

Developing Community-Informed Supports Following Undesired Listener Reactions in Adults Who Stutter

Dr. Hope Gerlach-Houck, Western Michigan University

Abstract

Many adults who stutter have experienced unwanted reactions from listeners, such as being interrupted, stared at, rushed, or told to “just slow down.” These experiences can be frustrating, upsetting, or difficult to move past, even after the interaction is over. Our previous research has found that these reactions are associated with increased anxiety and negative emotions in everyday life. Although therapy and support groups can provide valuable support, they may not be available in the moments immediately following a difficult interaction.

This project explores a simple question: What kinds of support would adults who stutter actually find helpful in those moments?

We will work directly with the stuttering community to develop brief, supportive messages that people could receive through a mobile app after experiencing an unwanted listener reaction. For example, a message might acknowledge how difficult an interaction felt or remind someone that they do not owe others an explanation for their stuttering. People could also choose to try a brief activity, such as a grounding exercise, a self-compassion prompt, or reflecting on whether and how they want to respond. Importantly, we do not want to assume what people need or how they should respond. We want adults who stutter to tell us what would actually feel supportive.

The project will take place in three stages. First, we will hold group discussions with adults who stutter to learn what kinds of support they would want following these experiences. Next, approximately 100 adults who stutter will review potential messages and activities and provide feedback on what feels helpful, unhelpful, or in need of improvement. Finally, a small group of adults who stutter will try the app for one week and share their experiences. A community advisory board made up of adults who stutter will help guide the project throughout.

Our goal is to develop a practical, community-informed approach to offering support when difficult interactions happen. The findings will help us understand what kinds of support people want, when they want it, and how it can be offered in ways that respect individual needs and choices. Ultimately, we hope this work will inform future research and help expand the resources available to the stuttering community.