

Stutterers and their Intelligence

Many years ago, during my grade school years, we students discovered there were two stutterers in our population. This discovery was to our derisive delight but to the dismay of these two children. We thought they were mentally deficient. In those days stutters were often treated with disdain.

They were dismissed from our social circles. After all, how could we get along with such slow-talking and hesitantly speaking counter parts? We mocked them, both behind their backs and to their faces. As we walked home from class, a favored pastime was reciting their funny-sounding words and phrases.

I cannot recall either of these children striking back, either physically or with retaliatory retorts. However, I recall their shirking away with their chins to their chests. They were out of the way, so we children could execute our ongoing frivolities.

Later in life I came across a country singer named Mel Tillis. He was a stutterer. As such, while he was talking, he came across as a bit vacant upstairs. This impression came from a person whose youth had been conditioned to disparage stutterers.

But oh could he sing and compose! No stuttering there. For the readers of this article who do not follow country music, go to YouTube and key in “Mel Tillis.” Watch and listen to his “Coca Cola Cowboy.” It is a masterful combination of lyrics and guitar.

It became obvious, even for a clueless observer, that Mel Tillis’ ongoing difficulty with enunciating the King’s English had nothing to do with his intelligence. It had to do with his having difficulty saying certain parts of the spoken tongue.

A vowel here and there, a consonant there and here. These distinctions had nothing to do with the intelligence of Mel Tillis. For that matter, it had nothing to do with the intelligence of the two children who we other children hounded on the playgrounds.

In those times, stuttering was a condition that could be disparaged with the silent consent of others. I recall an occasion in which a teacher derided one of the stutterers because she could not read a paragraph without stuttering.

During recent months, I have followed the activities of Joe Biden (and other candidates for President). Biden comes across as knowledgeable and capable, but seems unable to consistently articulate his position on certain topics. Until recently, and in spite of my peripheral experiences with stuttering, I did not associate Biden’s pauses and lapses with stuttering.

Joe Biden is a stutterer. His discussions about his being subject to stuttering are limited and contained. He makes no effort to cover up his stuttering, but he makes little effort to discuss it. In hindsight on the part of this writer, viewing past videos of his performances, it is obvious he lapses into stuttering. If only for a second or so, but the lapse is apparent.

His stutter is quite frequently attributed to old age; more often to his mental deficiencies. I come across these “observations” from a clueless media at least once a week. Listen carefully to what Mr. Biden has to say. He is intelligent and well-informed.

Nonetheless, I am writing this article without regard to who becomes the President for the next four years. I am writing it to express, regardless of one’s political persuasions, that Mr. Biden has overcome huge handicaps to get where he is today. For that alone, Blues and Reds should give him credit. If nothing else, we should acknowledge the tenacity of his spirit.

To his credit, and to my knowledge, Donald Trump has made no insinuations about Joe Biden’s stutter. And if Mr. Trump were a stutterer, I would write an article defending him.

I learned lately, and I wish my childhood mates and I had known earlier: Stuttering is not an emotional or psychological problem. It is not a sign of low intelligence. Quoting a study cited in *The Atlantic*: “The average stutterer's IQ is 14 points higher than the national average.”

To combat stuttering and confront this handicap is a never ending battle of swimming against the tide. Small wonder that stutterers have above average IQs.

Marilyn Monroe and Carly Simon were stutterers. So was James Earl Jones. So was England's King George VI (of “The King's Speech” masterful film).

If you happen to be a stutterer, you're in good company.