### PEOPLE WHO STUTTER BY K-12 SCHOOL TEACHERS

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### INTRODUCTION

Stereotyping is defined as an exaggerated belief associated with a category and functions to justify one's conduct in relation to that category (Allport, 1986, p.191). Most stereotypes are considered negative (smart, 2001) because: (1) They do not portray the individual as an individual, but as a category; (2) they polarize by clearly demarcating between those in a category and those who are not in a category; and (3) a stereotype of any kind leads to behaviors and actions that reduce available options for individuals in that category (Smart, 2001).

### INTRODUCTION

Possible effects of societal stereotyping include: (1)
Paternalism, defined as, "acting upon one's own idea of what is best for another person without consulting that person" (Anderson, 1987, p.177). Although, often done with the individual's best interests in mind, paternalism can be undesirable and unethical when decisions are made for individuals who are capable of making their own decisions;

(2) Marginality ,which occurs when an individual is not allowed to participate wholly in the life of the community as per his or her interests or abilities as a result of membership in a devalued group/ stereotype, (Smart, 2001); and (3) Role Entrapment, a phenomenon which occurs when a group in power defines the roles minority individuals can or cannot assume. This can be either social or occupational and usually includes only roles that are considered inferior or undesirable (Smart, 2001).

### INTRODUCTION

Past research exploring stereotyping of people who stutter (PWS), indicates the prevalence of a largely negative stereotype of PWS by a variety of groups (Yairi & Williams, 1970; Woods & Williams, 1971, 1976; Crowe & Walton, 1981; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986; Horsley & FitzGibbon, 1987; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Dorsey and Guenther, 2000).

### INTRODUCTION

Findings from previous studies indicate that PWS are characterized by descriptors such as "shy", "anxious?, "withdrawn", "nervous", "tense", "hesitant", "self-conscious", "less competent", "introverted", and "insecure". Perceptions such as these based on the fact that a person stutters contribute to a negative stereotype of PWS that can lead to behaviors and actions that discriminate against the individual (Smart, 2001).

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People with disabilities, including PWS, often internalize these negative stereotypes and accept them as truth about themselves (Smart, 2001). This internalization may be exacerbated if such stereotypes are repeated often and from authority figures. For children in schools, teachers are authority figures that can have a significant impact on their lives.

### **NEED FOR THIS STUDY**

Previous studies (Lass et al., 1994; 1992; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986) found that teachers and school administrators held largely negative stereotypes about PWS. Additionally, Yeakle & Cooper (1986) explored the effect of experience with PWS or coursework in speech disorders on teachers' perceptions of PWS. They found that teachers who reported experience with PWS and/or coursework in speech disorders expressed more realistic attitudes toward PWS.

### **NEED FOR THIS STUDY**

No further research on this topic was undertaken after the study by Lass et al. (1994). Also, following the study by Yeakle & Cooper (1986), no study has explored the effect of familiarity and educational factors on teachers' perceptions of PWS. The purpose of this study was to reassess schoolteachers' attitudes toward PWS and explore the effect of familiarity and educational factors on their perception of PWS.

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- Will a sample of teachers report more negative attitudes toward PWS as compared to People Who Do not Stutter (PWDS)?
- Will familiarity and educational factors affect teachers' perception toward PWS?

### **METHODS - PARTICIPANTS**

Participants included 178 school teachers from each of the 50 states, identified via and internet search. 1100 potential participants were selected randomly from this convenient population of teachers.

Participants were mailed a copy of the 14-item Semantic Differential (SD) scale (Collins & Blood, 1990; Burley & Rinaldi,1986) and a demographic questionnaire. Participants were excluded from the study if they reported that they stuttered on the demographic questionnaire as they might have a positive bias toward PWS.

### **METHODS - PARTICIPANTS**

Each of the 1100 participants were randomly assigned to one of two descriptions of a person: (1) a person who stutters and has no other communication disorder (PWS); and (2) a person who does not stutter and has no other communication disorder (PWDS).

212 participants returned the survey (19.27%). Of the returned questionnaires, 178 (16.12%) were completed and usable. 88 teachers responded to the first description (PWS) and 90 teachers responded to the second description (PWDS).

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A Semantic Differential (SD) scale was used to measure the attitudes that teachers reported towards PWS. The scale used for this study was a 14-itme instrument consisting of 14 adjectives paired with their antonyms (Collins & Blood, 1990; Burley & Rinaldi, 1986). The antonyms (e.g. "sincere—insincere") were randomly assigned to the left and right columns in an equal number of items. Ratings were made on a 7-point scale placed between the antonym. To quantify the rating results, the negative extreme was scored with a 7 and the positive extreme with a 1. Therefore, a higher score indicated a more negative attitude and a lower score indicated a more positive attitude.

### **METHODS - ANALYSIS**

Descriptive statistics - mean score and standard deviation were calculated to assess participants' attitudes toward PWS as compared to PWDS. A higher mean score indicates more negative attitudes and a lower mean score indicates more positive attitudes.

Between group comparisons - One-way MANOVA for each item on SD and overall mean score was used to compare the differences of reports made by the two groups of participants for the 14 items on the SD as well as the overall mean scores. Alpha = 0.05 divided by the total number of MANOVAs = 0.003

Comparisons for responses to PWS: For participant group responding to description two (n=88) a MANOVA was completed for each item and overall mean score on the SD. This explored how participants responses were influenced by their experience with PWS and/or coursework on stuttering. Alpha level = 0.003

# RESULTS-DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics indicated that this group of teachers' reported positive attitudes towards both groups, i.e., PWS and PWDS. The overall mean score for Group 1 (PWS) was 2.35 with a range from 1.89 to 2.91. The overall mean score for Group 2 (PWDS) was 2.79 with a range from 2.46 to 3.16.

# RESULTS - BETWEEN GROUP COMPARISONS

Results of the MANOVA used to explore the difference between groups' indicate no significant differences on the overall mean score for the SD (F=6.53; P=0.011). Significant differences were found for three items on the SD scale, including "sincere-insincere" (F=9.72; P=0.002), "physically normal-physically abnormal" (F=8.78; P=0.003), and "intelligent-unintelligent" (F=14.6; P=0.000). Mean scores for these three items indicate more positive attitudes towards PWS.

# RESULTS:RESPONSES TO PWS

Data gathered from Group 1 (N = 88) was analyzed using a second set of MANOVAs to determine the influence of their experiences with PWS and coursework in speech disorders on their judgments.

Four MANOVAs were conducted to explore the possible effects of past experience with PWS and/or coursework/professional readings in stuttering on teachers' responses to the 14-items on the SD scale. No significant effects were found for any of these analyses.

### DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that this group of K-12 schoolteachers' reported positive attitudes toward PWS. While teachers reported positive attitudes toward both groups (PWS & PWDS), PWS received overall lower scores indicative of more positive attitudes as compared to PWDS. Teachers reports of educational and experiential factors were found to have no effect on their responses to the SD scale.

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The findings of this study differ from previous research which found that teachers (Lass et al., 1992; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986) reported negative attitudes toward PWS. The findings from this study could be cautiously interpreted to indicate a positive shift in teachers' attitudes toward PWS. However, due to a difference in methodology, results from this study are not directly comparable to Lass et al. (1992) and Yeakle & Cooper (1986) and need to be further corroborated.

### DISCUSSION

Results from recent studies by Cooper & Cooper (1996), Healey et al. (2007), Gabel (2006) support findings from this study and are suggestive of a general positive shift in attitudes towards PWS

However, considering society's predisposition to political correctness, people might hesitate to overtly express negative attitudes or feelings in a questionnaire based study such as this.

# LIMITATIONS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A primary limitation of this study is the small sample size (N=204) and low response rate. This might limit the ability to generalize the results of this study and should be considered while interpreting these results.

Another potential weakness is the fact that the respondents were not provided with a definition of stuttering. This approach was chosen based previous studies (e.g. Woods & Williams, 1971; Lass et al., 1992; 1994), but this may not be the best research design. Future research might incorporate a verbal definition or audiovisual samples to either support or refute the present findings.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

- This study re-assess schoolteachers attitudes towards PWS and the effect of educational and experiential factors on their attitudes towards PWS.
- Findings from this study indicate a positive shift in teachers attitudes towards PWS.
- Experience with PWS and/or coursework/ professional readings in stuttering were found to have no effect on teachers attitudes towards PWS.
- This is a positive finding that should be corroborated by more research, using similar and different methodologies.

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