Measuring and Changing Negative Stuttering Stereotypes in Adolescents

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Background

- Frequently replicated research findings: “Stuttering stereotype”
  - Belief that stutterers are shy, nervous, introverted, fearful, weak, etc.
  - Belief that stuttering reflects psychological difficulties
- Uncertainty about cause
- Inaccurate information about the nature of stuttering
- Evident in virtually all populations and ages studied
- Little published information available on changing public attitudes toward stuttering
  - After watching a video of stuttering video attitudes of adolescents more negative than before the video (McGee, Kalinowski & Stuart, 1996)
  - After a graduate course in fluency disorders, students’ attitudes changed in positive directions, but most changes were not statistically significant (Reichel & St. Louis, 2004)
  - After a presentation by a stutterer, high school students had significant positive improvements in stuttering attitudes (Flynn & St. Louis, 2007)
- Conventional wisdom that attitudes hard to change

Purpose

- To compare attitude change in high school students after presentations about stuttering by a stutterer (1st author [TF])
  - Oral presentation by TF (40 minutes)
  - True Life® video presentation featuring 3 stutterers, including TF (40 minutes)
  - Oral presentation by TF (20 min) following MTV True Life® video presentation
- To compare attitudes & attitude changes of boys vs girls
- To compare attitudes & attitude changes of regular vs honors students

Method

- Adaptation of near-final version of Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes (POSHA)
  - Several items added
  - 65 items to rate + 13 biographic items on questionnaire
  - General items: Respondents circled number from 1-5 or ?. For example…
    - E.g., “I would want to be a person who…has a stuttering disorder.”
Arrangements made to speak to 4 high school health classes by TF (first author having moderate-severe stuttering)

IRB-approved parent consent / child assent forms developed & given to teacher to send home with students

Those returning forms given POSHA by teacher

Subjects

83 high school students in 4 classes filled out POSHA

45 regular students (53% M; 47% F; 15.8 yr)

12 Fr; 33 So; 0 Jr; 0 Sr

38 honors students (24% M; 76% F; 16.9 yr)

3 Fr; 18 So; 13 Jr; 4 Sr

Class presentations

Oral or Video presentations

TF talk on stuttering or video

Immediately followed by filling out 2nd POSHA + open-ended questions

Post-Video Oral presentations

Immediately followed by filling out 3rd POSHA + open-ended questions

After Oral and Post-Video Oral presentations

Finished with oral question-answer session

Respondents rated the speaker on 1-9 scale

Oral presentations (delivered conversationally in a positive manner) included:

Facts about stuttering

TF’s personal experiences & stories about stuttering

Some of TF’s coping mechanisms for stuttering

TF’s personal insights about stuttering

Mean ratings (1-9, Very Poor—Excellent)

Oral: 8.7

Oral (Post Video): 8.6

Surprising finding: 70% of respondents thought TF was “faking” his stuttering

Video presentation (True Life: I Stutter) included:

Featured 3 stutterers

TF dealing with stigma in seeking a job as a bartender

Woman going through therapy

Woman competing in a beauty pageant

Mean ratings (1-9, Very Poor—Excellent)

Video: 7.6

4.6% thought TF was “faking” stuttering

Converted mean data to -100 to +100 scale

-100 = 1 (Lowest rating)

0 = 5 (Neutral rating)

+100 = 9 (Highest rating)
- T-test of pre- & post-test scores applied
  - Significant differences accepted when p < .005 (Bonferroni Correction)

**Overall POSHA Results**
- Before scores very similar
- Before vs after oral presentation: largest positive change
- Before vs after video presentation: moderate positive change
- Before vs after video+oral presentation: large positive change

**Notable Changes**
- **Oral presentation alone**
  - 15 significant positive changes
  - Including stuttering due to physical or emotional abuse (not in graph)
  - Largest positive changes
- **Video presentation alone**
  - 11 significant positive changes
  - 1 negative change (stuttering caused by genetic inheritance)
- **Video+Oral presentation**
  - 17 significant positive changes
  - Majority of items: oral presentation after video
    - Further positively impacted attitudes
    - Reversed negative changes
      - E.g., “People who stutter are nervous or excitable.”
      - E.g., “Stuttering is caused by genetic inheritance.”
- **General section: stuttering vs 4 “anchor” attributes**
  - Overweight viewed more negatively than stuttering
  - Knew least about stuttering pre oral & video
    - Knowledge of stuttering increased after oral & video presentations, but more after oral
  - Source of knowledge
    - Pre: Highest: TV/radio/films
    - Post: Highest: Personal experience from other stutterers (TF); Next: TV/radio/films
- **Oral vs Video Comparisons**
  - Talk had a greater positive impact than video
  - Both had predictable areas more affected
    - Talk specifically discussed cause of stuttering
      - Greater positive change for cause items
    - Video specifically showed a stutterer (TF) being hired & working successfully as a bartender
      - Greater positive change for work-related items
        - E.g., “People who stutter should have jobs where they have to correctly understand and decide important things.”
        - E.g., “People who stutter can do any job they want.”
- **Males vs Female Comparisons**
  - Males & females had comparable pre-questionnaire scores
Females slightly more likely to change attitudes in a positive direction than males
- Both changed more after talk than video

**Honors Class vs Regular Class Comparisons**
- Honors: more positive attitudes towards stuttering before & after both oral & video
- Regular: also showed smaller positive attitude changes after both the oral & video
- Both changed more after talk than video

**Class type interacted with sex**
- Difference in gender ratio between class type
  - Honors: 9 males & 29 females
  - Regular: 24 males & 21 females

**Implications**
- High school students show evidence of “stuttering stereotype”
- A talk by a person who stutters can improve attitudes toward stuttering their attitudes
- A video about stuttering can also improve attitudes towards stuttering of high school students
- But less than a live oral presentation
- POSHA has promise to measure changes in attitudes of adolescents

**References**
