Abstract

Purpose: This study examined self-perceived general competence and social acceptance in young children who stutter (CWS) as compared to children who do not stutter (CWNS), and assessed the extent to which temperament, speech disfluency, language abilities, and home environment both co-vary and predict children’s perception of their own competence.

Methods: Data were collected from 16 CWS and 16 CWNS between the ages of 4; 0 and 5;10. Standardized assessments of perceived competence and social acceptance, temperament, expressive language, receptive language, and home environment were collected from each child, as well as stuttering severity ratings for the CWS.

Results: Results indicated that CWS and CWNS did not significantly differ in self-perceived general competence or perceived social acceptance. Regression analyses revealed that for CWS and CWNS combined a) surgency and negative affectivity best predicted perceived competence, and (b) negative affectivity and receptive language best predicted perceived social acceptance. For CWS only, stuttering severity was added to the analysis and results revealed that (c) surgency and expressive language best predicted perceived competence, and (d) stuttering severity and receptive language best predicted perceived social acceptance. Results approached significance.

Conclusions: These findings propose that children’s speech and language skills seem to be linked to their perception of peer acceptance, while a tendency for risk taking and a generally positive view of new situations may play an important role for self-perception of overall competence in the world. Further, the results implicate a “normal” self-perception on behalf of the CWS in this study, which mirrors the tendency for young children to view themselves in an overly positive light. This inflated sense of ability may serve as a “buffer” between the child’s life events (e.g., stuttering) and social-emotional development. Therefore, determining a child’s degree of self-perceived competence could be an important contributing factor to a successful therapeutic outcome.

Keywords: Children who stutter; Perceived competence; Social-emotional