



## Factors affecting occupational advice for speakers who do and do not stutter

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### ABSTRACT

Factors affecting perceptions of occupational suitability were examined for speakers who stutter and speakers who do not stutter. In Experiment 1, 58 adults who do not stutter heard one of two audio recordings (less severe stuttering, more severe stuttering) of a speaker who stuttered. Participants rated the speaker's communicative functioning, personal attributes, and suitability for 32 occupations, along with perceptions of the occupations' speaking demands and educational requirements. Perceived speaking demand strongly affected occupational suitability ratings at both levels of stuttering severity. In Experiment 2, 58 additional adults who do not stutter heard a recording of another adult in one of two conditions (fluent speech, pseudo-stuttering), and provided the same ratings as in Experiment 1. In the pseudo-stuttering condition, participants' perceptions of occupational speaking demand again had a strong effect on occupational suitability ratings. In the fluent condition, suitability ratings were affected primarily by perceived educational demand; perceived speaking demand was of secondary importance. Across all participants in Experiment 2, occupational suitability ratings were associated with ratings of the speaker's personal attributes and communicative functioning. In both experiments, speakers who stuttered received lower suitability ratings for high speaking demand occupations than for low speaking demand occupations. Ratings for many high speaking occupations, however, fell just below the midpoint of the occupational suitability scale, suggesting that participants viewed these occupations as less appropriate, but not necessarily inappropriate, for people who stutter. Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that people who stutter may face occupational stereotyping and/or role entrapment in work settings.

**Educational objectives:** At the end of this activity the reader will be able to (a) summarize main findings on research related to the work-related experiences of people who stutter, (b) describe factors that affect perceptions of which occupations are best suited for speakers who stutter and speakers who do not stutter, and (c) discuss how findings from the present study relate to previous findings on occupational advice for people who stutter.

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### 1. Introduction

Stuttering is a speech disorder that impairs a person's ability to speak fluently (Logan, 2010; Wingate, 1964; and see Langevin, Kully, Teshima, Hagler, & Prasad, 2010; Van Borsel, Reunes, & Van den Bergh, 2003 for examples). Most of the

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research on stuttering has examined the nature, characteristics, assessment, and treatment of the disorder (see Bloodstein & Bernstein Ratner, 2008, and Manning, 2010 for reviews). Beyond this, however, there has been growing interest in examining the broader context within which stuttering exists. This has led to the development of clinical tools to measure the impact of stuttering on a person's life (e.g., Craig, Blumgart, & Tran, 2009; Gillam, Logan, & Pearson, 2009; Vanryckeghem, Brutten, & Hernandez, 2005; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006) as well as research into various personal and environmental factors that are potentially associated with the expression of the disorder (e.g., Blumgart, Tran, & Craig, 2010; Mulcahy, Hennessey, Beilby, & Byrnes, 2008; Tran, Blumgart, & Craig, 2011; Van Borsel, Brepoels, & De Coene, 2011; Yaruss, 1998; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004).

The present study deals with an aspect of the environment that is highly relevant to people who stutter: factors that influence others' perceptions of which occupations are most suitable for fluent and disfluent speakers. Although it is widely recognized that people who do not stutter regard stuttered speech and people who stutter less favorably than they regard fluent speech and people who do not stutter (Cooper & Cooper, 1996; Davis, Howell, & Cook, 2002; Doody, Kalinowski, Armson, & Stuart, 1993; Panico, Healey, Brouwer, & Susca, 2005; Woods & Williams, 1971; Yairi & Williams, 1970), the factors that lead to such views are only partly understood (Logan & Willis, 2011; MacKinnon, Hall, & MacIntyre, 2007). Given the centrality of work-related issues to the lives of most adults, it seems important for clinicians to develop as complete an understanding as possible of the factors that drive the stuttering-related perceptions of people who do not stutter. Such information is potentially useful at both a societal level (e.g., devising strategies for how to alter public perceptions of people who stutter) and a personal level (e.g., helping clients who stutter develop strategies for how to respond to others' reactions to stuttering). More generally, it has the potential to provide clinicians with additional insight into the nature and depth of the stuttering experience—an attribute which clients who stutter often cite as being fundamental to their perceptions of therapeutic effectiveness (Plexico, Manning, & DiLollo, 2010).

### 1.1. Stuttering and work-related issues

To date, most studies of how people who do not stutter view people who stutter have focused upon either perceptions of general personal characteristics (e.g., Doody et al., 1993; Kalinowski, Armson, Stuart, & Lerman, 1993; Lass, Ruscello, Pannbacker, & Schmitt, 1995; Panico et al., 2005; Woods & Williams, 1971; Yairi & Williams, 1970) or perceptions of the communicative experiences of people who stutter (e.g., Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004; Hughes, Gabel, Irani, & Schlagheck, 2010; Logan & Willis, 2011). Consequently, relatively little is known about how people who do not stutter view the various societal roles that people who stutter fulfill, particularly those related to occupational choice, career progression, and job performance.

Hurst and Cooper (1983a) conducted an extensive survey of how employers view people who stutter. Some of the findings that they reported include the following: nearly half of the surveyed employers reported that interacting with a person who stuttered made them feel "somewhat uncomfortable;" about 40% of employers felt that stuttering hindered job promotion possibilities; about 75% felt that stuttering negatively affected employability; and 50% reported that, given the choice of hiring two applicants who were comparable in every way except for stuttering, it was preferable to hire the person who did not stutter. Several factors affected the participants' response patterns, including the number of employees in the work setting and the employer's gender, educational level, work experience, and personal experience in working with people who stutter.

In a related study, Hurst and Cooper (1983b) surveyed vocational counselors on their perceptions of the work-related experiences of people who stutter. As with the employer survey, there were an assortment of findings, including these: about 80% of counselors agreed that most people are uncomfortable when interacting with a person who stutters; 77% agreed that stuttering is vocationally handicapping; 70% agreed that employers tend to discriminate against people with speech disorders; about 50% agreed that people who stutter tend to have psychological problems; and about 50% agreed that stuttering was one of the most vocationally handicapping speech disorders. As with their study of employers, Hurst and Cooper reported that the counselors' responses to some items on the rating scale were affected by their experience in working with people who stutter. Counselors who were relatively experienced in working with people who stutter viewed stuttering as being more handicapping than counselors who were relatively inexperienced.

The work-related ratings made by employers and vocational counselors for people who stutter are roughly consistent with work-related experiences reported by people who stutter. For instance, in a large-scale survey of members of the British Stammering Association (Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002), 38% of respondents said that stuttering affected their work-related activities "a lot" and 45% said it affected work-related activities "a bit." Klein and Hood (2004) asked 232 National Stuttering Association members who lived in the United States to rate statements about their work-related experiences and the work-related experiences of other people who stutter. Overall, the participants' ratings for other people who stutter were less favorable than their ratings for their own experiences. Nearly 70% of the participants felt that stuttering negatively affected the ability of people who stutter to be hired and promoted; about 70% felt that stuttering had interfered at some time with their job performance, about 50% felt that they would perform their current job better if they did not stutter; about 40% agreed they would likely have a different job if they did not stutter; and 20% reported that they had turned down a job or a promotion because of the speaking demands associated with the job.

In other studies, it has been shown that the work-related speaking challenges faced by people who stutter persist across the lifespan (Bricker-Katz, Lincoln, & McCabe, 2010; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004) and may not fully resolve after they participate in speech therapy (Cream, Onslow, Packman, & Llewellyn, 2003). Some individuals, however, have

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