

**THE ENNEAGRAM: POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR
THERAPY AND PERSONAL GROWTH FOR SPEECH-
LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS AND PEOPLE WHO
STUTTER**

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INTRODUCTION

The Enneagram is a human personality model that has recently received increasing interest from the academic and lay communities because of its relevance to self-help, personal growth, and the dynamics of work environments. Apparently derived from an oral Sufi tradition dating to the first millenium, the Enneagram is a personality typing system like no other with which people are familiar.

For example, unlike the Myers-Briggs and several other models, the Enneagram is a dynamic system that is ultimately more concerned with the relationships among its nine basic personality types than with the characteristics of the types themselves.

The nine types and the relationships among them are shown in the nine-pointed Enneagram diagram, reproduced here. This diagram, introduced by George Gurdjieff in the early 1900's, provides a convenient map for understanding how the Enneagram system works. It illustrates the characteristic ways each of the nine types in this system responds to stress

and to opportunities for growth. These will be discussed later, but a full exploration is best left to the reader, using the references.

The Enneagram's ability to help people understand the personality dynamics at work in their lives explains its increasing popularity in spiritual growth and personality work. But it has not yet--to the author's knowledge-- been used explicitly in stuttering therapy.

This article explores some possible applications, including: 1) helping to understand the effect of stuttering on the personality of the PWS, 2) selecting a course of therapy or increasing the effectiveness of a chosen approach, 3) helping the person who stutters (PWS) and the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) understand stress factors during therapy and their possible effect, and 4) helping the SLP and the PWS understand his/her own personality and its dynamics, with the objective of increasing effectiveness as a therapist and/or (in the case of the PWS) as a self-therapist throughout life.

The purpose of this article is to generate interest in these possible applications, with the hope that the speech- language community will explore them further. It may be difficult for speech language pathologists who operate in an academic environment to accept this system in the absence of research data and the scholarly articles that accompany some other typology methods. Some major literature sources for the Enneagram are provided at the end of this article.

However, what can't be shown in this listing are the Enneagram workshops and panels that form the core of modern Enneagram exploration and refinement. This oral tradition comprises a virtual laboratory for Enneagram teachers and students to improve their understanding of this remarkable system. This work is a continuation of hundreds of years of investigation.

ENNEAGRAM DYNAMICS

The nine Enneagram points can be seen as idealizations, fixations or strategies that are assumed in response to the psychological wounds that inevitably result from interactions with caregivers in early childhood. The fixations, because they are created by children in response to survival needs, acquire a great deal of psychological energy very early in life. Because they are erected by beings with very little outside experience, they tend to be relatively one-dimensional. Tended and nurtured over the years as self-images, strategies, and belief structures, they assume the stature of basic illusions about life.

Review of the Nine Basic Fixations

Each of the nine fixations that forms the basis for one of the nine personality types represents a “false self” that the child substitutes for his unrecognized or unsupported essential self to cope and to obtain love from caregivers.

There is insufficient room here to discuss these types in detail, but a brief review of the basic fixations is essential:

- The Reformer, “one” strives to be perfect;
- The Giver “two” gives in order to get love and acceptance;
- The Performer “three” seeks to achieve by doing;
- The Tragic Romantic “four” romanticizes the uniqueness of his/her identity and relationships with others;
- The Observer “five” withdraws and observes;
- The Devil’s Advocate “six” scans the environment for threats;
- The Epicure “seven” plans an idealized, pleasurable, epicurean existence;
- The Boss “eight” seeks to manipulate and control;
- The Mediator “nine” discounts his own needs and importance and assumes the concerns of others.

One of the common (and almost always temporary) reactions people have to the Enneagram is that the fixations seem like “boxes,” when in fact most

human beings exhibit all of these traits or strategies at one time or another. In answer to this, it is important to realize that the fixation is a primary strategy or motivation, not the only one. It is the single motivation to which the person will tend to return again and again throughout life. It is what the mature adult will tend to do “when all else fails.” But it does not describe a complete personality.

THE DYNAMICS OF THE FIXATIONS

A simplified way to explain the acquisition of a fixation is that it represents a response to the inevitable lack of mirroring or recognition of the child’s dominant essential quality. For example, if a child whose dominant trait is trust is taught (directly or indirectly) that he or other people cannot be trusted, he will begin to automatically scan for betrayal and to respond to challenges in a fearful way.

If this behavior is reinforced by his caregivers, he will gradually discard his trusting essence and assume this new, mistrustful world-view as a way of gaining acceptance or love. Specifically, he will assume the “six” fixation--the “devil’s advocate” or “trooper,” which responds to reality in a fearful way. The tendencies toward the various fixations are acquired by age two, and there is no indication that they change over time.

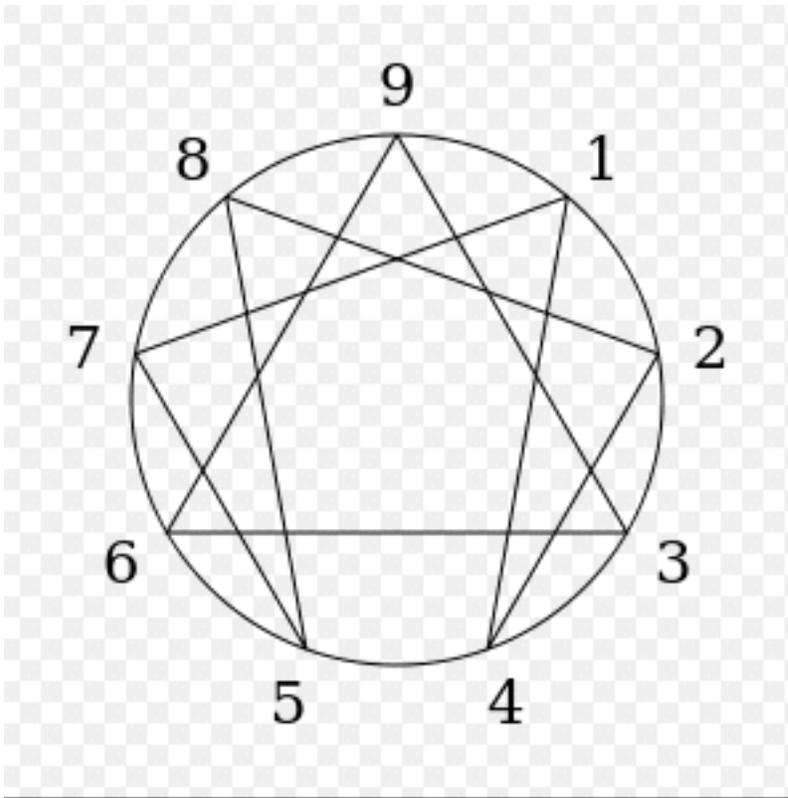
This means that the fixation may typically be in place before the usual onset of stuttering in children (age 3 to 5). There is no indication that PWS are predominantly of one point or fixation. This implies that stuttering is incorporated in the essential core dynamics of the pre-existing ego personality that is developed by the child to cope with, and obtain love and attention from, parents, caregivers and others. If this hypothesis is correct, the personality dynamics of people who stutter are really incredibly diverse.

The Enneagram points are identified below, together with their major idealizations and the essential qualities. The fixations and qualities are best seen in a dynamic sense in the nine-pointed Enneagram itself. The terminology is adapted from several sources and may be unfamiliar to some.

But the important thing here is to simply get a feel for the type of personality mapping that the Enneagram makes possible. (If you don't have an HTML 3.0 browser, you won't be able to see this table.)

Table I - Enneagram Dynamics Point & Dynamics* Idealized Self Ideal (Fixation)
Fixated Passion Stress Passion Heart Space (Essence) 1 > 4 > 7 Reformer
Perfection Anger Envy Joy 2 > 8 > 4 Giver Merging Pride Lust Identity 3 > 9 > 6
Performer Capability Vanity Laziness Will 4 > 2 > 1 Romantic Identity Envy
Anger Perfection 5 > 7 > 8 Observer Knowing Avarice Gluttony Strength 6 > 3 >
9 Trooper** Will Fear Vanity Trust 7 > 1 > 5 Epicure Joy Gluttony Anger
Knowing 8 > 5 > 2 Boss Strength Lust Pride Merging 9 > 6 > 3 Mediator Trust
Laziness Fear Capability * point > stress point > heart point **also called the
Devil's Advocate

NOTE A: While the above paragraph may look confusing, the diagram below makes it much more graphic and memorable. The direction of integration goes counterclockwise, so when a Point 1 (me) starts having fun and moving forward, I take on the positive characteristics of Point 7 who is identified as the hedonist. Whereas when I get stressed, I take on the negative characteristics of Point 4, the tragic romantic. JH



NOTE B: The enneagram is useful because it allows you to step outside your own skin and recognize that at any one moment, it may be your Type that's you're experiencing, rather than just you per se. It also gives you some direction on what you need to do to feel better. JH

We can also label the points like this:

THE ARROWS



The three numbers in the left hand column are the Enneagram triangle for each of the nine points. This triangle is comprised (from left to right) of the point or fixation, the stress point, and the heart point or space. The fixation is the false or “idealized self.” The “heart point” is the aspect of personality that most closely mirrors the original dominant aspect or essence of the individual. The “stress point” is the aspect of personality that is farthest from essence and which represents the reaction of the child to his/her wound.

Additional subtleties of the Enneagram are found in the acquisition of a dominant “wing” to one side or the other on the Enneagram diagram. These “wings” create characteristic “flavors” of personalities. For example, we’re all familiar with the actor’s associations which provide millions of dollars to hospitals and charitable organizations (3 with 2 wing.)

One common dynamic familiar to the speech-language community is the speech therapists who were originally motivated to “give” their clients “perfect” speech (2 with 1 wing) or to “reform” them (1 with 2 wing).

Hopefully, these original motivations will not be carried through too rigidly into professional practice. But realizing that this ideal is there and is bound to be frustrated can help SLP's come to terms with the limitations of themselves and their very human clients. Conceptually, the Enneagram can be seen as a sort of wiring diagram for the human personality. It shows the reactive flows of energy and change that tend to occur as the individual is confronted with challenges and with opportunities for growth throughout life.

USING THE ENNEAGRAM TO UNDERSTAND THE EFFECTS OF STUTTERING ON THE PERSONALITY

By helping to explain the apparent personality changes that occur in individuals under stress, the Enneagram can provide important insights about seemingly irrational behavior that may accompany stuttering. For example, it would seem illogical for a child who stutters to actually seek out speaking situations. However, in the "six" child discussed above, the natural stress point is the "three" (performer) point, and a "six" under stress knows the feeling that he/she must "perform" in spite of the stress to gain acceptance and love from others.

When the "six" is supported or placed in a nurturing situation where he can grow, he will tend to return to the "nine" point, which mirrors the original dominant trusting quality of his essential self. In the case of the child who stutters, this would be reflected in a relaxation: not needing to scan the world for fearful speech situations and not feeling that one has to talk all the time.

Because the Enneagram fixation is established before the typical onset of stuttering in disfluent children, the typology may have significant application to understanding important similarities and differences among PWS. The opportunity to study such aspects of the personality is significant. Because stuttering behavior has such a major impact, it tends to cause a certain illusion of sameness in the personalities of people who stutter. This sameness tends to mask differences that would be useful in determining how PWS respond to challenges in therapy and to different treatment approaches.

For example, stuttering tends to involve unconscious, avoidance and fear-based behaviors that can overwhelm other personality traits. People who think of themselves as “stutterers,” and even as “a person who stutters,” rather than just a “person,” tend to reinforce these identifications.

At the same time, the similarities among stutterers may shed light on the ways in which different people incorporate stuttering into their personalities. If, as many people believe, traits like perfectionism tend to aggravate stuttering by increasing the reaction of the stutterer to the onset of the condition, then perfectionistic behaviors may become exaggerated by the PWS, and may modify the base personality. Such modifications would create distortions that make it difficult to understand the stutterer because the basic personality (which is itself a mask) is masked.

APPLICATION TO THERAPY SELECTION FOR INDIVIDUALS

For the speech evaluator, knowing the Enneagram point of the client may be helpful in selecting successful therapy approaches. Important keys to motivation can be found from the clustering of personality types in subgroups. For example, personality types that are centered on the five, six and seven tend to incorporate fear responses much more directly in the personality and addressing fear responses in therapy may be more important.

The eight, nine, and one tend to be anger-based personality types. When directed internally at the self, anger can be very counter-productive during therapy and more super-ego or “inner critic” defending and separation may be required. The two, three, and four types tend to have more issues surrounding getting in touch with emotions (“what am I feeling?”) In the Enneagram diagram, there is a “main triangle” of types--the three, six and nine--that seems to be shared by everyone regardless of their point. The dynamics of this triangle are useful in themselves without knowledge of the specific personality type of the client, because these have been found in all personalities.

They illustrate classic “phobic” and “counterphobic” responses to the stress of stuttering. Because the author is a “nine,” it may be useful to briefly illustrate how this works. The challenge of the “nine” is to overcome inactivity and regain some of the essential competence and capability of the “three” (performer) point. As a “nine” who stutters, this means not only rousing myself to action, but overcoming the fear of not being able to perform, which throws me back into my fearful “six” stress point, from which it is usually impossible for me to do anything.

Before my work with the Enneagram, I was only vaguely aware of this continuing pattern which dominated my life. By recognizing it, I have been able to understand the importance of fear in my stuttering therapy, why I continually select performance activities that compensate for my disfluent speech (like athletics, musical composition, and writing), and have been able to see the importance of facing up to my fear of stuttering in my growth and fulfillment.

Again, because the dynamics of the 3-9-6 triangle appear to be shared to some extent by all humans, every PWS experiences some aspects of this challenge, in addition to his or her particular Enneagram dynamics. Depending on the specific fixation, if a fear-based individual (a five, six, or seven) is engaged in therapy, an approach that does not explicitly help the client confront and overcome fear may not be successful. (Of course, other points will have to contend with fear as well, but may find it easier to overcome.)

An approach that directly confronts fear--like stuttering modification therapy--may be more worthwhile in this case. On the other hand, task-oriented personality types such as the “one” may be attracted to, and excel at, a therapy approach that directly addresses the learned improvement or perfection of speech. If the “one” is able to successfully manage emotions while applying newly learned control techniques, he/she may not find their fluency undermined significantly by fear during the fluency maintenance phase.

These might be the people who excel at approaches such as Precision Fluency Shaping. On the other hand, the strong “inner critic” of the “one” must be quieted if the therapy is to be successful. Otherwise, every mistake or “slip- up” will occasion a damaging personal attack by the super-ego on the ego. The notion that different personalities may have different success rates using different types of therapy may help to explain the continual controversy in the SLP community. People with different personalities would also tend to be attracted to different therapies, increasing the likelihood of controversy.

At the same time, use of the Enneagram must involve some caveats since different types react in different ways. Using the client’s fixation or stress points in an exploitative manner may backfire. Appealing to (as opposed to forcing) the “best self” of the client--the heart space--may be more fruitful in the long run. For example, using a “one’s” perfectionism and ability to be task-oriented may result in success for approaches such as precision fluency shaping.

But there are certain risks. All the points will tend to go to their “stress point” if pushed too hard. Knowledge of Enneagram dynamics could help the SLP and the person who stutters know what to look for in this case. But people who spend a lot of time in their stress point are out of touch with themselves and will have a difficult time with therapy. For example, the “one” personality can be a drudge, spending large amounts of time in practice or self-improvement. There will be an undercurrent of pain that life has never been any fun.

Pushing work too much to a “one” may not be a fruitful approach. A better approach might be to appeal to the one’s natural attraction to playful therapy approaches. The “one’s” heart space is the fun- loving “seven” point. If a “one” who is ready to grow is simply encouraged to “have a good time” before a speaking challenge, great things may result.

USE OF THE ENNEAGRAM TO UNDERSTAND PROBLEMS AND STRESS DURING THERAPY PROGRAMS

One of the common characteristics of Enneagram work is the importance placed on self-acceptance. This is derived from understanding of the Enneagram dynamics, which demonstrate the damage that can result from stress and attempts to control the personality--either on the part of the teacher or student. Anyone who uses the Enneagram to understand his clients or himself would do well to remember this. Personality dynamics are important in stuttering therapy because the client will tend to respond to stuttering and its challenges in ways characteristic of his fixation. For example, a child stutterer who appears to be lazy may be a point “three” (performer) under stress.

When placed under the additional stress of an exacting form of therapy such as PFS or extremely challenging tasks like voluntary stuttering in front of strangers, the “three” personality may tend to keep responding with laziness (failure to practice, etc.) On the other hand, if such a client is provided with a less stressful approach to treatment, the therapist may be rewarded with a client who stays “in personality” and performs, and then develops the ability to grow to his heart point (the “six”) and, in fact, turns out to have an abundance of will (or self support) that will serve him well in the long haul.

On the other hand, the complexity of responses to stress under therapy can be illustrated by the “seven” personality, which tends to take on characteristics of the “one” point under stress. There is a high side and a low side to every point. A “seven” who becomes overly critical in therapy could take on the extreme self-criticism that is the most negative characteristic of the “one” point. On the other hand, a “seven” stutterer who was able to use the “one’s” perfectionism in a more positive way might be able to turn the stress of therapy into actual gains.

ENNEAGRAM TYPING

Enneagram typing can be used to reveal the presence of hidden dominant traits that may emerge during therapy and that may influence the success of therapeutic approaches. Every person has only one Enneagram point. It’s

common for beginning students to say things like: “Well, I think I’m different and have a combination five and three point.” “Nines” are so open to the views of others that they often spend months placing themselves all around the Enneagram.

People under extreme stress (probably including some stutterers) may resemble their stress point more than their fixation. But, in time, the dominant point will emerge. It may take longer to determine the “wing” that tends to be dominant. To review this, personalities tend to take on the “flavor” of one or the other of the “points” that are immediately adjacent to the fixation. Thus, a “nine” with a “one” wing (9w1) would be a nine with strong perfectionist tendencies.

There are a plethora of other details and aspects attending Enneagram study, centers of intelligence; focus of attention; and association with the body, intellect, and emotions (subtypes). These are explored in all their many ramifications in the references.

The best way for PWS and SLPs to learn more about the Enneagram is to look through one of the many introductory books, some of the best of which are listed in the references. Those who find it interesting may want to attend one of the many workshops and seminars held in major U.S. cities. The Enneagram was always taught orally before the emergence of literature in the past few years.

It’s too easy to see the fixations in a negative light when the Enneagram is learned from books, because it looks like just another way of putting people in boxes. Another advantage of workshops is the first goal of most people who enter this work: discovering their own point. Participating with a group can provide important insights not possible to receive from a book. If the teachers reveal their fixations and several people who know their type are present, this will provide the first glimpses of how the Enneagram is applied to real people, who may seem very different than the generalization created in the student’s mind.

The stigma of having a fixation at all (which can be humiliating for some people) is also easier to overcome when others are admitting to this “weakness.” Finally, the best way to identify your type is to listen to people who tend to share your point of view. An SLP who has been trained to identify personality types will have a real advantage when evaluating prospective clients.

People who stutter can easily do this on their own as a supplement to a self-help or therapy program. Sometimes Enneagram typing can be done in the span of one or two sessions. The basic personality dynamics will then be revealed for exploration and inquiry and this in itself can be a powerful tool in recommending and implementing therapy approaches.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

The Enneagram is not being proposed as a total solution for understanding stuttering and its effect on the personality. Like any road map, it is just a tool for understanding the territory, not to be confused with the territory itself. A classic Freudian approach to the Enneagram would be to seek the strengthening of the fixation to provide a firm basis for growth. In some cases, the strengthening of the ego in this manner may even be seen as the objective of psychotherapy. Most modern Enneagram teachers would see this as an unfortunate limiting of the system’s power. While it is important in any growth process to develop the full acceptance of the self at the onset, the challenge of the Enneagram is to show that the fully realized human being has available to him the positive (and the negative) aspects of the entire range of motivations and strategies. By demonstrating to the self that it really does have the ability to tap the full range of human capabilities, the Enneagram offers a path that can last a lifetime. This is true for people who stutter as well.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Terry Saracino, a Denver-area Enneagram teacher who studied under Helen Palmer, for her review of this manuscript and her helpful and insightful comments. John C. Harrison of the National Stuttering Project suggested that I write this article, provided extremely insightful comments on the drafts, and has been a constant source of support and inspiration.

November 21, 1995