one of three possible videos featuring an adult who stutters (one in which the speaker self-disclosed at the beginning of the monologue, another in which the speaker self-disclosed at the end of the monologue, and a third in which no disclosure of stuttering occurred), observers rated a set of six Likert statements related to various character traits. The only statement that was significantly different across the three conditions was that the speaker was perceived to be more friendly when disclosing stuttering at the end of the monologue than when not disclosing stuttering. Although in the present study the self-disclosure statement occurred at the beginning of the monologues, the observers appeared to perceive the speaker as more friendly when self-disclosure occurred as compared to when it did not.

In addition to the aforementioned studies, Lee, et al. [34] also evaluated the impact of self-disclosure on adult observer perceptions, measured by ratings for 21 bipolar adjective pairs related to personality, intelligence, and appearance. Similar to the present study, no significant differences were found when participants viewed one video that contained acknowledgment of the stuttering and one that did not, with moderately more favorable responses by observers when disclosure of the stuttering occurred.

Influence of speaker gender

In the present study, observers were more likely to rate female speakers who stutter as having certain positive character traits (i.e., friendlier, more intelligent) compared to male speakers who stutter, regardless of the presence or absence of a self-disclosure statement.

The hypothesis predicting that gender bias would only be present when the person who stutters did not self-disclose was not supported.

The preference towards characterizing the female speaker as more intelligent and friendlier compared to the male speaker was in contrast with other studies that favor males over females across multiple disciplines [42-45].

These findings also seem to suggest that the dual discrimination for females may be more applicable to adults. Past studies that examined gender biases included adult participants and not children. In addition, prior studies that investigated children’s perception of persons who stutter [13,23] included adult speakers and not child speakers and did not investigate potential gender biases.

Results from the present study indicate prior experience with stuttering does not seem to influence child perceptions of children who stutter. That is, observers’ opinions about the personality traits and the inclusion or absence of a self-disclosure statement in the videos were not statistically significant. These results were in contrast to prior research in adults who stutter, which has indicated that prior experience with stuttering may positively influence observers’ perceptions and attitudes toward persons who stutter [46]. However, present findings were in agreement with Byrd et al. (in press), who also reported that past experience with a person who stutters did not mediate observer perceptions. Since prior exposure to stuttering does not consistently seem to play a role in people’s perceptions of persons who stutter, it is suggested that children who stutter self-disclose when it seems appropriate to do so regardless as to whether the person they are interacting with has had any prior or ongoing interactions with other persons who stutter.

Clinical considerations and future directions

Data from the present study demonstrate clinicians should not limit their recommendation of use of self-disclosure to adults as the act of self-disclosure may also serve to positively influence observer perceptions of children who stutter. As suggested by Collins, et al. [29], it is plausible that by making an overt statement that acknowledges his/her stuttering the speaker is able to reduce the level of ambiguity regarding the occurrence of stuttering during a social interaction, thereby improving the likelihood of a favorable response.

In addition, the manner in which the client self-discloses has a significant impact on listener perceptions. Byrd et al. (under review) recently found that the use of a non-apologetic, neutral self-disclosure statement, such as “Hi. My name is Christine and I stutter. You may hear me repeat or prolong sounds and syllables as I speak. If there is anything I say that you do not understand, please let me know and I will be happy to say it again.” results in significantly more positive perceptions than use of an apologetic statement (e.g., “Hi. My name is Christine and I stutter. Please bear with me as speaking has always been difficult for me”). However, as Byrd and colleagues also report, clinicians should be aware that when asked to write a self-disclosure statement, clients almost always write one that is apologetic in nature. Instruction with regard to revising their statement to be more neutral in nature, and explanation as to why that is critical, enhanced the positive impact of self-disclosure.

Finally, there is a clear need for additional research with regard to the clinical utility of self-disclosure. Our clinical anecdotal data demonstrate

questions would need to be worded in such a way that would prevent redundancy with the survey. is, the open-ended questions should not lead the participant to respond with the vocabulary used in the closed-ended survey questions (e.g, friendlier; more shy, etc.) so as to provide novel information regarding the observer's perceptions of the speaker. Finally, the relationship between the use of self-disclosure and the impact of stuttering on the person who stutters' communication attitudes and overall quality of life should be considered in future research.

With regards to the general perception of persons who stutter; men have been found to evaluate persons who stutter more negatively than women [47,48]. On the other hand, Dietrich, et al. [49] determined

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