

Stuttering as resistance: Lived experience, agency, and disability theory

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Wellcome Workshops

Metaphoric Stammers & Embodied Speakers

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Authentic Self

Fluent

Stuttered

Medical models

Social models

Speech restructuring
therapies

Neurodiversity

Authentic self as fluent

Authentic self is repressed by bodily power (pathology)

We can liberate the self by restoring normal functioning

- Behavioral therapy
- Medication
- Surgery

Authentic self as stuttered

Authentic self is repressed by social power (ableism)

We can liberate the self by rejecting fluency

- Stuttering pride
- Activism
- Creative expression

Identity is always relative

There is no true self to be emancipated, there is only different selves constituted through power relations

I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out
some one aspect of myself and present this as
the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the
other parts of self

Audrey Lorde

A rejection of authenticity does not necessarily lead to
determinism

We are free in so far as we continuously rebelling against
the ways in which we are already defined, categorized,
and classified

To suggest that the stutterer is simply repressed by power (be it societal or bodily) is to deny his agency, his ability to resist power

Where there is power there is resistance

Rethinking covert stuttering

(Constantino, Manning, Nordstrom, 2017)

- How do people who pass as fluent constitute themselves?
- Expected a straightforward study of ableism and repression
- Got stories of resistance and agency

Rethinking covert stuttering

(Constantino, Manning, Nordstrom, 2017)

- Participants did not see why stuttering was any more authentic than fluency
- Passing is not repressed stuttering but a unique form of stuttering constituted by specific practices of self
- Passing resists both how biology suggests a stutterer must talk and what privileges society says stutterers should have access to

In our zeal to resist medical conceptions of stuttering do we just substitute one normalizing litmus test for another?

By rejecting fluency in and of itself or by asking whether forms of knowledge are consistent with our favorite model of disability, what ways of being do we disqualify?

I'm not comfortable telling another stutterer how to think/feel about their stuttering

Stutterers are always already resisting how they are constituted

How are they currently resisting societal demands for fluency?

How are they currently resisting their body's demands for effortful speech?

Rather than see therapy as a means to liberate the self (be it fluent or stuttered) I suggest we see it as an exploration of the stutterer's resistance and agency

We explore how the stutterer has been constituted not to determine who they must be but to determine who they do not have to be

We explore how they got here but leave where they're going up to them

In my clinical experience, most stutterers value both an increase in their ability to resist societal pressures to speak fluently and an increase in fluency, or at least easier stuttering