Clinician's Perceptions of Career Choices for People Who Stutter

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Introduction

Though a significant amount of research has found that there is a negative stereotype of people who stutter (PWS) (Woods & Williams, 1976; Dorsey a& Guenter, 2000), few studies have attempted to explore the potential relationship between such stereotypes and any sort of negative action or behavior that affects the lives of PWS. Negative stereotypes can be problematic because they form societal barriers related to jobs, housing, education, and social opportunities (Smart, 2001).

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Introduction

Societal barriers are often manifested as role entrapment, which occurs when the majority population limits the opportunities that members of a minority group are allowed to pursue (Smart, 2001). Role entrapment can be manifested as a vocational stereotype, resulting in an individual being relegated to less than desirable roles. Role entrapment, in the form of vocational stereotyping, often limits an individual's ability to pursue certain careers and leads to limited career opportunities, reduced job satisfaction, lack of advancement in chosen careers, and other difficulties in employment.

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Introduction

Little research has explored whether PWS suffer from role entrapment. One study used the Vocational Advice Scale(VAS) to explore whether university students would report role entrapment of PWS. The VAS contains 43 items in which participants report their perceptions of career advice for PWS for 43 different careers. Results suggested that the students were less likely to advise PWS to pursue 20 of the careers ($p<.01$) and reported no difference in the advice given to PWS and PWDS on the other 23 careers. The careers judged to be less advisable for PWS were those that required high communication skills. The report for the mean score on the VAS suggested that stuttering negatively affected career choices.

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Introduction

Though the findings of Gabel et al. (2004) offer some evidence related to role entrapment of people who stutter, more research is needed. The purpose of the present study was to explore this phenomenon in a group of speech language pathologists (SLPs). The study was interested in discovering whether SLPs would report role entrapment in the form of negative stereotyping related to career choices.

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Methods-Participants

Seventy SLPs participated in this study (mean age=40 years, sd=11.2). Sixty-seven of the participants were female and three were male. Sixty-nine of the participants had earned a MA or MS in communicative disorders and one had earned a doctorate. All of the participants held the Certificate of Clinical Competence. Only two SLPs considered themselves to be fluency specialists, and one of those participants was a member of the SID-4. Fifty eight of the participants reported knowing a person who stuttered.

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Methods-Participants

The SLPs reported having between one and 40 years experience (mean=14.8 years, sd=11). The SLPs reported caseload sizes between 0 clients and 99. Thirty three reported having individuals who stuttered presently on their caseload (between 1 and 5 clients). Sixty-eight of the 70 SLPs reported working with clients who stuttered during their careers (between 1 and 50 clients). All of the participants reported taking a course related to stuttering (between 1 and 4 courses), 47 reported engaging in professional reading related to stuttering, and 17 reported attending professional seminars related to stuttering.

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Methods- Procedures

The respondents' addresses were identified through the Ohio Speech, Language, and Hearing Association membership list. One-hundred names were randomly chosen and these individuals were assigned to one of two conditions. In the first condition, the participants were asked to respond to the description of a male who stutters who had no other communication disorder. The other participants responded to a male who did not stutter and had no other communication disorder. Participants in both groups responded to the condition using the VAS. Seventy two participants (70% return rate) returned the questionnaire, with 43 of the participants responding to the male who stuttered and 27 responding to the individual who did not stutter.

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Methods- Procedures

Each participant received a packet containing a cover letter, directions for completing the study, and the stuttering version of the Vocational Advice Scale (VAS) (Gabel et al., 2004). This scale was designed to measure the perceptions of appropriate career choices for individuals who do and do not stutter. The VAS is a 43- item scale in which students report their attitudes toward advising a person who stutters to train for 43 different careers. The participants reported their agreement with each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with scores ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The VAS has been found to have validity and reliability.

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Methods- Analysis

Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to test for the main effects of speaker status (stuttering or nonstuttering) on each of the 43 items on the VAS and the mean score on the VAS. A p-value of .05 was used to identify significant differences between the reports from the two groups for each item and the mean score.

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Results

Results suggested that six of the careers were perceived to be significantly less advisable for PWS ($p<.05$):

Table 1-

	Mean(SD) PWS	Mean(SD) PWDS	F	P
Attorney	3.18(1.05)	3.81(1.08)	5.82	<.02
Judge	3.27(1.07)	3.93(.874)	6.89	<.02
SLP	3.64(.883)	4.11(.934)	3.98	<.05
Protestant Minister	3.36(.857)	3.89(.892)	5.94	<.02
Guid/Empl Counselor	3.56(.943)	4.11(.698)	6.44	<.02
Parole Officer	3.27(1.03)	3.81(.921)	4.85	<.02

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Results

It should be noted that a lower mean score was reported for PWS for 23 of the items (including the seven that were reported to be less advisable). Despite the lower mean scores, this group of SLPs reported that a majority of careers were advisable for PWS.

The mean score for the VAS provides a general measure of the effect of stuttering on career choices. There was no significant difference between the mean score for PWS or PWDS ($p>.05$). This finding suggests that the SLPS did not believe that stuttering has an overall effect on career choices.

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Discussion

The findings of this study partially support those reported by Gabel et al. (2004). The SLPs surveyed in this study believed that six careers were less appropriate for PWS than for PWDS. These six careers were a subset of the 20 careers identified in the study by Gabel et al.

The six careers identified as less advisable for PWS appear to be among those that require a high amount of communication ability. Thus, this study supports that PWS might indeed suffer from role entrapment related to career choices. The role entrapment may be due to the perceived difficulties that PWS have with communication.

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Discussion

SLPs identified that 37 as no less advisable for PWS than for PWDS. In the study by Gabel et al. (2004), only 23 careers were advised similarly for PWS and PWDS. Thus, SLPs may be less likely to report role entrapment of PWS. Of course, this study did not directly compare SLPs with individuals from the general population. Future research should explore this issue.

In addition, it might be that this group of SLPs had more academic and clinical experience with PWS than what is generally expected of SLPs. Future research should continue to explore this phenomenon in a larger population.

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Discussion

This study should be considered preliminary, due to the limited sample size. Future research should seek to replicate these findings in a larger and more diverse population of SLPs. In addition, the perceptions of SLPs should be compared with those of other populations. Finally, the reasons for why SLPs identify certain careers should be explored.

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