



Exploratory research in the measurement and modification of attitudes toward stuttering

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Abstract

Past studies attempting to both measure and change stuttering stereotypes using semantic differential scales have indicated that clinicians' attitudes toward stuttering have been negative, robust, and resistant to change. This study measured changes in clinicians' attitudes after viewing either a factual video depicting the fluency-evoking effects of altered auditory feedback or an emotionally insightful video depicting the negative social consequences of stuttering. Two groups of graduate speech-language pathology clinicians took part in this ABA study design measuring participant responses to the two videos. Twenty-one participants completed surveys before and after viewing an emotional documentary depicting the life of a young girl who stutters. Another group of 34 graduate clinicians completed surveys before and after viewing a brief factual video exhibiting the immediate amelioration of stuttering behaviors at both normal and fast speaking rates while under the effects of altered auditory feedback. While post-testing results indicated that both of these documentaries were associated with a few changes in perceptions of stuttering, such changes were subtle. Moreover, the few significant perceptual changes found cannot be considered a noteworthy success in modifying graduate clinicians' perceptions of stuttering so that they better resemble the stuttering population described by prior psychological and stuttering research. Future research, along with the fate of current and past methodologies attempting to change the negative stuttering stereotype, is discussed. *Educational objectives:* (1) Readers will become familiarized with the negative stereotypes of persons who stutter; (2) readers will become familiarized with research attempting to modify negative perceptions of people who stutter; and (3) readers will

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become familiarized with possible explanations for the persistence of negative stuttering stereotypes. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Research has shown that many populations hold negative stereotypes toward persons who stutter. These stereotypes include the belief that people who stutter are generally quiet, reticent, guarded, avoiding, introverted, passive, self-derogatory, anxious, tense, nervous, and afraid (Crow & Cooper, 1977; Fowlie & Cooper, 1978; Woods & Williams, 1976). These stereotyped beliefs are held by speech-language pathologists and speech-language pathology students (Cooper & Cooper, 1982, 1985; Cooper & Rustin, 1985; Kalinowski, Armson, Stuart, & Lerman, 1993; Lass et al., 1989; Leahy, 1994; St. Louis & Lass, 1981; Turnbaugh, Guitar, & Hoffman, 1979; Woods & Williams, 1971; Yairi & Williams, 1970), teachers and special educators (Crow & Walton, 1981; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Ruscello, Lass, Schmitt, & Pannbacker, 1994; Silverman & Marik, 1993; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986), parents (Crow & Cooper, 1977; Fowlie & Cooper, 1978; Woods & Williams, 1976), employers and vocational counselors (Craig & Calver, 1991; Just & Cooper, 1983; Silverman & Paynter, 1990), and people who stutter themselves (Kalinowski, Lerman, & Watt, 1987; Lass et al., 1995).

While negative stereotypes of people who stutter are both common and accepted, psychological data do not support the presence of distinctive or common negative personality traits found within the stuttering population. An expansive literature review including psychological research and personal evaluations of the stuttering population concluded that people who stutter are not “distinctly neurotic or severely maladjusted,” do not seem to carry common “character structure or broad set of basic personality traits,” and appear to fall within normal ranges of personal adjustment (Bloodstein, 1995, p. 236). While an intuitive argument could be made that people who stutter are less socially adjusted than fluent speakers, or that people who stutter have common distinct personality traits, results from an assortment of psychological studies remain inconclusive (Bloodstein, 1995, p. 237). Despite the lack of empirical data supporting the commonly held negative perceptions of the stuttering population, these notions persist and are pervasive in our culture, with no substantive successes in making the stuttering stereotype more congruent with the psychological research literature.

Past research suggests that negative stereotypes of people who stutter remain intact regardless of personal exposure or family relationship to stuttering (Doody, Kalinowski, Armson, & Stuart, 1993; Leahy, 1994; McGee, Kalinowski, & Stuart, 1996). Doody et al. (1993) surveyed 106 members in three small, rural communities in Newfoundland, Canada using a 25-item semantic differential scale (Woods & Williams, 1976). Those surveyed were asked to rate both “a

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