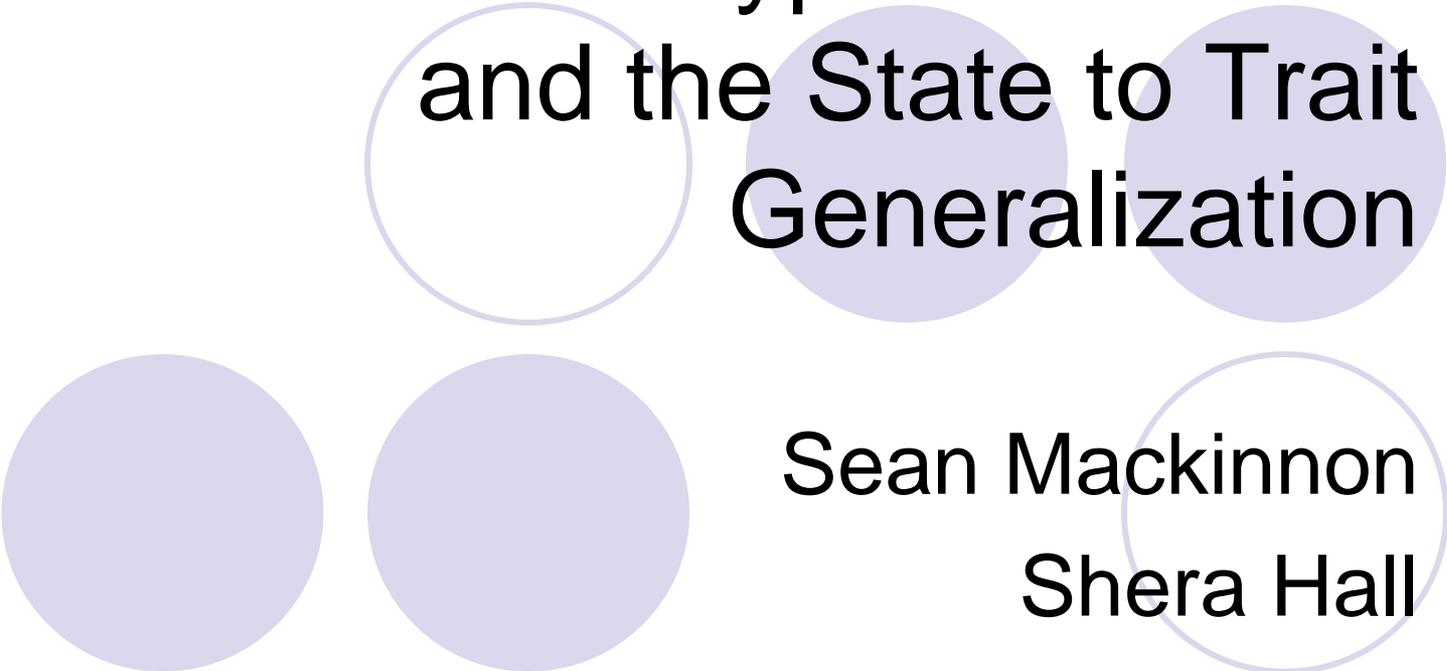


# Perceptions of People Who Stutter: Stereotype Formation and the State to Trait Generalization



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# A Negative Stereotype Surrounding People Who Stutter Exists

## Stutterers rated as:

- insecure
- reticent
- guarded
- avoidant
- introverted
- hesitant
- self-derogatory
- nervous
- tense

## Stereotype found with:

- teachers and other school staff
- residents of small communities
- parents
- speech-language pathologists and clinicians

# Purpose and Operational Definitions

- Purpose: To determine the origin of these negative stereotypes
- Operational Definitions:
  - Trait Stutterer – A person who suffers from a permanent, uncontrollable stutter
  - State Stutterer – A person who stutters in a moment of normal speech disfluency

# Explanation 1: The Person Perception Hypothesis

## Definition:

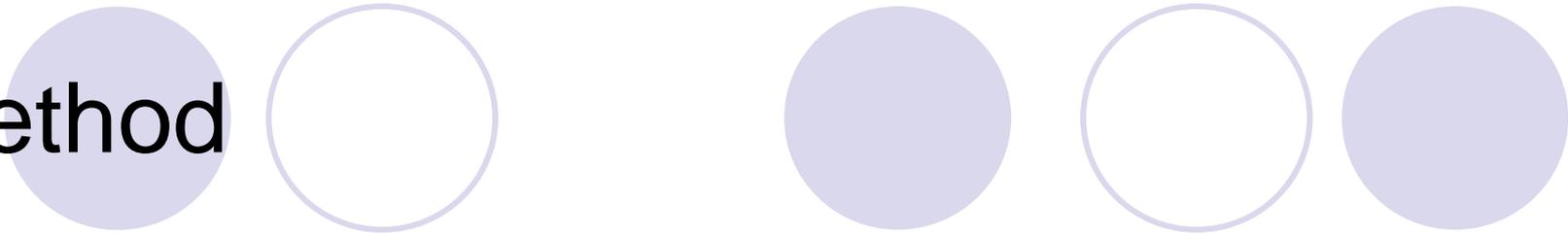
- Stereotypes are formed through regularities extracted from the traits of encountered individuals or media depictions.
- This hypothesis predicts:
  1. Strong similarity between the typical and state ratings
  2. Clear differences between ratings of these two persons (typical male & state stutterer) and the trait stutterer
  3. The more experience a person has with people who stutter, the less likely they will be to stereotype them

# Explanation 2: The Generalization Hypothesis

## Definition:

- People generalize from the feelings they experience during state stuttering when determining the personality of trait stutterers.
- This hypothesis predicts:
  1. Strong overall similarity between state and trait ratings
  2. When a discrepancy exists, the state ratings will be towards the extremes of a likert scale
  3. Experience with people who stutter will not influence stereotype formation

# Method



- Recruited from psychology undergrad classes
  - N = 183 (67% female; 31% male)
- 25-item semantic differential scale was used
  - Example:  
Open 1—2—3—4—5—6—7 Guarded
- Experimental Condition: (N = 156)
  - Rate both a trait stutterer and state stutterer
- Control Condition: (N = 27)
  - Rate a typical male

# The Stereotype of Stutterers Exists in This Sample\*

When compared with a typical male,  
trait stutterers were viewed as more:

- guarded
- nervous
- shy
- self-conscious
- tense
- sensitive
- reticent
- passive
- afraid
- introverted
- hesitant
- anxious
- withdrawn
- quiet
- insecure
- emotional
- self-derogatory
- avoiding
- fearful

\*These are the  
“stereotypic” traits.

Results found using independent t-tests, all significant < .05

# The Stereotype of Stutterers: Descriptive Data from the Stuttering Inventory

- 53% of participants agreed that:
  - “Most stutterers could be described as having feelings of inferiority”
- 63% of participants disagreed that:
  - “Fear is generally thought to have little relation to stuttering.”
- 51% of participants agreed that:
  - “Stutterers are more shy and withdrawn than other people.”

# State vs Trait: Correlations

- Ratings for the state stutterer and trait stutterer were highly correlated:

$$r = .78, p < .001^*$$

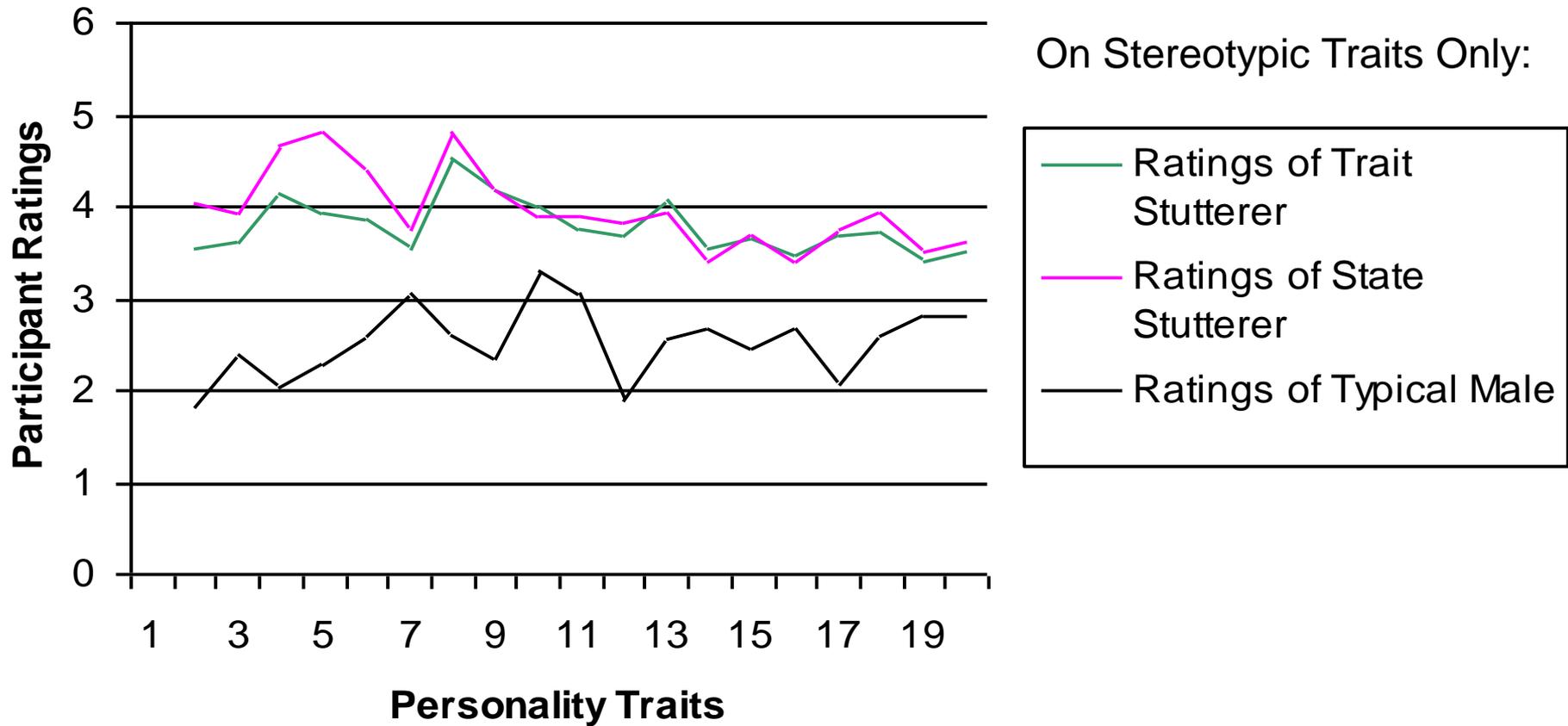
- Participants rated the personality of a person who stutters temporarily as similar to a person with a permanent, uncontrollable stutter
- This lends support to the Generalization Hypothesis

\* Using the stereotypic traits only; Correlation using non-stereotypic traits only was:  $r = .41, p < .001$

# Anchoring and Adjustment: What Should We Expect?

- A high degree of similarity between state and trait ratings
- When ratings do differ, state ratings will be more extreme
- Reasoning: “A stutterer can’t be anxious *all* the time, so I’ll rate them as more calm”
- The adjustment made will be insufficient

# Graphical Display of the Stereotype



Note: All numbers were recoded so that high numbers on the y-axis indicate ratings that are congruent with the stereotypic traits listed above (i.e. guarded, nervous etc), and low numbers indicate ratings in favor of the opposite trait (i.e. open, calm etc).

# Does Experience With People Who Stutter Impact Stereotype Formation?

- Overall, no effect for knowing a person who stutters was found

$$t(144) = 1.80, p > .05$$

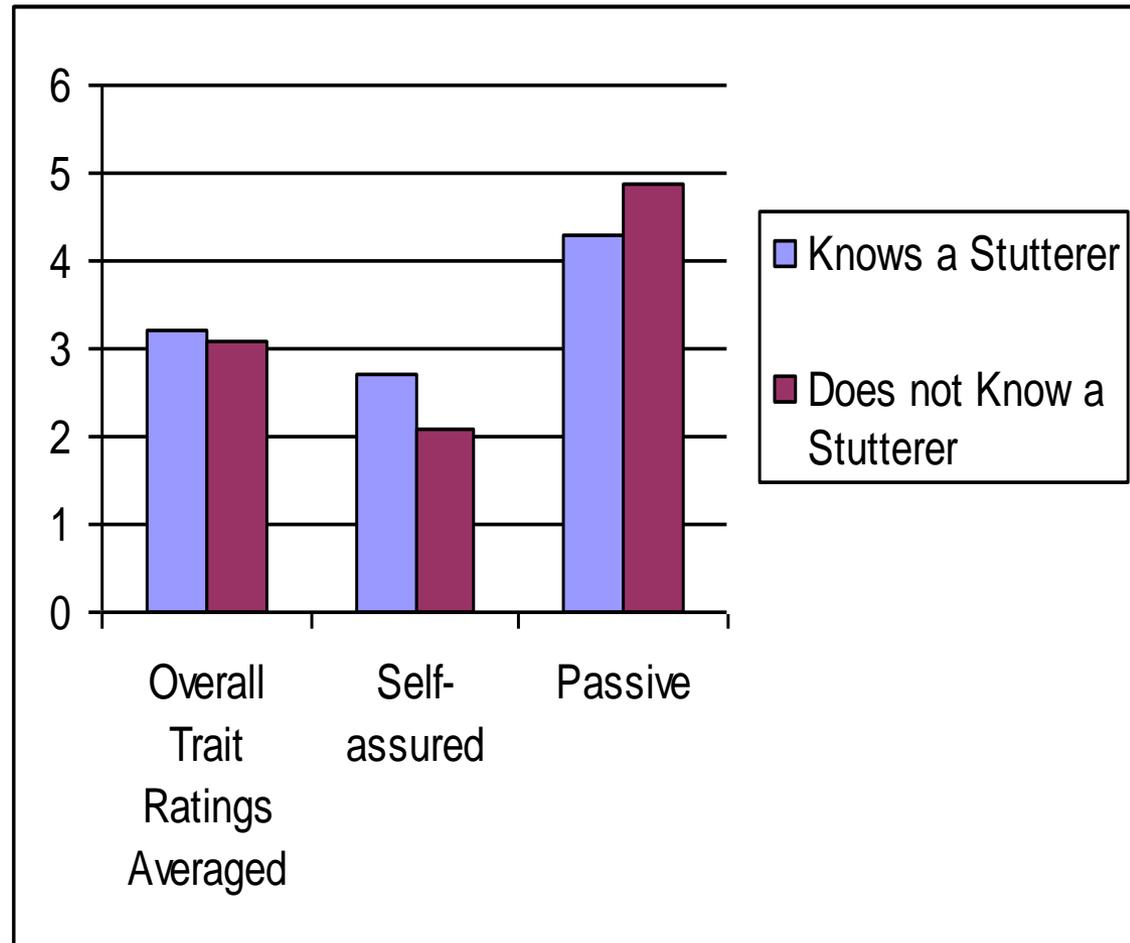
- On an individual item basis, stutters were rated as:

- More self assured

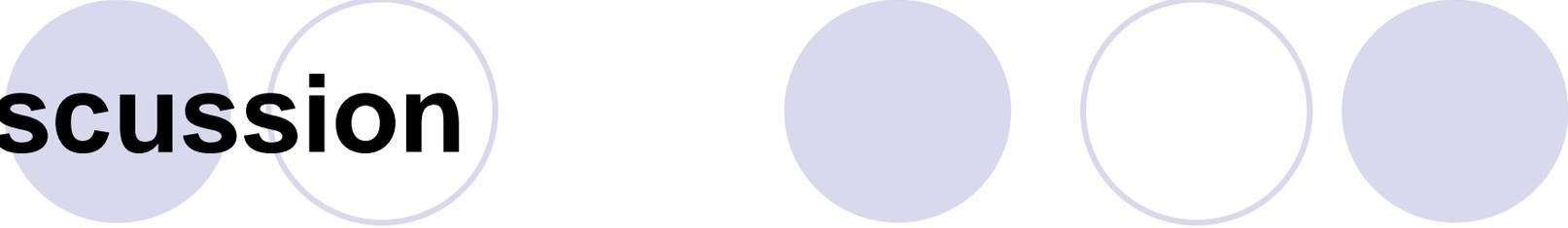
$$t(148) = 2.56, p = .01$$

- Less passive

$$t(148) = -3.17, p = .002$$



# Discussion

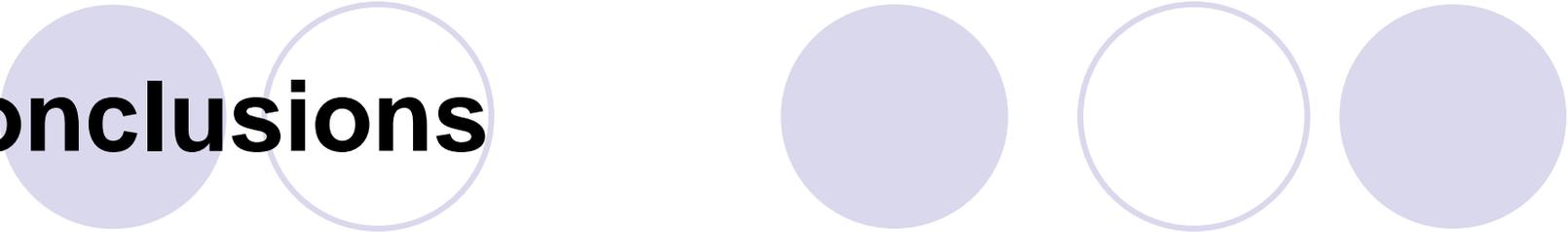


- Stereotypes of people who stutter appear to be formed through generalization:
  - People anchor in their own personal experience of stuttering
  - They make a small, insufficient adjustment
  - Trait stuttering is perceived as very similar to normal speech disfluency
  - This stereotype persists, even when participants had personal experience with a person who stutters

# What makes using the anchoring and adjustment heuristic more likely?

- (1) Participants are slower to indicate that others' perspectives are different than their own
- (2) Egocentric biases increased under time pressure
- (3) Biases decreased when rewards were offered for accuracy
- (4) Adjustments from one's own perspective tend to be insufficient, because people stop the decision making process after the first plausible solution is reached.

# Conclusions



- Though often an automatic process, these stereotypes may not be inevitable.
- The anchoring and adjustment heuristic is used when people must make a quick decision
- A heuristic, like all “rules of thumb,” can be overridden by effortful cognition. With enough knowledge and elaborative thought, these stereotypes may be diminished.