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FRAGILE FACADES: STUTTERING AND
THE STRATEGIC MANIPULATION OF AWARENESS*

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This is a study of how stutterers cope with their disability. We examine strategies used to manage interactional order and identity by concealing, revealing, or disavowing stuttering. This offers insights into the way people manage disabilities: the articulation of premeditated and spontaneous tactics, and how management strategies shape, and are shaped by, the experience of disability.

Stuttering is a puzzling disorder of human communication which has defied explanation and cure for thousands of years (Van Riper, 1971:2). According to survey estimates in Europe and North America, stutterers constitute about 1 percent of the school-age population, regardless of language or dialect (Bloodstein, 1981:79; Van Riper, 1971:39). Although systematic data are not available — there are only impressionistic accounts from anthropologists — stuttering appears to be less common in non-western, non-industrial societies.[1] Stuttering typically appears between two and nine years of age. There is some evidence that stuttering has a genetic basis; it tends to appear in successive generations of the same family and frequently in identical twins (Bloodstein, 1981: 94). Stuttering is more common among males than females, by a ratio of three or four to one (Bloodstein, 1981:86). Only about one fifth of those who stutter in early childhood continue to stutter into adulthood (Bloodstein, 1981:86; Van Riper, 1971:45).

Stuttering, as visible behavior, refers to interruptions in speech involving the prolongation or repetition of sounds or words, pauses between words or syllables, and "blocking" on words, sometimes accompanied by extraneous sounds such as grunts, facial grimaces, body movements, and postural freezing as the person struggles to "get the word out." These speech difficulties can range from a split second to, in the worst cases, about a minute (Bloodstein, 1981:3).

Like other perceived impairments, stuttering interferes with "the etiquette and mechanisms of communication" (Goffman, 1963:103) and disrupts the "feedback mechanics of spoken interaction" (1963:49). Depending on the social context, the culture, and the health and social status of the speakers (Petrunik, 1977:37), persons who unintentionally and chronically deviate from fluency standards are likely to be defined as stutterers and subjected to various penalizing social reactions, including pity, condescension, embarrassment, amusement, ridicule, and impatience (Johnson, 1959:239; Lemert, 1967:135).

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1. A good summary is provided in Bloodstein (1981:103). Some observers have reported an absence of stuttering among certain North American Midwest Indian tribes such as the Utes, the Shoshone, and the Bannock (Johnson, 1944, 1944b; Snidecor, 1947). Other studies (Clifford, 1965; Lemert, 1967: 135; Sapir, 1915; Stewart, 1959; Van Riper, 1946) have noted that this is by no means true for all North American Indian tribes. Both Lemert and Stewart found that tribes (particularly those on the Pacific Northwest coast of Canada) which encouraged competition and stricter child-rearing practices, and which placed more emphasis on self-control, reported more instances of stuttering. Lemert (1967:146) also offered a similar explanation for a higher incidence of stuttering among Japanese than Polynesians.

The extent and frequency of stuttering varies. No one stutters all the time. Indeed, there are some situations in which virtually all stutterers are fluent, for example, when singing, speaking in unison with others (including other stutterers), and speaking to themselves, animals, and infants. In addition, stutterers are often more fluent when speaking with a drawl, accent, or different pitch (Petrunik, 1977:34, 71). Some individuals stutter on some words or sounds but not others. ("I can never say 'g's'." "I always stutter on the word 'coffee'.") Setting is also important. Many stutter more during telephone conversations than they do in face-to-face conversation; others find speaking to strangers particularly difficult; still others are more fluent in formal than informal situations, or vice versa. Stutterers have good periods and bad periods. ("Some days I wake up and I'm fine, other days I'm in for hell all day.") There are even some actors and entertainers who stutter but who are fluent when playing a role or facing an audience.

Studying the ways stutterers cope with their stuttering offers valuable insights into how people manage perceived disabilities (Freidson, 1965) and the potential stigma associated with them by highlighting processes that are usually taken for granted, and thus obscured (Davis, 1961). This strategy of using the specific to identify the general has recently been employed by Kitsuse (1980) who has used the "coming out of the closet" metaphor to examine the processes which establish new and legitimate identities. Schneider and Conrad (1980) have developed Kitsuse's analysis by using epilepsy to examine how persons manage discreditable information where there is "no clear identity to move to or from" (1980:32) and where "no 'new' readily available supportive. . . subculture exists" (1980:33).

Both Kitsuse, and Schneider and Conrad, focus on identity rather than interactional order, and on calculated and planned management rather than moment-to-moment strategies. We broaden this analysis by examining: (1) how people coordinate the requirements of creating acceptable identities *and* orderly interaction; (2) how they integrate management strategies thought out in advance with those selected on a moment-to-moment basis; and (3) how the subjective experience of disability together with the reactions of others, shape the management process (Higgins, 1980; Petrunik, 1983). Stuttering has three features which facilitate an examination of these issues. First, stuttering is a potentially stigmatizing disability that disrupts interaction. Second, because stutterers experience speech as a function over which they exercise partial but precarious control, their management of speech is both spontaneous and premeditated. Third, the experience of stuttering is critical for how stutterers, and others, define and manage stuttering.

After briefly describing our research, we examine the central importance of stuttering as a reality experienced by the stutterer. We then examine a variety of strategies which stutterers use to manipulate awareness of their stuttering and present the fragile facade of normal speech. Although we refer throughout to Goffman's (1963) analysis of stigma management as a benchmark in demonstrating how an understanding of stuttering contributes to a more general understanding of stigma, we go beyond Goffman and those who have extended his work, such as Conrad and Schneider, in emphasizing the importance of the experiential domain for sociological analysis.

THE RESEARCH

This paper is based upon both our personal experience with stuttering and a variety of stuttering therapies, and field studies which we conducted between 1970 and 1983 in clinical and everyday settings. We used qualitative methods, including participant observation, life histories, and focussed interviews.

The major research setting was a speech pathology clinic associated with a psychiatric institute in a large Canadian city. Between 1970 and 1972 we were participant observers (Petrunik for the entire period, Shearing for the first year) taking part in weekly therapy groups which used an approach based on the non-avoidance of stuttering (Van Riper, 1971). A total of 25 individuals

took part during this period, with the numbers present at group sessions ranging from three to 10. Most participants underwent therapy for less than a year (Petrunik, 1977, 1980). A year earlier Shearing had participated, with about 10 others, in a similar program, involving weekly sessions arranged through a private clinic for a year.

A second setting was the Webster Precision Fluency Shaping Program, a three-week intensive course based on operant conditioning principles (Webster, 1975), in which Shearing participated with four others in 1980 and Petrunik with two others in 1983.

In addition, both authors participated in a course conducted by the late William Kerr, a roving unlicensed speech therapist from the Isle of Jersey. This course was based largely on changing the rhythm of speech. Shearing participated in a three-week, intensive live-in session as an adolescent in Durban, South Africa, in 1954, with about 20 others. Petrunik took a two-week intensive course with nine others in Canada in 1970. Petrunik kept a research diary and collected news clippings, correspondence, and other documents related to the course. He attended several meetings either to introduce or advertise the course or to protest against it. He also maintained contact with six of the nine other stutterers who had participated in the course for at least a year afterwards (Petrunik, 1974:204, 215; 1977:27).

Petrunik examined the clinical literature of speech pathology, biographies and autobiographies of stutterers, works of fiction, the journal of the National Council of Stuttering, a voluntary association of stutterers in Washington, D.C., records from the speech pathology clinic and — with the consent of subjects — personal correspondence and diaries. A few subjects provided detailed written life histories. Petrunik conducted lengthy, formal interviews with 20 stutterers and numerous informal interviews with stutterers,[2] their families and friends, speech therapists, and medical and para-medical practitioners.

Since stuttering varies with situation, circumstance and mood, we tried to see our subjects in as many different settings and for as long as possible. All quotes, unless otherwise attributed, are from our interviews and field notes.

THE EXPERIENCE OF STUTTERING

I suppose that the hope of every stutterer is to awaken some morning and find that his disability has vanished. There is just enough promise of this in his experience to make it seem possible. There are days when, for some reason, the entangled web of words trips him only occasionally. In such periods of relief, he may peer back into his other condition and puzzle over the nature of the oppressive "presence" . . . [hoping that it] is a transitory aberration which might fade and vanish. . . . One feels that only an added will-power, some accretion of psychic rather than physical strength, should be necessary for its conquest. Yet, try as I might, I could not take the final step. I had come up against some invisible power which no strength of will seemed to surmount (Gustavson, 1944:466).

Like normal speakers, stutterers believe speech is something that should be intentionally controlled. Yet, somehow their words are mysteriously blocked or interrupted. Stutterers experience stuttering as the work of an alien inner force (often referred to in the third person as "it") which takes control of their speech mechanism. Stuttering is something which stutterers feel happens *to* them, not something they do: "somebody else is in charge of my mouth and I can't do anything about it" (Van Riper, 1971:158).

In coping with this subjective reality, stutterers use three general strategies: concealment,

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2. While we make no claims of representativeness, we interviewed or observed stutterers of both sexes, ranging in age from adolescence to middle age and in occupations from blue-collar workers to professionals. We studied persons from a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in addition to English-speaking Canadians, including a French Canadian, a Brazilian Jew, several Italians, an East Indian, a Trinidadian of East Indian descent, a white South African, a South African of mixed descent and a Jamaican of mixed descent, a Dutchman, and a Chinese man.

openness, and disavowal. Concealment strategies involve three principal tactics: avoidance, circumvention, and camouflage. These tactics allow most stutterers to avoid being seen as stutterers part of the time and a few to become secret stutterers. Openness tactics include: treating stuttering as unproblematic, struggle with the "it," and voluntary disclosure. Disavowal—which often calls for the tacit co-operation of others—involves the pretense that stuttering is not occurring when it is obvious that it is. We discuss in turn each of these strategies and their tactics.

CONCEALMENT

Avoidance

The simplest way to conceal stuttering is to avoid speaking. Many stutterers select occupations they think will minimize speaking. Others avoid situations in which they fear stuttering will embarrass them.

> I never went to the dances at school because I was afraid of stuttering and looking silly. Because I didn't go, I didn't learn to dance or mix socially. I always felt bad when people would ask me if I was going to a dance or party. I would make up some excuse or say that I didn't want to go. I felt that people thought I was some sort of creep because I didn't go. Each time I wouldn't go because of my fears, I felt even weirder.

Stutterers avoid specific types of encounter. Instead of using the telephone they will write a letter, "drop in on someone," or go to a store to see if it has the item they want. Stutterers avoid particular words, substituting "easy" words for "hard" ones. Word substitution sometimes results in convoluted phrasing in which nothing seems to be addressed directly.

> If I didn't dodge and duck, I wouldn't be able to carry on a conversation. If I didn't circumlocute, I wouldn't be able to get certain words out at all. Unless I'm coming in through the back door and taking a run at it, I'd never get it out.

Where this tactic proves difficult or impossible, stutterers may structure conversations so others say the troublesome words for them. One way of doing this is by feigning forgetfulness:

> You know what I mean, what was it we were talking about this morning, you know, John has one, it's ah, this is annoying, it's right on the tip of my tongue. . . .

Another tactic is to structure the situation so that someone else will be called upon to do the talking. For example, most stutterers fear they will stutter on their name (Petrunik, 1982:306). To avoid introducing themselves when they meet strangers, stutterers sometimes arrange their entry so that someone who knows them will proceed them into the situation. They then rely on the social conventions governing introductions to compel the other person to introduce them. Similarly, stutterers often fear placing orders in restaurants because here, too, word substitution is difficult. To cope with this situation, stutterers may encourage others to order before them; as soon as an item they would like—or at least find acceptable—is mentioned, they can use words they feel more confident with to duplicate the other person's order: "me too" or "same here." With close associates such cooperation may take on the character of finely tuned team work.

> When we were visiting friends of ours and I was having blocks, my wife would sometimes get what seemed to be a slightly anxious look and would quietly supply the word. She did this in a way that seemed so natural to me that I wondered if the others noticed it.

While the willing cooperation of others, especially intimates, has been well documented (Goffman, 1963:55, 97) a study of stuttering draws attention to how others may unknowingly be co-opted to conceal a potential stigma.

Circumvention and Camouflage

Stutterers sometimes use tactics based on timing and rhythm to outsmart the "it." Using these tactics requires a knowledge of both the etiquette of conversation and the patterns of one's own stuttering. Some speak quickly, for example, "building up" momentum to get "past" or "over" "difficult words." Others rhythmically pace their speech with the aid of coordinated hand and/or leg movements. Some arrange their sentences so that "easy" words precede "hard" ones, to establish a "flow" which carries them uneventfully over "trouble spots." Others arrange their speech so that "difficult" sounds are said on falling (or rising) pitches. Still others find that changing their tone of voice, or speaking in dialect or with an accent, is helpful.

A similar tactic involves delaying saying a troublesome word until the stutterer feels "it" no longer threatens to control speech and the word is ready to "come out." One way of doing this is to introduce starters and fillers (well, like, er, ah, um) into speech, to postpone troublesome words until the moment when they can be said. One stutterer, for example, was walking along a street when a stranger asked him for directions: "Where is the Borden Building?" A sudden panic gripped the stutterer. He knew exactly where the building was but, to permit him to wait for a moment when "it" could be caught off guard, he responded: "Well, let me see [pause with quizzical expression] oh, ah, near . . . let me see . . . near, I think Spadina and, ah, College." A variant of this tactic involves rearranging words. The late British humorist and stutterer, Patrick Campbell, gave an example of this in a television interview. While travelling on a London bus, he feared he would not be able to say, "May I have a ticket to Marble Arch?" without stuttering. So, when the conductor approached, he said instead, "May I have a ticket to that arch which is of marble made?" — which he executed fluently.

Where stutterers fail to outwit the "it" they may attempt to camouflage their problem by, for example, visually isolating others from evidence of their stuttering. A teacher who stutters accomplished this by writing on the blackboard just as he was about to stutter, thereby disguising a "block" as a pause to write.

Secret Stutterers

Most stutterers avoid detection only part of the time. However, some stutterers manage to maintain the identity of a "normal speaker" virtually all the time. They define themselves as stutterers not because they stutter in secret, like Becker's (1963:11) "secret deviants," but because they confront and respond to an inner propensity to stutter. Some stutterers report going for years without overtly stuttering. This fact — that a deviant identity can exist in the absence of visible deviant behavior — adds weight to Jack Katz's (1972) critique of those conceptions of labeling which focus exclusively on deviance as behavior and ignore deviance as an inner essence imputed to individuals. Goffman's (1963:56) refusal to recognize that stigmatized people may define themselves in terms of an inner essence and "that what distinguishes an individual from others is the core of his being" has limited his ability to comprehend how both stigmatized and "normal" people perceive their differences and the consequences of this for defining their "real" or "natural" groupings (1963:112). Some speech pathologists, on the other hand, have long recognized that stigmatized people define themselves on the basis of their subjective experience. They refer to secret stutterers as interiorized, indicating that stuttering can be an internal experience as well as an external appearance (Douglass and Quarrington, 1952:378).

Interiorized stutterers place great importance on preserving a social identity and will go to extraordinary lengths to preserve it. For example, a self-employed businessman in his early forties concealed his stuttering from his first wife. He confided in his second wife, but continued to conceal his stuttering from his children. At work, he had his secretary handle potentially trouble-

some situations. He would, for example, have her make certain phone calls for him. He claimed he would lose business if his stuttering became known. At one time he fired a secretary who had been working with him for a number of years because he thought her facial expressions showed that she had noticed him stuttering. He took great care not to drink too much or become fatigued so that he would not lose control over his speech. He preferred to entertain at home rather than to go out because he felt he could better regulate his drinking at home.

Successful interiorized stutterers develop a particular sensitivity to the intricacies of syntax. They "become 'situation conscious' [and display] special aliveness to the contingencies of acceptance and disclosure, contingencies to which normals will be less alive" (Goffman, 1963:111).

Avoiding stuttering has many costs. Some tactics exclude the stutterer from fully participating in social life as a "normal person," infringing on the very status the stutterer wishes to preserve. The interactional costs may be relatively trivial (not eating what one really wants in a restaurant, or saying something quite different from what one intended), or far more consequential (depriving onself of a social life or not pursuing a desired occupation).

> Because I wasn't normal I thought I couldn't do normal things like get married. I avoided going to parties, because I didn't want to feel bad, and then I felt bad because I didn't go and wasn't meeting people and having a good social life.

Similarly, the consequences for social identity may be relatively benign (being defined as "quiet" or "shy") or even somewhat flattering (being a "good listener" or a "strong silent type"). On the other hand, avoiding interaction may result in derogatory characterizations ("nervous," "odd," "rude," "affected," "silly," "strange," or "retarded").[3] A border crossing incident illustrates how avoidance can be interpreted as evidence of impropriety:

> The border guard asked me where I was born. Because I was afraid I would stutter on "Nova Scotia," I hesitated and started to "ah" and "um" to him. "Let me see now . . . it's the . . . uh, Maritimes . . . uh . . ." and so on. The outcome of all this evasion was that they made a thorough search of my car and even threatened to slit my seat covers.

The importance which stutterers give to the costs of concealment determines the tactics they use. Some people will do almost anything to avoid stuttering; others prefer to stutter in some situations rather than face the consequences of concealment.

> On the first day [of the Kerr course] we were gathering at the motel and going through the ritual of introductions. One man put his hand out to me and said, "My name is . . . uh . . . actually . . . my name is Jim." Afterwards one of the other men in the group who had a highly noticeable stutter shook his head and said, in an aside to me, "What a fool! I'd rather stammer my head off than avoid like that. It looks ridiculous. People must think he's crazy!"

OPENNESS

Unproblematic Stuttering

Unlike interiorized stutterers, those with visible and audible speech disruptions find that some audiences become so familiar with their stuttering that they no longer have anything to conceal. ("All my friends know I stutter. I can't hide my stuttering long enough.") These stutterers simply go ahead and speak without thinking about the consequences. As a result, particularly when speaking with persons who know their problem, they can be barely conscious of their stuttering.

> With Evelyn, if you asked me, I never stutter. If there was a tape recorder going it might show that I was stuttering. But I don't notice it and it doesn't bother me. I don't have any trouble talking to her on the phone unless others are there.

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3. See Goffman (1963:94) for a parallel between stutterers and the hard of hearing.

At the same time those who know stutterers well seem less conscious of their stuttering. Spouses and friends remarked:

> You know, since I've got to know you well, I hardly ever notice your stuttering.
>
> You know, sometimes I forget he stutters.
>
> I notice his stuttering only when others are present. I'm more conscious of it. At other times, I don't care.

Goffman (1963:81) argues that friends are less aware of a stigmatized person's problem because they are more familiar with the stigma. In the case of stuttering, however, what is critical is its obtrusiveness—"how much it interferes with the flow of interaction" (Goffman, 1963:49)—rather than mere visibility. When stutterers are with friends they feel less constrained to meet the exacting requirements which talk requires in other circumstances, because both parties develop idiosyncratic rules which enable them to become less dependent on such things as precise timing. For example, in telephone conversations between stutterers and their friends silences can cease to be interpreted as cues indicating the end of a speaking turn or a break in the telephone connection.

Once such understandings are developed stutterers feel less pressure to account for their problems or to work at concealing and controlling the "it"; thus, the sense of stuttering as a subjective presence wanes. For stutterers who learn to speak fluently by meticulously learning a new set of speech behaviors (Webster, 1975), the experience of stuttering as an "it" may fade away because with their speech under control there is no longer any need to account for stuttering.[4]

Struggling with the "It"

Stutterers who find it difficult to conceal their stuttering face the additional problem of how to converse with people who take interruptions in the speech of stutterers as a signal to resume talking themselves. Stutterers attempt to avoid this by making two claims: first, that they are competent persons who understand the conventions of talk; and second, that they have not relinquished their speaking turn—even though they are lapsing into unusually long silences—and should be permitted to continue speaking uninterrupted. These claims are important to the stutterer because together they provide the basis for participation in conversation and for maintaining an acceptable identity. One way stutterers make these claims is by confronting a block "head on" and trying to force out the word or sound: a typical pattern is a deep breath followed by muscle tension and visible strain as the stutterer attempts to "break through" the interruption and regain control of speech. The late Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima (1959:5) vividly described this phenomenon: "When a stutterer is struggling desperately to utter his first sound he is like a little bird that is trying to extricate itself from thick lime."

By making visible the "I/it" conflict through struggle, stutterers demonstrate to those they are conversing with that they have not given up their speaking turn and are doing their utmost to limit the interruption in their speech. This process of externalizing stuttering enables stutterers to share with others their experience of stuttering as a mysterious intrusive force. By demonstrating that their deviation from the conventions of speech is not intentional (Blum and McHugh, 1971; Goffman, 1963:128, 143; Mills, 1940) they hope to persuade others to bear with them and not to regard them as outsiders who reject, or do not understand, the norms others adhere to. The struggle that stutterers engage in is the "stigma symbol" (Goffman, 1963:46) that others recognize as stuttering. Struggle feeds into the troubles stutterers are trying to remedy in a classic vicious circle: stuttering is in part a product of attachment to the very social conventions that stutterers struggle to avoid breaking.

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4. While fluency can be achieved and the sense of stuttering as an "it" can disappear, the continued maintenance of fluency is quite another matter. Time and again those who have achieved fluency—through whatever means—find themselves relapsing, even years later (Perkins, 1979; Sheehan, 1979, 1983).

This analysis is supported by evidence that some members of the British upper classes view stuttering (or stammering as it is referred to in Britain) as a mark of distinction (Kazin, 1978:124; Shenker, 1970:112). They openly cultivate stuttering as a display of their superior social status and expect others to wait at their convenience. These persons make no apology for their stuttering and accordingly do not struggle with it to demonstrate its involuntary character. Consequently, their stuttering typically takes the form of a "slight stammer" characterized by relaxed repetitions and hesitations without any of the facial distortions associated with struggle.

Voluntary Disclosure

Like concealment, struggle also involves costs. Stuttering presents the listener with the problem of knowing how to sustain an interaction punctuated with silences, prolongations, and facial contortions. As one observer noted:

> What am I supposed to do when a stutterer is struggling to say something? Should I help him by saying the word—because I usually know what he is trying to say—or am I supposed to wait? Then if you wait, what do you do? Am I supposed to watch him struggling? It can be awful. And then there is just no knowing what to do with the time. It can be a long wait. It's embarrassing.

One way stutterers deal with this, and with the fear of exposure in the case of concealment, is by voluntarily disclosing their stuttering (Van Riper, 1971:211) in much the same manner as epileptics (Schneider and Conrad, 1980).

> The person who has an unapparent, negatively valued attribute often finds it expedient to begin an encounter with an unobtrusive admission of his own failing, especially with persons who are uninformed about him (Goffman, 1967:29).

Stutterers who make public speeches may begin by referring to their problem so their audiences won't be unduly shocked. One university professor started off each term by talking about his stuttering and inviting students to ask questions about it. Another began his courses by deliberately stuttering, so that he would not create expectations of fluency that he might later fail to meet.

Stutterers sometimes indicate the involuntary nature of their disability by apologizing or by noting that their present stuttering is worse than usual. Through such tactics they, in effect, argue that the stigmatized and normal categories represent poles of a continuum, and that they are much further toward the normal end of this continuum than their present behavior would suggest. In doing so, stutterers typically take advantage of the fact that while struggling with some sound or word they can often make fluent asides which display their relative normality.

> We went to the shh— shh— (s's always give me trouble) shh— show last night.

> I was talking to K— K—en (Wow! I had a hard time on that one) and he was saying. . . .

Other stutterers put listeners at ease with retrospective accounts such as, "Boy, I'm having a hard time today. I must be really tired."

Sometimes humor is used to anticipate and defuse confusion or embarrassment. One stutterer told people at informal gatherings to "go ahead and talk amongst yourselves if I take too long about saying anything." A teacher attempted to put his students at ease by inviting them to "take advantage of my stuttering to catch up on your note-taking."

Other stutterers use humor to claim more desirable identities for themselves.

> I use humor a lot now. If I'm having a problem, I'll make a comment like, "Boy, it's a problem having a big mouth like mine and not being able to use it." When I'm having a hard time getting out a word in a store I'll say something like, "Three tries for a quarter." Once a waitress started guessing when I blocked giving my order and kept on guessing and guessing wrong. Every so often, I would smile and say, "You just keep guessing." Everyone was laughing but they were laughing at her, not me.

Stutterers may also take a more aggressive stance. By pitting themselves against the listener, they indicate that they refuse to allow others to use their stuttering to belittle them. One of our respondents referred to this as the "fuck you, Mac" approach.

> I challenge the listener. I can make a game out of it. I look them straight in the eye and in my mind tell them to "fuck off." I might stutter like hell, but so what. It doesn't make them any better than me.

In using this strategy stutterers attempt to disavow the implications that they suspect others will draw about their lack of control over speech by displaying "cool." This strategy draws its impetus from the fear that many stutterers have that they will be seen as nervous and easily ruffled persons when they perceive themselves as normal persons in every respect other than their inability to control speech.

Another non-apologetic, but less aggressive, strategy that is occasionally used is one in which the stutterer systematically attempts to redefine stuttering as a "new and proud identity" (Schneider and Conrad, 1980:32) and to use this new identity as a means of getting stuttering "out of the closet" (M. Katz, 1968; Lambidakis, 1972). Some of our respondents reported that talking about their problem to new acquaintances proved to be a good way of gaining rapport. Revealing one's weakness to another can be a way of appearing honest, frank, and "more human." Others claimed that their efforts to overcome their "handicap" had strengthened their character. A few (e.g. Van Riper, Sheehan, and Douglass) have even used their personal experience of stuttering professionally, in therapy and research, to gain knowledge and rapport with patients and/or subjects. Even in occupations such as sales or journalism, where stuttering might ordinarily be seen to be a great handicap, some stutterers have used stuttering to their advantage. A Canadian journalist was said to have "disarmed" those he interviewed with his stuttering so that they were sympathetic toward him and unusually frank. A salesman had his business cards printed: "B-B-Bob G-G-Goldman the stuttering Toyota salesman."

Public figures sometimes use their stuttering as a trademark and a means to success. Some examples are the comedian "Stuttering Joe" Frisco, the humorist Patrick Campbell, and the country and western singer Mel Tillis. In his autobiography, Campbell (1967:212) reports how his stuttering on British television made him famous:

> While making the ginger ale commercials I looked upon my stammer as a nuisance that would have to be played down as much as possible if we weren't to have endless takes. . . . Although I didn't care to think about this aspect of it too much I did realize that my stammer fitted rather neatly into their campaign, the essence of which was never to mention the word 'Schweppes', but merely to mention the first syllable 'sch—', and that was quite enough for me in every way.
> It wasn't until nearly a year later [when asked to advertise butter] that I realized my mistake. [Again Campbell tried to control his stuttering. The producer called him aside and said] "I don't know quite how to put this—but could we have a little more of your trademark on the word 'butter'?". . .I'd been trying to suppress the very thing it seemed that everyone wanted.

Reflecting on his "asset," Campbell claimed that while he tried to put the best possible light on it, he never really became proud of his identity as a stutterer. The frequent and fleeting gains did not offset the losses that recurred day after day.

> If I was offered by some miraculous overnight cure the opportunity never to stammer again, I'd accept it without hesitation, even though it meant the end for me of television (1967:213).

DISAVOWAL

While stutterers sometimes try to put listeners at their ease by drawing attention to themselves, there are often circumstances in which they prefer to define their stuttering out of existence. To do this successfully, they need the tacit cooperation of their listeners. Both parties must share the assumption that the embarrassment and awkwardness associated with stuttering and attempts to

control it are best dealt with by acting as if the stuttering were not happening. This provides a "phantom normalcy" (Goffman, 1963:122). By overlooking stuttering, both parties act as if "nothing unusual is happening" (Emerson, 1970) rather than acknowledge something which would require a response for which no shared guidelines exist. This tactic leaves intact the stutterer's status as a normal and competent person and the other's as a decent and tactful person who avoids needlessly embarrassing others. Tactful overlooking, as Safilios–Rothschild (1970:129) has suggested, is normatively prescribed:

> Regardless of any degree of aversion felt toward the disabled, the non-disabled are normatively not permitted to show these negative feelings in any way and their fear of making a verbal or a non-verbal "slip" indicating their emotions renders the interaction quite formal and rigid.

The importance of tacit disavowal of stuttering is indicated by the anxiety some stutterers feel when they enter a situation where they know it cannot, or will not, be ignored. Conversations with little children are one example.

> Children give me the hardest time. They know something is wrong and they don't hide it. My little nephew embarrassed me terribly in front of the family. He said "your mouth moves funny." I tried to explain to him that I had something wrong with my mouth just like other people had something wrong with their ears or their eyes.

Another example is where stutterers are forced to watch and listen to themselves or others stuttering. Just as many fat people avoid scales and mirrors (Himelfarb and Evans, 1974:222), many stutterers shun mirrors and audio and video tape recorders. Similarly, stutterers are often uncomfortable watching others stutter. We witnessed stutterers in the speech clinic cover their faces with their hands or even walk out of the room rather than witness another person stutter. These attempts to distance themselves from stuttering appeared in some cases to be experienced as a disassociation of the body and the self through a loss or blurring of self-awareness. Stutterers talked of "slipping out of the situation" at the moment of stuttering and not being aware of what they or others were doing when they "returned." During these periods, stutterers experience a "time out" (Goffman, 1967:30; Scott and Lyman, 1968) from the situation. Time appears to stop so that when speech resumes it is as if the block did not occur. This sense of time having stopped, and of stuttering occurring outside the situation, is symbolized by the frozen poses stutterers sometimes adopt at the moment of stuttering: gestures are stopped, only to be resumed once speech continues. For example, one stutterer regularly "blocked" on a word just as he was about to tap the ash off his cigarette with his finger. During the few seconds he was "caught" in his block, his finger remained poised, frozen an inch or so above his cigarette. When he released the sound, the finger would simultaneously tap the ash into the ashtray.

Stutterers and their listeners manage time outs cooperatively by severing eye contact. Normally, people who are conversing indicate their attentiveness by facial expressions and eye contact, thereby reaffirming that they are listening and involved in the interaction. By breaking eye contact at the moment of stuttering, stutterers and their listeners jointly disengage from the conversation and exclude stuttering from the interaction. The moment fluent speech returns engagement is re-established through a renewal of eye contact; the participants confirm their mutual subterfuge by acting as if nothing had happened. During time outs listeners may also confirm their disengagement by doing something unrelated, such as assuming an air of nonchalance, shuffling papers, glancing through a magazine or a book, fiddling with an object, or surveying the immediate surroundings. These signals indicate that the participants are not "in" the conversation.

While struggling to "get a word out" stutterers may avert their faces or hide their mouths with their hands. This phenomenon reveals an apparent difference in the social significance of sight and hearing. During this obscuring of the sight of stuttering, as with the time out, both parties

are presumably aware that stuttering is taking place, and indeed that the stutterer is doing her or his best to "get past the block" and resume the conversation. Yet, at the same time, stuttering is denied. It is as if through the "thin disguises" (Goffman, 1963:81) which contradictory appearances provide it is possible to establish opposing social claims and thus "have one's cake and eat it too."

Time out, besides resolving the interactional problem of how to respond to stuttering, protects or hides one's vulnerability; it's much like the common response of averting your eyes when you accidentally see someone naked. Stutterers are, in a sense, "naked" at the moment of stuttering; they are without a mask, their front is crumbling and their "raw self" exposed (Goffman, 1963:16). Averting their eyes is a cue to the other to look away from the stutterer's "nakedness," thus saving both from embarrassment. The stutterers we interviewed expressed this sense of "nakedness" or vulnerability with descriptions such as "weak," "helpless," "like a little kid," and "with my shell removed." Some even said that at the point of stuttering they felt transparent. This can be related to the saying that the eyes are the mirror of the soul, which stems from the belief that the eyes reflect one's true feelings even though the rest of one's face may camouflage them.

Loss of eye contact gives stutterers time to recover their composure, manage the "unsatisfactory" image that has emerged, and, if possible, project a new image. Listeners have their own self to consider. Because they too may be held partly responsible for the stutterer's embarrassment, they can use loss of eye contact to indicate that they did not intend the embarrassment to happen and, above all, that they are not amused or uncomfortable.

While the tactic of mutual disavowal is usually a situational one the comment of one stutterer we interviewed indicates that in some cases it can be much more pervasive:

> Ever since I was a young child I can't remember my parents ever directly mentioning stuttering. It seemed obvious that they saw me stuttering, and they knew I stuttered, but they never said anything. The only incident I can remember is my father singing "K-K-Katy" a couple of times. I felt badly about that. Nothing direct was ever said, even by my brothers. My younger brother always gave me a lot of trouble. But he never mentioned stuttering once. I wondered if my parents told them not to say anything. My parents did make lots of references to me as nervous, sensitive, or different, and were always saying they were going to take me to the doctor for my nerves. But except for brief references on very few occasions, they never mentioned anything about stuttering.

In such cases, the disavowal of stigma is extended across entire situations. This requires others to tacitly agree to ignore the stigma in all encounters with the stigmatized person.

DISCUSSION

Our study of stuttering provides a vehicle to elaborate upon and extend the work of Davis, Goffman, Schneider and Conrad, and others on the strategic manipulation of awareness to manage potential stigma. The implications of our analysis also extend beyond stigma management to a consideration of the importance of the experiential dimension for the construction of social order. Because the stutterer finds problematic what others take for granted, the stutterer's social world is the world of everyman writ large.

In our consideration of stuttering we have developed three major lines of argument. First, our analysis shows the importance of considering subjective experience as well as behavior when studying the management of identity and the construction of interactional order. Stutterers engage in the ongoing creation of a subjective reality which at once shapes, and is shaped by, the management strategies they employ to regulate awareness of their disability and claim or disown identities. This consideration of the subjective experience of stuttering supports Jack Katz's (1972) argument that deviance theory should recognize that people sometimes perceive deviance as an inner essence independent of behavior. In addition, our analysis extends rather

than simply elaborates upon Goffman's work, for though he writes of "ego" or "felt" identity, which he defines as "the subjective sense of [the stigmatized person's] own situation" (1963:105), he does not develop this concept.

Second, we have shown that the management of potential stigma can involve strategies conceived of, and executed, on a moment-to-moment basis, in addition to the premeditated strategies that have attracted most sociologists' attention. Advance planning was usually necessary where stutterers tried to conceal their problem through role avoidance. In speaking situations, management became more spontaneous: stutterers selected strategies in the light of opportunities and difficulties which arose in the course of interaction. In both cases, concealment strategies were marked by a high level of self-consciousness. When stutterers used openness or disavowal, however, only voluntary disclosure was consciously employed. Both struggling to overcome the "it" and time outs were non-calculated, though, especially in the latter case, stutterers were quick to recognize these tactics as coping and "restorative measures" (Goffman, 1963:128) once they were brought to their attention.

Finally, we have called attention to the fact that stutterers, like other stigmatized persons, seek to manage two interrelated, yet analytically distinguishable, problems. They are concerned both with preserving an acceptable identity and with preserving orderly interaction so that they can get on with the business of living. In exploring this issue we have shown how stutterers sometimes find themselves in situations in which it is not possible to simultaneously achieve both these objectives and thus are required to choose between them. The repertoire of tactics stutterers develop, and by implication the limits they place on their involvement in social life, depend on the importance they attach to these objectives.

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