

The effects of self-disclosure and non self-disclosure of stuttering on listeners' perceptions of a person who stutters

E. Charles Healey^{a,*}, Rodney M. Gabel^b,
Derek E. Daniels^b, Nori Kawai^a

^a *University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, United States*

^b *Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH, United States*

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine listener perceptions of an adult male person who stutters (PWS) who did or did not disclose his stuttering. Ninety adults who do not stutter individually viewed one of three videotaped monologues produced by a male speaker with severe stuttering. In one monologue, 30 listeners heard the speaker disclose stuttering at the beginning and in another monologue, 30 listeners heard the speaker disclose stuttering at the end. A third group of 30 listeners viewed a monologue where no disclosure of stuttering occurred. After listeners viewed a monologue, they were asked to rate a set of six Likert scale statements and answer three open-ended questions.

The results showed that only one of six Likert statements was significantly different across the three conditions. The only statement that was different was that the speaker was perceived to be significantly more friendly when disclosing stuttering at the end of the monologue than when not disclosing stuttering. There were no significant differences between the percentage of positive and negative comments made by listeners across the three conditions. Listeners' comments to each open-ended question showed they were comfortable listening to stuttering with or without disclosure and slightly more than half of the listeners believed their perceptions of the speaker did not change when he disclosed stuttering. The results also showed that the speaker who disclosed stuttering at the beginning of the monologue received significantly more positive listener comments than when he disclosed stuttering at the end of the monologue. Results are discussed relative to comparisons with the [Collins and Blood \(1990\)](#) study, the clinical relevance

* Corresponding author at: 253 Barkley Memorial Center, Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0731, United States. Tel.: +1 402 4725459; fax: +1 402 4727697.

of acknowledging stuttering as a component of treatment, and future research on the self-disclosure of stuttering.

Educational objectives: The reader will be able to: (1) describe how different groups of listeners perceive and respond to two conditions of self-disclosure of stuttering and one condition involving non self-disclosure of stuttering; (2) summarize the range of listener responses to and benefits of self-disclosure of stuttering; and (3) describe the value of self-disclosure of stuttering for the listener and the speaker.

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1. Introduction

For several decades, research has shown that listeners tend to have negative perceptions of a person who stutters (PWS) which have led to negative stereotypes (Cooper & Cooper, 1996; Ham, 1990; Turnbaugh, Guitar, & Hoffman, 1979; Woods & Williams, 1976). In fact, these negative perceptions and stereotypes can be formed even if a person doesn't have direct contact or interaction with a PWS. Perhaps one aspect of the negative listener perception evolves from a listener's discomfort or uncertainty about people who stutter and/or how to react when stuttering occurs during a communicative interaction (White & Collins, 1984; Woods & Williams, 1976).

It has been suggested that clinicians can help people who stutter minimize the negative impact stuttering might have on a listener if they are taught to use a self disclosure technique such as "acknowledgement" (Collins & Blood, 1990) or "advertising" (Breitenfeldt & Lorenz, 1989). The purpose of either one of these techniques is (1) to reduce the sensitivity to and/or promote acceptance of his/her stuttering and (2) to reduce any negative listener biases toward the PWS (Breitenfeldt & Lorenz; Collins & Blood). It has also been suggested that the act of self-disclosing benefits those who stutter by reducing anxiety or tension about hiding stuttering from a listener, and improving social interactions with people who do not stutter (Bloodstein, 1995; Collins & Blood, 1990; Sheehan, 1975; Van Riper, 1982).

Although there is support for the use of acknowledgement with a variety of disabilities, (Blood & Blood, 1982; Hastorf, Wildfold, & Cassman, 1979) there is only one published study by Collins and Blood (1990) that has documented the usefulness of acknowledgment for people who stutter. Collins and Blood examined the effects of the acknowledgment by having listeners watch a videotape of one of two adult males with mild stuttering or one of two adult males with severe stuttering answering questions during a mock job interview. In each videotape, listeners heard the PWS acknowledge stuttering at the end of the job interview and were told that he stuttered all of his life, was receiving treatment for his stuttering, and that he did not mind that people knew that he stuttered. The acknowledgment of stuttering was followed or preceded by another job interview in which another person with a similar degree of stuttering did not acknowledge that he stuttered. After watching the videotaped job interviews, listeners were asked to rate the *two* speakers relative to 14 bipolar opposites (i.e., sincere-insincere; likeable-not likeable, etc.) on a seven point scale developed by Burley and Rinaldi (1986) and answer a series of questions about their perceptions of the speakers such as how they would act around the speaker, how the speaker would act around strangers, and how easy it would be to work with the individuals who stuttered.

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