The present study failed to find any significant difference in physiological levels of anxiety in AWS and AWNS across various speaking situations. Significant group differences were found in self-perceived anxiety, but only during the pre-speaking session. Past reports have suggested that situations which enhance self-attention are likely to exacerbate social anxiety and subsequent stuttering, especially those situations related to group composition (Mullen, 1986). As a result, these situations are accompanied by anxious anticipation, distress and avoidance. However, there are reports that in situations with extreme focus on self-attention (e.g., enthusiastic laughter), social considerations related to stuttering are suppressed (Bloodstein & Bernstein-Ratner, 2008). These mixed findings paired with the current observation of no strong physiological (cortisol) response to situational variation would suggest that anxiety in itself is not a major interfering factor in communication apprehension.

Alm (2014) suggests that it is cognitive activity that interferes with speech in social situations rather than anxiety. Social cognition involves thoughts about what one thinks of oneself, and what others may think or expect, regarding how one should behave. For persons who are concerned about stuttering it is likely that social situations often involve thoughts about possible scenarios, including what others may think if they stutter and alternative plans of how to act. The amount of social cognition about stuttering in a certain situation is hypothesized to be related to three main factors: (a) the importance and the possible consequences of the situation, (b) the risk for stuttering, and (c) uncertainty about the best way to act. The results of the present study fit nicely with Alm’s (2014) notions of social cognition. Namely, communication apprehension evidenced by AWS in various speaking situations may have more to do with how one thinks of oneself rather than resulting from the emotions of social anxiety.

Conclusions

Overall results of this study would suggest that there is a relationship between communication apprehension and various speaking situations among AWS. This is most evident in the self-perceived anxiety associated with speaking. Any physiological connection to anxiety associated with various speaking situations appears to be less obvious. The situational variability in communication apprehension may be linked to social cognition rather than elevated anxiety.

References