

Listeners' Perceptions of Speech and Language Disorders

Emily Allard
Dr. Dale Williams
9 Dorchester A, West Palm Beach, FL 33417
561-670-6692
eallard1@fau.edu

For years, studies have been conducted to assess public attitudes toward individuals with communication disorders. For the most part, these studies have examined individual disorders. In addition, examiners did not generally take into account differences within their participant samples and those that did presented mixed results with respect to how participant variables such as gender and geographic location impact perceptions. The purposes of this study, then, were to assess attitudes toward a broad range of communication disorders and to determine whether these attitudes were affected by within-subject variables.

In this study, 450 participants listened to audio clips of an actor reading a speech with an articulation disorder, a fluency disorder, a voice disorder, a language disorder, or no disorder. Each participant listened to one clip and then rated the speaker on the personality traits of intelligence, self esteem, decisiveness, reliability, emotional stability, social adjustment, stress level, employability, and ambition. Participants then completed a demographics questionnaire.

This study supports previous research concluding that the public may still hold negative stereotypes towards individuals with communication disorders. The results revealed that perceptually normal speech was viewed more favorably than all tested disorders with respect to the traits of self-esteem and employability. In addition to comparatively favorable perceptions of normal speech, the results indicated that there were differences in how the various disorders were perceived. Within-group analyses revealed no significant differences in participant ratings with respect to participant age, gender, personal contact with anyone presenting a communication disorder, or the type of locations (urban or rural) in which the participants lived.