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Clinical utility of self-disclosure for adults who stutter: Apologetic versus informative statements



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the present study was to explore the clinical utility of self-disclosure, particularly, whether disclosing in an informative manner would result in more positive observer ratings of the speaker who stutters than either disclosing in an apologetic manner or choosing not to self-disclose at all.

Method: Observers (N = 338) were randomly assigned to view one of six possible videos (i.e., adult male informative self-disclosure, adult male apologetic self-disclosure, adult male no self-disclosure, adult female informative self-disclosure, adult female apologetic self-disclosure, adult female no self-disclosure). Observers completed a survey assessing their perceptions of the speaker they viewed immediately after watching the video.

Results: Results suggest that self-disclosing in an informative manner leads to significantly more positive observer ratings than choosing not to self-disclose. In contrast, use of an apologetic statement, for the most part, does not yield significantly more positive ratings than choosing not to self-disclose.

Conclusion: Clinicians should recommend their clients self-disclose in an informative manner to facilitate more positive observer perceptions.

1. Introduction

Stuttering is not a psychological disorder or a disorder that is the result of atypical nervousness or anxiety (Alm, 2014); rather it is a multifactorial, neurophysiological disorder with a genetic predisposition (e.g., Ambrose, Yairi, & Cox, 1993; Dworzynski, Remington, Rijdsdijk, Howell, & Plomin, 2007; Kraft & Yairi, 2012). Nevertheless, stuttering is commonly portrayed in movies and television to depict characters who are nervous, weak, unintelligent and/or duplicitous (Johnson, 2008). Negative stereotypes toward people who stutter have been demonstrated across a variety of populations, including speech-language pathologists (e.g., Lass, Ruscello, Pannbacker, Schmitt, & Everly-Myers, 1989; Silverman, 1982; Turnbaugh, Guitar, & Hoffman, 1979; Woods & Williams, 1971; Yairi and Williams, 1970), teachers (e.g., Crowe and Walton, 1981; Lass et al., 1992; Woods and Williams, 1976; Yeakle and Cooper, 1986), university students (e.g., Betz, Blood, & Blood, 2008), parents (e.g., Crowe & Cooper, 1977; Woods & Williams, 1976), school-age children (e.g., Franck, Jackson, Pimentel, & Greenwood, 2003; Hartford & Leahy, 2007) and protective service workers (Li, Arnold, & Beste-Guldborg, 2016). Pervasive ignorance regarding the underlying nature of stuttering has contributed to marked stigmatization and discrimination (e.g., Boyle, 2013) and has increased the stereotype threat for persons who stutter.

Stereotype threat is the danger of extensive negative misperceptions about a particular group that leads to individual members of that group failing to reach their potential (Steele & Aronson, 1995). MacKinnon, Hall, and MacIntyre (2007) suggest that the

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formulation of negative stereotypes regarding persons who stutter evolve for at least two reasons. First, the observer projects the anxiety, nervousness, and/or uncertainty s/he experiences during moments of disfluency and assumes that those same feelings apply to the person who stutters during instances of stuttering. The second explanation for the stuttering stereotype 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. Self-disclosure has been suggested as a strategy for persons belonging to groups at risk for stereotype threat including but not limited to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) community and people with mental illness with the outcomes indicating that disclosing to others leads to self-empowerment and decreases vulnerability to the stereotype threat (e.g., Corrigan, Kosyluk, & Rüsich, 2013). Research completed thus far demonstrates that this strategy can positively influence both children's (e.g., Byrd, Gkalitsiou, McGill, Reed, & Kelly, 2016; Frank, Jackson, Pimentel, & Greenwood, 2003; Hartford & Leahy, 2007) and adults' (e.g., Boyle, Dioguardi, & Pate, 2016; Boyle, Dioguardi, & Pate, 2017; Byrd, McGill, Gkalitsiou, & Capellini, 2017; Collins & Blood, 1990; Healey, Gabel, Daniels, & Kawai, 2007; Lee & Manning, 2010) perceptions of individuals who stutter. Together, these studies suggest self-disclosure is of benefit and that the nature of the statement may uniquely influence listener perceptions. Specifically, past research suggests that an apologetic self-disclosure statement may compromise the potential benefit of use of this strategy.

Collins and Blood (1990) showed videos of two males who stutter mildly, and two who stuttered severely to 84 female undergraduate college students. Participants were exposed to conditions wherein the speaker did and did not self-disclose about his stuttering when prompted at the end of the interview whether or not there was anything else that he would like to share. When the speaker self-acknowledged his stuttering, listeners rated him significantly more favorably on traits of intelligence, personality, and appearance. Additionally, results demonstrated the speakers who stuttered severely received significantly more positive ratings when they self-disclosed compared to when they did not self-disclose than the speakers who stuttered mildly.

Healey, Gabel, Daniels, and Kawai (2007) asked observers to rate a male speaker who stutters who did or did not self-disclose his stuttering during a video-recorded monologue. The speaker self-disclosed by stating "I should let you know that was kind of tough for me in spots. I stutter and I appreciate you bearing with me" at the end of the monologue or using the statement "...But before I start, I should let you know that I stutter so this might be hard in spots, so bear with me" at the beginning of the monologue (Healey et al., 2007, pp. 55–56). Raters scored the speaker's video on personality traits using a Likert scale and also described the speaker using open-ended comments. Results did not reveal overall differences in Likert scale ratings of the speaker when he did or did not self-disclose. However, the observers did not have the opportunity to compare observations. Instead, they either viewed the male speaker self-disclose or viewed a video where he did not self-disclose. Nevertheless, videos that contained a self-disclosure statement at the beginning of the dialogue received more positive listener comments than those where self-disclosure was presented at the end (Healey et al., 2007). This finding indicates that if self-disclosure is utilized, there may be more benefit to self-disclosing at the beginning of a communication interaction, which is consistent with findings from other studies (e.g., Lincoln & Bricker-Katz, 2008). Additionally, and of particular relevance to the present study, findings from Healey et al. (2007) suggest that the wording of the self-disclosure statement may affect how listeners perceive the speaker who stutters. Healey et al. (2007) stated that the self-disclosure statement they had their speaker employ might have appeared to be more of an apology for stuttering than an act of revealing it (e.g., "I appreciate you bearing with me"). They further argued that the apologetic nature of this statement may have compromised the potential positive influence of the speaker's self-disclosure on listeners' perceptions. Thus, the discrepancy between the findings reported by Collins and Blood (1990) and that of Healey et al. (2007) may have been the use of an affirming self-disclosure statement in the former and the use of an apologetic statement in the latter study.

Lee and Manning (2010) further contributed to the self-disclosure literature by completing two distinct experiments. In the first experiment, participants viewed one of the following: (1) a condition where the speaker stuttered and self-disclosed, (2) a condition where the speaker stuttered but did not self-disclose; (3) a condition where the speaker stuttered and employed stuttering modification, or (4) a condition where the speaker stuttered, self-disclosed, and used stuttering modification. In the second experiment, participants were provided with direct comparisons of a speaker who stuttered and self-disclosed versus a speaker who stuttered but did not self-disclose. The authors only found significant findings in the listener perceptions for the experiment that provided a direct comparison of the speaker self-disclosing versus the speaker not self-disclosing. The condition where the male speaker self-disclosed was rated moderately more favorably than the condition with no self-disclosure. Given that the listeners needed a comparison of no self-disclosure to one of self-disclosure to elicit significantly different perspectives regarding the speaker, the authors argued that the use of self-disclosure may not be practical – at least, not if the sole purpose is to change listener perception. However, Lee and Manning (2010) further stated that self-disclosure as a strategy may still provide to be beneficial for the speaker who stutters as the act of acknowledging stuttering facilitates acceptance and understanding.

More recently, Byrd et al. (2017) extended past research by employing an informative statement at the beginning of an exchange to determine whether this type of statement resulted in significantly more positive listener perceptions than no self-disclosure statement. Participants ($N = 173$) were randomly assigned to view two of four possible videos (i.e., male self-disclosure, male no self-disclosure, female self-disclosure, and female no self-disclosure). The self-disclosure statement was informative, and non-apologetic in nature: "I sometimes stutter, so you might hear me repeat words or sounds, but if you have any questions or want me to say anything again, just let me know." Results demonstrated that listeners were significantly more likely to select speakers who self-disclosed their stuttering as more friendly, outgoing, and confident compared to speakers who did not self-disclose. Observers were also significantly more likely to select speakers who did not self-disclose as more unfriendly and shy as compared to speakers who used a self-disclosure statement. These data suggest that the informative, non-apologetic statement leads to positive perceptions in contrast to the previous research that employed an apologetic statement. However, whether or not a non-apologetic statement is significantly more beneficial than an apologetic one remains unknown, as Byrd and colleagues did not include both an apologetic and

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