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Book Review

Patrick Campbell, Christopher Constantino, Sam Simpson. (Eds.), Stammering Pride and Prejudice: Difference not Defect, J&R Press (2019).

Rarely do we read books which simultaneously inspire and challenge us to be better at what we do. *Stammering Pride and Prejudice* does just that and so much more. As a speech language therapist who doesn't stutter, I have always been mindful of walking the treacherous tight rope between working with individuals who stutter who come to me to stutter less and to 'fit in' to society's value of fluent speech versus helping individuals be proud of who they are and creating a sense of belonging within the stutter community.

Stammering Pride and Prejudice reminds readers of this tension and takes readers on a journey of personal narratives, poems, and essays written by people who stutter and stuttering allies who explore stuttering from a social model perspective and at the same time questioning the medical model of stuttering therapy. Patrick Campbell, Chris Constantino and Sam Simpson state in their introduction that they "wanted Stammering Pride and Prejudice to make the sentence "I am learning to stammer more" a little less absurd (p. xxix). This combined with the two brief forewords provided by the late Mike Oliver (Emeritus Professor of Disability Studies) and award-winning author David Mitchell set the tone for the rest of the book.

The book is comprised of 22 chapters – 18 essays, two poems, a short story, and one collection of still photographs capturing the "stuttering aesthetic". The essays vary in style and length. Most of the essays are written with an autobiographical voice whilst a few are more academic in structure. Some of the pieces which are more autobiographical have personal inclusions of art or illustrations by the contributor. These images enhance the authors' work and evoke additional mood and atmosphere throughout the book. The two poems are strategically interspersed throughout the book and help change the flow as well as adding rich layers to understanding the complexities and nuances of the stuttering experience. As a reader, I found myself deeply connecting to both poems, due in part to the addition of rhythm and prosody that comes naturally when reading poetry as well as the rawness and vulnerability communicated with each line. The short story, "Bella's secret" by Sarah Wilkson (p.143), is well written and helps to pivot the reader from stuttering secrecy towards stuttering openness, acceptance and pride. Finally, the inclusion of a collection of still photographs from the National Stuttering Association in Iceland capturing the "stuttering aesthetic" (moment of stuttering) is a surprise and welcome addition, as it visibly captures something that is often heard (stuttered speech) but not seen.

The editors place each "chapter" in an order which explores stuttering prejudice, before wandering through therapy and concluding with pride. I enjoyed reading the book from front-to-back and looking back, I did notice the progression from prejudice to pride but as the editors noted, each piece could be read individually. To expect a clear-cut distinction between prejudice and pride would be an oversimplification of each person's journey. For the purpose of this review, rather than summarising all 22 chapters, I will highlight some of the key messages from chapters which stood out to me as a speech-language therapist and signpost recommended chapters to clients who stutter and/or parents of children who stutter.

Reading from a speech-language therapist's perspective, I particularly enjoyed the personal narratives which delved into the authors' experiences or encounters with stuttering therapy. Contributors highlighted the pitfalls of fluency-focused stuttering therapy and the oppressive nature this has on the stutterer, the mixed messages people who stutter encounter (sometimes unwittingly through the use of famous people who stutter role models) and the challenges practicing speech-language therapists face when becoming more "social-model" inclined.

In Chapter 4, Katy Bailey uses the social model and personified stuttering to "a canary for social toxins; whether people feel OK to stutter is an indicator of whether we are living in a safe environment" (p. 25). Bailey's chapter, titled "Scary canary: Difference, vulnerability and letting go of struggle" shares many interesting anecdotes of her experiences as a person who stutters. Anecdotes which stand out include her 3 months of living and studying in Jamaica where her dysfluency was met with overtly positive reactions and the difference this made about how she felt about her stutter; the ensuing crash and fall of returning to England and being told by a university lecturer that she "had to be fluent" in her finals; and, her experience as a speaker at an international professional conference for speech-language therapists and researchers where the focus was on medical aspects of stuttering (discovering genes, MRI scans to map the brain pathology in stuttering and discussions of a "curable phase" in children who stutter). One of my favourite quotes from her chapter which will be a powerful teaching tool for novice clinicians is that "therapists are sabotaging themselves and their clients by succumbing to the oppressive ideal of fluency. If you are pushed to pursue fluency at all costs you lose your real voice and spontaneity; something valuable, indeed priceless. You will never lose your fear of stuttering if your listeners, including your

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therapist and yourself, view dysfluency as a failure" (p. 29–30).

In Chapter 6, Patrick Campbell provides a mixture of formal research, lived experience, and personal theories in his chapter "People with stigma: A reflection on stigma against stammering in society and the stammerer". Patrick's own admission of being a slow convert to the social model of disability will resonate with many readers interested in *Stammering Pride and Prejudice*. As a doctor, he is well positioned to provide insightful commentary on the medical model and its "traditional" views of stuttering and excels in advocating for a social model of thinking. Amongst his lived experiences and personal theories, Patrick highlights the challenges of having a hidden and variable disability like stuttering. Since stuttering is concealable and variable in its nature, society as a whole "does not feel the need to provide a ramp for people who stammer; rather, it still expects us to limp up the stairs using our moments of fluency to act like a normal speaker" (p. 43). Patrick also rightly points out that many of the stuttering role models we embrace indirectly perpetuate the narrative that people can "overcome" their speech problem and that many famous celebrities have "recovered" or worse yet, stuttering is not part of their identity. This observation invites readers to consider the mixed messages being sent to young people who stutter when we use famous people who stutter as role models. A young person or and parent may ask, "If there are famous people who stutter why don't we hear them stutter?" or "Do I (or my child) need to "overcome" stuttering to be successful?"

In Chapter 12, Rachel Everard and Carolyn Cheasman share both their personal experiences as speech-language therapists who stutter and their professional practice through the lens of the social model of disability. "A tale of two therapists" leads with Rachel's story where she takes the reader on a very personal journey. She shares her family's response to her stuttering (a reluctance to talk about stuttering); the speech therapy she encountered as an 11-year-old where she was taught syllable-timed speech (it sounded too weird and drove her stutter underground); and her experiences as a British Stammering Association trustee when she was in favour of the BSA's vision being "a world without stammering" (medical model) rather than a "a world that understands stammering" (social model). Rachel's own reflections demonstrate how our thinking can change as our beliefs evolve over time. If she were involved in the debate again, she would definitely support the vision that was ultimately chosen: a world that understands stammering. Carolyn's story although shorter, highlights the self-imposed pressure to hide stuttering despite getting no direct messages to do so. Her story reinforces the need for speech-language therapists to keep in mind that the "out of control" feeling can be unpleasant, and this fused with feeling different can lead to shame. Carolyn's openness with embracing certain aspects of the social model principles whilst at the same time experiencing the pull of medical model principles is refreshing as it lets readers know that becoming more "social-model" inclined has its challenges. The tail end of their chapter outlines their joint perspective in that "it's OK to stutter" and "it's OK not to stutter" which hopefully gives permission to clients to be whoever they are. (p. 115).

For those who stutter themselves and allies of people who stutter, there is something for everyone. Highlights include the two wonderful poems by Erin Schick (p. 1) and Nisar Bostan (p. 35), reading Dori Holte's journey from a parent's perspective (p. 59) and Elizabeth Wislar's personal journey to acceptance and stuttering gain through support (p.189), and the photos from the "Capturing the Stammering Aesthetic" project by Villiljós and colleagues from the National Stuttering Association in Iceland (p.185).

Erin Schick's poem, "Honest Speech" introduces readers to the notion of having a voice so unique it can be recognised by loved ones. A highlight which will resonate with people who stutter is her line "When I stutter, I am speaking my own language fluently" (p. 2). For those who are unaware, Schick's performance is time-capsuled on YouTube when she performed at the 2014 National Poetry Slam in California and well worth a watch to capture the full force of her poem. Nisar Bostan's poem, although longer, also packs a powerful punch and eloquently describes the time pressures people who stutter face, the labelling and naming of stutterers, and the complex contradictions one experiences as a person who stutters. His final line of "But I DO have a voice" (p. 37) exudes defiance and confidence and is sure to be relatable to many people who stutter.

Dori Holte and Elizabeth Wislar's personal journeys from different perspectives provide eye-opening insights into the experiences of raising a child who stutters and growing up as a person who stutters. Holte's heartbreaking experience of seeing her son Eli become silent at 12 after receiving stuttering therapy which focused on attaining fluency through fluency shaping and stuttering modification will remind readers of the dangers of "speech tools". Her chapter has a useful section which discusses the risk of silence when an expectation of fluency is placed on children whilst children are developing ways of viewing the world (developmental cognitive traits). These include, "1) Having a strong desire to perform well and do things right, 2) Finding criticism or failure difficult to handle, 3) Viewing things as black and white, right or wrong, wonderful or terrible with very little middle ground, and 4) Naturally seeking praise and wanting to conform" (p. 66). The turnaround for her son Eli was also interesting and reinforced Bill Murphy's notion of "islands of competency" to mitigate the potential shame experienced by school-aged children who stutter (Murphy, 2005). Readers interested in learning more about Dori's story can do so by reading "Voice Unearthed: Hope, Help, and a Wake-Up Call" (Holte, 2011).

Elizabeth Wislar's chapter, "A journey in eight events" centres itself on pivotal moments growing up as a person who stutters. I enjoyed reading her first anecdote of "Ignorance" which described a memory when a classmate in 1st grade asked her about her speech and the subsequent reactions from the adults around her which led to Wislar's own fear of talking about stuttering (p. 190) to the turning points in between which eventually lead her to "Gain" and concludes with Wislar attending a world congress for people who stutter in 2016. Wislar's reflection that "community and friendship has been the biggest gain from finally owning that I am a person who stutters" (p. 203) sheds light on the positive aspects of being a person who stutters. This message contrasts nicely to some of the research published about the negative effects of stuttering.

Finally, as previously mentioned, the collection of photos by Villiljós and her colleagues from the National Stuttering Association in Iceland was a surprise inclusion, but also a highlight within the book. Villiljós and her colleagues wrote "the stammering aesthetic is an aspect of the person you may often witness when you meet them face to face, but one which is never shown on a still photograph. And yet, it is often an important aspect of their identity". This was the first time I had seen stuttering captured visually

and, in my opinion, sums up the celebratory spirit of pride and uniqueness in the last third of the book.

Stammering Pride and Prejudice is a refreshing book which challenges the reader to question what we breath, accept, and take for granted regarding stuttering and stuttering therapy. Nina G so aptly sums it up in her chapter, "the goal is not about becoming fluent; it is living well with or without fluency (p. 128). The book's main strength is that it fulfils its aim of representing diverse perspectives on stuttering. The recruitment of non-academic and non-SLP voices makes the book more accessible to the general public compared to other speech-language pathology texts. In fact, of the 22 chapters in the *Stammering Pride and Prejudice*, only three are written by people who don't stutter. This is particularly important given that speech-language pathology texts are written by experts without communication disorders. *Stammering Pride and Prejudice* is one of the few books available which has multiple perspectives by people who stutter and the only book to date which questions the medical model of stuttering therapy. One minor critique would be the lack of inclusion of one or two more chapters similar to Kubert's (p. 205), which beautifully describes the intersectionality of her experiences as a person who stutters intertwined with being a person with Cerebral Palsy. An exploration of the experiences of people who stutter taking into account other aspects of their identity such as race, gender, sexuality and/or other disabilities may be something the editors could include in future editions of this impressive text.

Overall, *Stammering Pride and Prejudice* is a book suitable for speech-language therapists, people who stutter, and allies of people who stutter. It is a welcome addition to any professional or personal library. It is not a traditional textbook as it purposefully does not cover the theory, assessment and/or treatment of stuttering but rather, positions itself as a non-academic read for those interested in the social phenomenon of stuttering and the barriers people who stutter face in society. *Stammering Pride and Prejudice* serves well as a supplemental text in a stuttering and fluency disorders course to counteract the medical urge to "fix" stuttering. Parents of children who stutter and people who stutter themselves who are curious about viewing stuttering as a different, valuable and respected way of speaking will thoroughly enjoy the book. I would recommend readers to dip in and out of "chapters" and to re-read parts of the book which are relevant to the readers' interests as there is a smorgasbord of ideas and quotes worth re-visiting and noting down whether you stutter yourself, work with someone who stutters, or if you're a parent of a young person who stutters. Patrick Campbell, Chris Constantino, and Sam Simpson should be commended for bringing together and curating a collection of diverse stories and voices and I am excited to see what difference this book makes to the lives of people who stutter all around the world. In the spirit of quoting one of the chapters titled "looking back, looking forward" (Simpson, p. 145), I will end my review with words from David Mitchell's foreword,

> "*Reading Stammering Pride and Prejudice has made a much better-informed stammerer of me… My curiosity was energised, and my understanding was enriched, as if I had attended a campus open day at a Faculty of Stammering Studies in a University of Being a Better Human*" (p. xviii).

I cannot think of a better way to end this review of *Stammering Pride and Prejudice* in that after reading it, you will become a better human.

References

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