RECOUNTING THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS WHO STUTTER:

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to gain a detailed understanding of the K-12 school experiences of adults who stutter. This study made use of a qualitative, phenomenological approach to recount the K-12 school experiences of adults who stutter. The primary investigator conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with adults who stutter (8 males, 3 females), and 2 focus group interviews (N=6, N=4). These interviews were videotaped and audio-recorded. The primary investigator transcribed and analyzed the interviews for major and minor themes. To establish credibility, participants were provided with a copy of the transcript analysis in order to validate, clarify, or question the results. In addition, two independent investigators performed separate thematic analyses. Their findings were compared with those of the primary investigator to establish consistency of themes. Participants spoke at length about how stuttering affected their school experiences. Major themes involved student characteristics, such as emotions, coping strategies, and personality; school characteristics, such as relationships with teachers, relationships with peers, classroom interactions (e.g., oral presentations, volunteering information, introducing oneself), and interventions (e.g., speech therapy, parent-teacher conferences, or lack thereof); and post-educational consequences of stuttering. In addition, participants provided personal reflections on the present school climate for people who stutter, the visible and less visible experiences of stuttering, the experience of having a disability in school, and suggestions for classroom teachers. Results suggest that the experience of stuttering in school is influenced by many factors, and that attention should be given to not only one’s
speech characteristics, but also to emotional and psychological needs and the sociocultural environment of the individual.
This dissertation is dedicated to the following individuals:

My grandmother, Ella Mae West (February 12, 1915 – December 4, 2003)

My grandmother, Juanita C. Daniels

My grandfathers, whom I never met but care about deeply

My parents, Kermit and Bobbie Daniels

My first cousin, Gregory Lamar Daniels (July 31, 1971 – August 9, 2001)

To people who stutter
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Thanks, Kesho. One “box” down, many more to go.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Stuttering is a disorder of communication that has been studied from many different perspectives over the years (Blood, Blood, Tellis, & Gabel, 2003; Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crowe & Walton, 1981; Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002; Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Johnson, 1944; Ludlow & Loucks, 2003; Perkins, Rudas, Johnson, & Bell, 1976; Weber-Fox, Spencer, Spruill, & Smith, 2004; Weiss, 2004). A number of researchers agree that stuttering is a multifactorial disorder that affects individuals in a variety of ways (Smith, 1999; Smith & Kelly, 1997; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004). In the past, researchers primarily focused on causal explanations and specific characteristics of the speech mechanism (Bloodstein, 1993; Johnson, 1944; Perkins et al., 1976). However, Quesal (1989) and Corcoran and Stewart (1998) encouraged researchers to look beyond physiological characteristics and include the social experiences of people who stutter (PWS) into their research agendas.

Though a number of researchers have used qualitative methodologies to explore the social experiences of PWS, few empirical studies have qualitatively explored their school experiences (Ribbler, 2006). PWS often report difficult school-related experiences (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Klompas & Ross, 2004). These difficult experiences include, but are not limited to, oral presentations, reading aloud in class, social interactions, communicating with teachers, and peer relationships (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004). In addition, research in the school setting has shown that various groups of people hold negative perceptions and stereotypes of PWS. These groups include peers (Davis, Howell & Cooke, 2002; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel & Greenwood, 2003; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Mooney & Smith, 1994;
Perrin, 1954; Storch, Krain, Kovacs, & Barlas, 2002), schoolteachers (Lass et al., 1992; Silverman & Marik, 1993; Swan, 1993), school administrators (Lass et al., 1994), and college professors and university students (Bento, 1996; Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; McKinnon, Hess, & Landry, 1986).

Therefore, some research suggests that the school environment can be problematic for PWS. This is an important area to be explored in more depth because school is generally a time when individuals begin to formulate personal and social identity – who they are, what they stand for, and what goals they hope to achieve in life (Davidson, 1996; Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002; Leigh, 1999). For example, following the school years, research has shown that PWS may suffer from occupational stereotyping, and also pursue careers that require limited speaking (Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Alhouse, 2004). This may be due to how stuttering has affected their identity during the school years. Therefore, PWS may not view themselves in a positive way as a result of internalizing negative messages from others around them (Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Hottle, 1996).

Limited research has explored the impact of stigma and stuttering on the school experiences of PWS. Many of the accounts in the area of stuttering and school experiences have focused on ways in which teachers can interact with PWS in the classroom (LaBlance, Steckol, & Smith, 1994; Pindzola, 1985; Swan, 1993). In addition, empirical findings in the area of stuttering and school experiences often emerge as themes within larger studies that were not designed to intentionally focus on school experiences (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004). Other past studies have focused on attitudes and perceptions of stuttering from the perspectives of educators who work with PWS (Crowe & Walton, 1981; Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Yairi & Williams, 1970;
Yeakle & Cooper, 1986), but limited research has systematically explored the impact of stuttering on school experiences from the perspective of the person who stutters. Crichton-Smith (2002), for example, wrote that “despite much anecdotal commentary on the experience of stammering [stuttering], only a few studies have been carried out that investigated this from a first person perspective” (p. 334). Moore (2006), in a more general discussion about incorporating student voices into school curriculum, expressed the value of gaining first-person student perspectives:

> Beyond question, the foremost objective of all educators should be to create educational opportunities for children that are inclusive, challenging, and meaningful. What is problematic, however, is that most decisions about an appropriate curriculum seldom include consultation with the students who will be directly affected. The literature in this review consistently demonstrates that students’ perceptions contain valuable information that should be used in deciding what works in a classroom. . . . Educators must listen to students’ voices and implement what they learn from students’ perceptions and experiences to create the best educational services. . . . What is surprising is that their voices are too often omitted from the literature. (p. 24-5)

The current study seeks to remedy the lack of information on students’ perceptions by documenting systematically the impact of stigma and stuttering on quality of school life from the perspective of PWS.

A related issue when discussing documentation of school life for PWS involves eligibility for special education services. According to the Individuals with Disabilities and Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA ’04), special education professionals must show that a student’s disability has an adverse impact on his or her educational performance (Bennett, 2006;
Olsen & Bohlman, 2002; Ribbler, 2006; Susca, 2002; Whitmire & Dublinske, 2003; Whitmire et al., 2006). Therefore, when recommending special education services for PWS, the speech-language pathologist and classroom teacher will need to indicate the ways in which stuttering adversely affects school performance. Often, this adverse impact is determined through observations and intuitions of the professional with limited input from the student. By gaining in-depth knowledge of the school experience from the perspective of the person who stutters, school teachers and speech-language pathologists may learn of additional impacts that would not be discovered through direct observation and intuition.

As a result, research on the school experiences of PWS can help professionals who work or consult with PWS (i.e., school teachers, school personnel, speech-language pathologists, and fluency specialists) to design school contexts that facilitate better learning environments. In addition, Mancini and Coster (2004) stated that it is important to gain “knowledge about the important factors affecting the social participation of children with disabilities so that intervention to maintain or strengthen supportive factors and to change limiting factors can be guided appropriately” (p. 12). Therefore, this knowledge can also help strengthen intervention for PWS. Consequently, PWS may achieve a more positive sense of identity and a better quality of school life.

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge of the ways in which PWS experience the K-12 school environment. The chapters are organized as follows. First, this Introduction outlined the rationale for investigating the school experiences of PWS. Chapter 2 is a review of literature that focuses on the disability experience, stigma, and past research related to stuttering and school experiences. Chapter 3 describes in detail the methodology used to implement the study.
Chapter 4 will provide results of the study. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings in detail and their implications for PWS in school and society.
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The school environment is complex for many reasons. Westby (1997) suggested that students must negotiate not only the academic curriculum, but also the cultural curriculum. In other words, in addition to mastering academic content, being a successful student in school involves world knowledge, an understanding of classroom and instructor expectations, and rules of interaction for social acceptance (Westby, 1997). Scholars of education, such as Keefe, Moore, and Duff (2006), and Feinberg and Soltis (1992), have suggested that school is a microcosm of society. That is, school prepares students to exercise human rights. Moreover, these authors also suggested that the relationships that occur within school can predict broader social issues. Luckasson (2006) wrote that “schools teach powerful messages not only through the formal textbook curriculum but also through example” (p. 13). She provided several examples of the ways in which students’ rights can be violated through school policies and practices. For example, denying a student the right to participate in extracurricular activities based on a disability violates the human right of association. Sanctioning teasing experiences and discrimination based on disability and stigma devalues individuals and affects how they may perceive themselves in the world. Thus, students in school must interact on several different levels with content, individuals, and policies and practices, and this notion can have important implications for students with disabilities.

Because the school environment is complex for students with disabilities, such as PWS, a discussion of school experiences presupposes certain theoretical assumptions. These theoretical assumptions lay the foundation for the conceptual framework of the study, and a discussion of the relevant literature to the school experiences of PWS.
Theoretical Assumptions

The theoretical premise of this study is that human beings exist as members of dynamic social and cultural systems (Ogbu, 1981, 1992; Rogoff, 1990, 2003). Moreover, individuals develop their identity through social interactions that take place within cultural routines (Hagstrom & Wertsch, 2004). Hagstrom & Wertsch (2004), for example, wrote that “identity is not an innate something that emerges out of the developing self but rather results from actions taken during social interactions with others” (p. 163). Thus, individuals learn who they are by how they compare to others, and in relation to the values of his or her culture (Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Hottle, 1996; Ogbu, 1992; Tatum, 1999). This premise is important to the topic of school experiences of PWS, because it acknowledges the roles of school culture and social interactions that take place within school culture, and the ways in which these components can influence the school experiences of PWS. The following perspectives provide the theoretical grounding for the study of school experiences of PWS.

A Social Constructivist Perspective. Social constructivism (a philosophy on which sociocultural theory is based) is rooted in the writings of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, was interested in exploring human consciousness and learning. He believed that social and cultural context played important roles in an individual’s cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, one cannot understand an individual without understanding his or her social experiences and the historical context that framed those experiences. His development of sociocultural theory conceptualizes the human experience as consisting of individual characteristics, interactions with other people and social institutions, and cultural context in which humans, interactions, and institutions are embedded. The sociocultural framework acknowledges the biological, social, and cultural constructs that frame human functioning. Thus
this framework is highly appropriate for the study of communication disorders, and it has been employed by a number of authors (Hagstrom & Wertsch, 2004; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Schneider & Watkins, 1996; Shadden & Agan, 2004; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), to a variety of topics, including stuttering (Hagstrom & Daniels, 2004).

Stuttering has been described as a multifactorial disorder (Smith, 1999; Smith & Kelly, 1997). Many studies have focused on the ways in which others view PWS (Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel, & Greenwood, 2003; Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004; Lass et al., 1992; Lass et al., 1994; Silverman & Marik, 1993), and the social experiences of PWS (Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Hottle, 1996; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Mooney & Smith, 1994). Moreover, professionals have provided suggestions for how to modify the cultural (school) environment for PWS (LaBlance, Steckol, & Smith, 1994; Pindzola, 1985; Swan, 1993). Many studies and articles have emphasized the social aspect and cultural climate of PWS in addition to biological aspects and characteristics within the individual. Therefore, the sociocultural model, because it includes these many factors, is highly appropriate for conceptualizing the stuttering experience.

The sociocultural perspective suggests that the individual cannot be separated from social interactions and the cultural context in which those actions take place (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Thus biology, psychology, environment, or language, as isolated components, are not enough to explain the experience of being a person who stutters. According to the sociocultural framework, one must consider characteristics of the individual (genetics, neurology, language, emotions), interactions of the individual with social others (parents, teachers, peers) and social structures (school, family, workplace), and the culture that frames
these social relations. Thus, a person who stutters may exhibit speech disfluencies, but it takes interactions with others who are not disfluent and with a culture that values fluent speech to develop an identity as a person who stutters. Stuttering is therefore both a biological construct and a social construct. Dudley-Marling (2004), in a discussion of students with learning disabilities, explains a similar notion when illustrating the concept of shyness:

A person cannot, for example, be a shy person on her or his own. The performance of shyness requires the presence of other people (with whom one can be shy) interacting around some shared activity that makes the characteristics that mark shyness salient. For example, shyness can emerge in a classroom setting only if there is an expectation of conversational interaction. Even a hermit’s shyness must be defined in relation to other people with whom he or she chooses not to interact. (p. 485)

As one can observe, shyness, as a purely innate construct, is not sufficient to explain how one becomes and continues to remain shy. It is a complex and situated phenomenon. Dudley-Marling further illustrates the situated phenomenon of smartness.

The performance of smartness requires, at a minimum, a set of cultural standards for defining one as smart (e.g., success in school, mastery of a particular way of speaking); opportunities to demonstrate smartness (e.g., a complex math problem, standardized achievement tests, opportunities for verbal performance) that occur at just the right time and place (a verbal performance that counts as smart in a school setting will likely have a very different significance in a bar); at least the theoretical presence of people who perform these tasks less well – that is, people who are not smart – . . . and the presence of people who have been granted the social authority to adjudicate smartness (e.g., peers, teachers, test developers). Certainly, individual traits play a role in the performance of
smartness, but these other factors are at least as important. Different tasks, different sets of cultural expectations, or the failure of these various factors involved in the performance of smartness to come together in just the right way, in the right place, and at the right time could easily transform a “smart” person into someone who is not so smart after all. (p. 485)

Thus, in parallel with the above mentioned examples, being a person who stutters requires a biological predisposition to stuttering (which is perhaps influenced by genetic, linguistic, emotional, and psychological variables) that result in overt or covert communication behaviors; interacting with others who convey either overt or subliminal messages that the person is different; and participating in activity settings where fluency is viewed as salient.

Viewing a disorder such as stuttering from a social and qualitative perspective is not a new approach (Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Tetnowski & Damico, 2001). In addition, many professionals have adopted similar perspectives in disorders such as aphasia (Mackay, 2003; Shadden & Agan, 2004), learning disabilities (Dudley-Marling, 2004), hearing impairment (Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002; Kent, 2003), and Asperger syndrome (Malloy & Vasil, 2002). Moreover, many writings in the area of disabilities have conceptualized the social and cultural aspects of the phenomenon (Goffman, 1963; Hagstrom, 2004; Harlan & Robert, 1998; Smart, 2001; Smith, 2003).

This discussion suggests that individual human functioning is a complex process that includes biological characteristics, social interactions with people and institutions, and cultural context that defines the rules for how interactions take place (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). An individual’s identity (i.e., who they are, what they stand for, what goals they set) results from a combination of all of these factors (Azoulay, 1997; Daniels & Gabel,
Disability research has shown that students with disabilities often have qualitatively different social and school experiences than students without disabilities (Flynt & Morton, 2004; Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002; Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006; Kent, 2003). These findings may stem from the fact that society is more likely to treat people with disabilities differently than people without disabilities (Goffman, 1963; Smart, 2001). This notion has implications for the school setting because students with disabilities must socially interact with others in a school culture that may be predisposed, through stereotypes, policies, and practices, to viewing them differently than people without disabilities. Therefore, when conceptualizing the experience of PWS in school, one must consider the person in relation to experiences with others and the school culture.

**International Classification of Functioning, Disabilities, and Health (ICF) Framework.** A second framework that is more specific to the disability experience is the ICF framework. As with the social constructivist perspective, the ICF framework emphasizes the individual’s experiences in relation to his or her environment, thus capturing the complexity of the school experience. This framework combines three pre-existing models of disability: medical, environmental, and functional (Smart, 2001).

The medical model suggests that disability can be defined in terms of physical impairments where primacy is placed on biological aspects of the individual. Moreover, in this model disability diagnoses rely heavily on objective and standardized measures of performance. Advocates of the medical model would suggest that when physical signs and symptoms are eliminated, then disability is no longer present. For example, this model of disability would suggest that stuttering is only present when observable speech disfluencies and associated secondary behaviors are present. This model is most familiar and has the longest history,
particularly in the medical and health sciences (Smart, 2001). Limitations of the medical model include not placing emphasis on social context or environmental demands. In contrast to the medical model, the environmental model suggests that one’s physical or social environment can define disability. In other words, disability doesn’t reside within the individual, but rather exists in the context of one’s physical and social environment. For example, a person who stutters may only be disabled when practices of the environment limit participation, such as imposing a time limit on an oral presentation. Moreover, if a particular environment views the condition in a positive light, or if everyone in the environment has the same condition, then disability may not exist. Thus, disability in the environmental model is a social construct. Finally, the functional model suggests that disability be defined in terms of activities or “functions” that the person is incapable of accomplishing. For example, according to this model, a telemarketer who stutters may be more disabled than a chef who stutters since the job of telemarketing depends largely on speaking.

As these models suggest, disability impacts more than physical status alone. Social context and activities of daily living are affected as well (Smart, 2001). Because of its multidimensional focus, the ICF has been a useful framework for conceptualizing the experience of PWS (Yaruss, 1998; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004). Yaruss (1998), for example, applied an earlier version of the ICF framework to demonstrate how stuttering affected an individual’s life (Yaruss, 1998). The three domains of this version included impairment, disability, and handicap (Yaruss, 1998). Impairment refers to a physical, structural, or anatomical abnormality. In relation to stuttering, this would include speech disfluencies that result from inefficient neuromotor functioning. Disability refers to limited activities of daily living. For example, a person who stutters may have difficulty talking on the telephone or ordering food at a restaurant. Handicap
refers to the social penalties that individuals experience as a result of the impairment or disability. For example, PWS may experience limited employment opportunities and more economic hardships. The revised ICF framework was expanded to include two major parts; the first part explores experiences related to the individual’s health and activities (i.e., body function and structure and activities and participation); the second part explores contextual factors that may influence one’s experience with disability and functioning (i.e., environmental factors and personal factors) (see Yaruss & Quesal, 2004, for an extended review).

The ICF and social constructivist perspectives acknowledge the role of the individual in relation to social activities and environmental demands. These perspectives are important to understanding the school experiences of PWS due to the complexity of the school environment. As Leigh (1999) stated, “the school environment is a place where one learns about oneself within specific types of group settings and socialization experiences. . . . Ultimately, schools and the interpersonal relations that evolve within the school setting do make a difference in the ways they contribute to the formation and reconstruction of identity as a process of personal development” (p. 237). School involves individuals with different personality characteristics; interactions of individuals with each other, and their social participation in classrooms and other school-related events; and policies and practices that define the rules for how individuals act in the school environment. Due to the complexity of individuals and the school environment, a study of school experiences must include a framework designed to capture this complexity. The following conceptual framework will lay the foundation for this study.

Conceptual Framework

Maxwell (2005) stated that a conceptual framework is “primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why – a
tentative theory of the phenomena that you are investigating” (p. 33). These factors direct the researcher’s attention to particular aspects of the phenomena and illuminates relationships that may otherwise go unnoticed. A conceptual framework, according to Maxwell, is based on experiential knowledge, prior theory and research, pilot research, and thought experiments. An important point of the conceptual framework is that it is “something that is constructed, not found. It incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the structure, the overall coherence, is something that you build, not something that exists ready-made” (p. 35).

Based on the typical school experiences of students without disabilities, the primary investigator’s personal background as a person who stutters, prior theories (such as social constructivism) and research on disability, stigma and school experiences (Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002; Leigh, 1999), and pilot interviews, a conceptual framework was developed to illustrate factors suggested to affect the school experiences of PWS (see Figure 1). The framework centers on the school experiences of PWS. The primary components that are suggested to affect school experiences of PWS include individual characteristics, such as speech production skills, personality, and self-concept; and the school environment, which includes school cultural context (e.g., instructor and classroom expectations, participation in extracurricular activities, and policies and practices that inform school expectations, activities, and participation), and social interactions within school (e.g., interactions with teachers, school personnel, peers, and speech-language pathologists). The interaction of these components ultimately affects one’s identity construction, which, in turn, can modify individual characteristics accordingly. This framework serves as a guide, or starting point, to exploring the school experiences of PWS.
This theoretical discussion on the complexity of the individual and the school environment has been supported by research aimed at studying school contexts (Stumpers et al., 2005). The following section connects the above mentioned theoretical assumptions to research designed to explore the school context of students with no documented disabilities. This knowledge will lay the foundation for gaining insight into the school contexts of students with disabilities.

The School Context and Experiences of Students without Disabilities

The school context involves complex interactions of individuals as they act with each other and the cultural routines of school. Moreover, schools have become an important means through which students develop their identity as well as learn to become members of society (Feinberg & Soltis, 1992; Stumpers et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to explore the school context and students’ experiences within this context.

Stumpers et al. (2005) conducted a study that examined the school context of adolescents, and their experiences within this context. These researchers stated that “in an era where traditional sources of belonging have diminished due to changing family and community demographics (i.e., the breakdown of the nuclear family), schools have increasingly become important sources for meeting this critical need for young adolescents” (p. 252). Stumpers et al. (2005) conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 participants about their school experiences in order to examine their school context, and personal experiences within this context. Data were transcribed and analyzed for major and minor themes. Three major themes emerged to the participants’ school experiences, as well as minor themes within each of the major themes. The first major theme was “People”; minor themes within this theme included teachers, friends and peers, and people outside of the school context, such as parents. According to the participants,
teachers played an important role in the students’ school experiences. Participants stated that having sensitive and understanding teachers afforded them an optimal learning environment. Friends and peer groups also influenced the participants’ school experiences. For example, the researchers stated that “it is imperative that young adolescents have the ability to choose and engage in appropriate peer social networks as a source of emotional support, information, orientation and guidance” (Stumpers et al., 2005, p. 258-9). Participants in the study reported varied experiences with friends and peer groups: some participants felt accepted by their peer groups whereas other felt a need to conform to standards set by the group. Besides teachers, and friends and peer groups, people outside of the school context influenced the school experiences of the participants. These included parents, family members, and friends outside of school. This minor theme, however, had an indirect role and was judged to be less important as teachers, friends, and peer groups.

The second major theme of the study was “Social Roles.” This theme refers to various responsibilities of the students, such as serving in an elected office or being socially assigned a role in a particular peer group. Minor themes within the theme of “Social Roles” included student officer, being a good student, and being a ‘big kid’. The first minor theme, student officer, represented a structured social role that only certain students could attain. Participants reported that student officers represented a role of power and prestige, as this type of position afforded students special privileges such as talking directly to the principal. Being a ‘big kid’ represented a social role that was more implicit. ‘Big kids’ were students in upper grade levels. Participants stated that this role made them feel more respected, responsible, and powerful. Finally, “good students” was a minor theme that referred to those students who listened
attentively in class, and completed all expected assignments in a timely manner. Participants stated that being good students increased positive relationships with their teachers.

The third and final major theme was “School Values.” This referred to beliefs and practices that are embraced by the school. Minor themes within this theme included meaningful participation, safety, fairness, and need fulfillment. Stumpers et al. (2005) wrote that “participation yields a sharing of power that can lead to greater ownership of the community by its members which further results in greater satisfaction and cohesion within the group” (p. 262). Participants in the study reported that good schools involved being able to participate with teachers and peers. Safety was another important feature of a good school environment. Participants stated that feeling physically safe and secure contributed to a good school environment. The researchers also suggested that, embedded in the idea of safety, was emotional safety. In other words, participants also reported feeling safe when they were free from bullies. In addition to meaning participation and safety, participants stated that fairness and need fulfillment fostered positive school experiences. Fairness was discussed in the context of teachers not showing favoritism towards certain students, and rewarding students for doing the right thing. Need fulfillment referred to cohesiveness and unity among members of the school environment.

As one can observe, the experiences of students without disabilities in the school environment will depend on a variety of factors (Stumpers et al., 2005). Some students report positive experiences, while others may report negative experiences (Gamliel et al., 2003; Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Sweeting and West (2001) conducted a study to determine factors that differentiated children who were teased and bullied from their counterparts who were not. The researchers collected self-reported data from several 11-year old children (N=2,586), as well
as information from parents, nurses, and classroom teachers (N=2,237). Results suggested that the experience of teasing and bullying was not differentiated along lines of race, height, or physical maturity. However, physical attractiveness, weight, disability status, and academic performance were significant predictors.

Because the school context is multidimensional and complex, in what ways do students with disabilities experience this context? A number of researchers have suggested that people with disabilities, including PWS, are stigmatized groups, both in school and society (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002; Green et al., 2005; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006; Smart, 2001; Woods, 1978; Woods & Williams, 1976). When exploring the school experiences of PWS in particular, and people with disabilities in general, it is important to first understand the concept of stigma. Knowledge of stigma, and how it develops, will help to illuminate the importance of understanding the school experiences of PWS. The following section further explores the concept of stigma, how it relates to the experiences of people with disabilities, and its implications for PWS in school.

**Stigma and People with Disabilities**

The concept of stigma has generally been defined as a negative attribute that is assigned to a person or group of people (Goffman, 1963). However, in addition to characteristics or traits of the individual, the concept of stigma also involves the individual’s social interaction experiences, and the cultural environment in which these experiences take place. Link and Phelan (2001), for example, discuss stigma as a concept that consists of different components which are linked to power and privilege. They contended that the concept of stigma is often too focused on the individual, and attributes and traits of the individual, and less focused on the sources of stigma and the social processes and power differences that work to create and
maintain it (Link & Phelan, 2001). This perspective is important because, when attempting to understand the school experiences of PWS, one must focus attention on not only the person who stutters but also the various relationships that PWS encounter in school, and policies and practices that may work against the person who stutters. The following components describe how Link and Phelan conceptualize stigma.

*Labeling.* Labeling refers to the “social selection of human differences when it comes to identifying differences that will matter socially” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 367). These authors suggest that human differences can be categorized into differences that are virtually irrelevant (e.g., ear size, the color of one’s car, shoe size); differences that are relevant in a few situations (e.g., eye color, food preferences, handedness) but not in the larger scheme; and differences that have social significance (e.g., IQ, skin color, sexual orientation). The latter category, differences that have social significance, results from the process of labeling. In other words, members of the society select the differences that will be salient from those that will be inconsequential.

A key concept in the labeling process is that these categories of difference are often taken for granted as “the way things are,” perhaps due to inherent biological characteristics, rather than being viewed as socially constructed categories. Labels, however, are assigned to individuals rather than existing within the person. Link and Phelan (2001) suggested that this social process of labeling is evident in the oversimplification of categories, such as “black-white,” even though variability exists within all categories. This idea has extensively been written about regarding the concept of race. As many anthropologists would suggest, race is a social construction rather than a biological construct (Hutchinson, 2005). For example, there is no one feature (e.g., skin color, parentage, facial characteristics) that can establish clear lines of demarcation among populations (Hutchinson, 2005; Link & Phelan, 2001). That is, populations cannot be separated and
distinguished solely by genetics; human variation is too pervasive to separate and categorize individuals by biological factors alone. It has often been suggested that race is a social construct because society dictates the more important features to pay attention to when attempting to classify individuals. For example, most humans decide that skin color, as opposed to ear shape, is most important when determining racial categories and this is done for political, social, economic, and historical reasons. The dominant group has a personal stake in maintaining racial classifications and hierarchies, and this group therefore creates labels to delineate these categories (Hutchinson, 2005).

Therefore, labeling is a result of social selection rather than pre-existing genetic or biological factors. Although biology and genetics may play a role in determining differences, the labeling of differences that will have social significance is a result of human selection. This notion has important implications for people with disabilities. People with disabilities are labeled by others when their difference “matters,” and this labeling is a social process (Green et al., 2005; Link & Phelan, 2001). For example, PWS exhibit specific types of disfluencies in their speech, such as part-word repetitions, sound prolongations, and silent blocks (Bennett, 2006; Bloodstein, 1995). Although all individuals exhibit disfluencies in their speech, a separation is made between disfluencies that are “normal” and those that are “abnormal.” Culatta and Goldberg (1995) provided an example of this notion:

Normally fluent speech is not perfect speech. All speakers pause, hesitate, repeat, and mis-speak in a variety of ways that are well within the limits of normal communication. Even the most polished and professional speaker will be disfluent at times. Under stress, most speakers may exhibit disfluencies when using unfamiliar vocabulary or when they are made to speak in unfamiliar speaking situations. These disfluencies are not abnormal,
nor are they stuttering. However, once speakers cross the boundary from these normal nonfluencies to abnormal disfluencies they are evaluated differently by their listeners.

We each have within ourselves a model of exactly what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of fluent and nonfluent speech. (p. 24)

Thus, the specific disfluencies that PWS exhibit in their speech, often termed “core behaviors” (Bennett, 2006), have social significance in that listeners evaluate these disfluencies differently from “normal disfluencies,” which include phrase revisions, phrase repetitions, and interjections (Bennett, 2006; Bloodstein, 1995). In the school setting, many labels are often applied to PWS as a result of their speech production and associated behavioral characteristics (Klassen, 2001; Lass et al., 1992; Lass et al., 1994; Woods, 1978; Woods & Williams, 1976).

**Linking Differences to Stereotypes.** Labeling leads to stereotypes, which are unscientific, unreliable generalizations that are applied to a group of people (Hutchinson, 2005; Link & Phelan, 2001). Thus, stereotyping occurs when people take differences and personal prejudices and apply them to everyone who has the label. A number of researchers in the area of stuttering have investigated this component of stigma (Blood et al., 2003; Gabel et al., 2004; Woods, 1978; Woods & Williams, 1976). Many of these studies have found that PWS have been described as shy, quiet, anxious, nervous, and less prepared to enter careers that require verbal communication. Knowledge of stereotypes in the school setting is important because stereotypes lead to certain types of decisions (e.g., who answers a question in class, who reads aloud, who will be nominated for leadership positions, who will participate in extracurricular activities), and these decisions ultimately lead to outcomes that affect the student.

**Separation.** Separation is the distancing of people without the label from those who have been socially assigned the label. This distancing can occur in the form of limited social
interactions, or through the use of language in a way that conveys an “us” versus “them”
dynamic. For example, when individuals make references to “a person who has cancer” or a
“person who has heart disease,” these statements, according to Link and Phelan (2001), imply
that the individuals having the stated conditions are part of the group, but happen to have a
medical condition. Conversely, when individuals refer to “schizophrenic people” or “autistic
people” these labels imply an “us” versus “them” dynamic. Therefore, language can have
profound implications in whether students feel a sense of belonging. Israelite, Ower, and
Goldstein (2002) stated that “this perspective is clearly demonstrated in the opposites we
construct in relation to hearing status: normal hearing/hearing impaired, hearing/hard of hearing,
hearing/deaf. Such pairs demonstrate the prevailing view of hearing loss as a difference that
alienates the individual from ‘normal’ or usual everyday life” (p. 135).

PWS may experience feelings of separation in the school setting depending on how they
are labeled and stereotyped by others. Therefore, the relationships that PWS have with school
teachers and peers play important roles in this component of stigma. Because stuttering only
affects approximately one percent of the United States population (Bennett, 2006), it is
reasonable to suggest that PWS will rarely encounter other peers or teachers who stutter. As a
result, their sense of identity and belonging will be mediated largely by their experiences and
interactions in the school setting.

Status Loss and Discrimination. As people become labeled, linked to undesirable
characteristics, and separated, a rationale is created for unfair treatment (Green et al., 2005; Link
& Phelan, 2001). Link and Phelan (2001) suggested that this unfair treatment can be exhibited in
status loss and discrimination. Status loss refers to a devaluing of the person in relation to a
social hierarchy. For example, African Americans or people with mental illness may have less
social prestige in particular employment settings. Discrimination is an action or behavior (Hutchinson, 2005; Smart, 2001). It is when one acts on stereotypes. Discrimination can occur at individual and structural levels (Green et al., 2005; Link & Phelan, 2001). Individual discrimination is the overt act of unfair treatment by one individual to another. Structural discrimination refers to policies and practices that work against certain groups of people.

Research has shown that PWS experience status loss and discrimination, especially as they continue into the employment setting (Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004; Swan, 1993). Swan (1993), for example, stated that “society values verbal communication and expects members to speak with ease and fluency. Being a stutterer puts one at a distinct social and economic disadvantage” (p. 139). Therefore, the labeling and stereotyping of PWS can lead to status loss and discriminatory practices. This can be observed in the teasing and bullying experiences of PWS and their relationships with classmates in the school setting (Davis, Howell & Cooke, 2002; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999). Research has shown that PWS may be less preferred as playmates, and are less likely to be popular (Davis, Howell & Cooke, 2002), which is an indication of status loss or lowered social position.

*Stigma Dependent on Power.* Link & Phelan (2001) emphasize that stigma is dependent on power. According to the authors, a common tendency is to focus on attributes that distinguish groups, rather than on the power differences between groups. They also stated that if this component of power did not exist in the stigma definition then every group would be a stigmatized group:

Consider for example patients in a treatment program for people with serious mental illness. Patients in such a setting are likely to identity and label human differences in staff members. For instance, they might tag some clinicians with the label “pill pusher” and
apply stereotypes connected with the labels they create such as that pill pushers are cold, paternalistic, and arrogant. Finally they might treat the people they identify as pill pushers differently in accordance with the conclusions they have drawn about them by avoiding or minimizing communication with them, exchanging derogatory comments and jokes about them, and so on. Thus although the patients might engage in every component of stigma we identified, the staff would not end up being a stigmatized group. The patients simply do not possess the social, cultural, economic, and political power to imbue their cognitions about staff with serious discriminatory consequences. (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 376)

Thus, while all individuals may go through the same cognitions of labeling, stereotyping, and discriminating against others, the key, according to Link & Phelan (2001), is which groups’ cognitions will prevail. Some groups do not have the social, political, or economic capital to make their cognitions result in any serious consequences for the groups in which they have labeled and stereotyped. PWS, for example, may label certain teachers and school personnel as harsh and insensitive, and interact with them differently based on those labels and stereotypes. Likewise, teachers and school personnel may label PWS as quiet, shy, nervous, and anxious, and treat them accordingly. However, it is the teachers and school personnel who have the social and political resources to enact their beliefs onto PWS, and this can be accomplished on a systematic level. Therefore, in addition to physical characteristics of stuttering, the opinions and beliefs of the school environment also play a role in the experience of PWS in school.

Stigma can have profound effects on the identity and social experiences of PWS. When individuals become stigmatized, they must cope and manage in their daily life. Smart (2001) suggested that “an individual with a disability has two tasks: (1) he or she must manage/treat the
disability and (2) deal with the degree of stigma that others direct toward the disability. All PWD [people with disabilities], regardless of their type or severity of disability, personal achievements, or socioeconomic status, understand that they are members of a stigmatized and devalued group” (p. 319). It is important to recognize and understand the different ways that people with disabilities manage stigma. This knowledge can provide a glimpse into the ways in which they manage in the school setting.

*Stigma Management of People with Disabilities*

Research on stigma and people with disabilities in the school setting indicates that people’s lives can be affected in a variety of ways (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006). One way, in particular, is its impact on social identity. Hagstrom & Wertsch (2004) stated that “social identity refers to representation of oneself that emerges during interaction with other people across a variety of social contexts. It is personally experienced but publicly defined” (p. 162). Social identity is an important concept to explore because it allows one to learn how individuals attach meaning to their experiences (Hagstrom, 2004; Hagstrom & Daniels, 2004; Hagstrom & Wertsch, 2004; Olney & Brockelman, 2003). Daniels and Gabel (2004), for example, addressed the impact of stuttering on identity construction. They discussed personalized aspects of stuttering, such as anger, guilt, and shame, and how these emotions may lead to a negative social identity. In addition, they also discussed social attributions toward stuttering, such as how different groups of people (e.g., school teachers, school counselors, and peers) may stereotype PWS, and thus limit their social and educational opportunities (Daniels & Gabel, 2004). Because identity and social interactions appear to be important elements in the experience of people with disabilities, particularly in school, one must gain knowledge as to how people with disabilities think about identity and manage social interactions.
Identity Negotiation. Research suggests that people with disabilities live in a society that prejudgets them as being different from people without disabilities (Goffman, 1963; Olney & Brockelman, 2003). These judgments are often based on stereotypes (Goffman, 1963; Smart, 2001; Whaley & Golden, 1999). However, a number of studies suggest that people with disabilities often have a positive self-concept (Merrigan, 1999; Olney & Brockelman, 2003; Whaley & Golden, 1999). The problem lies in how others perceive them. Moreover, as research suggests, disability identity appears to be dependent upon one’s immediate social context and overall historical upbringing (Cramer & Gilson, 1999; Stewart & Healy, 1989; Tatum, 1999). For example, Olney & Brockelman (2003) conducted a qualitative study that explored the identity and interaction experiences of people with disabilities. Results from participant interviews suggested that “the impact of the disability differed from situation to situation. It appeared that disability was normalized when students were surrounded by others who experienced similar problems” (Olney & Brockelman, 2003, p. 40). This account represents Smarts’ (2001) review of the environmental model of disability, and is also consistent with other lines of research (Gilson, Tusler, & Gill, 1997; Frable, Hoey, & Platt, 1998). Moreover, results also indicated that disability identity is not only context dependent but also personally defined:

Participants responded to a request for persons with disabilities to be involved in this study, yet some had not viewed disability as a cultural or social identity until we posed this question to them. An undergraduate expressed the view that group identity was not salient for him: ‘I am fine with the label to the extent that it is a clinical description of problems that I have. And I don’t really consider it to have any weight beyond that.’ However, most of the students embraced disability as a core part of their identities: ‘I do know I have this problem. I agree.’ (Olney & Brockelman, 1999, p. 40)
As one may observe, not all individuals with disabilities will view themselves in terms of their disability. Their definition of who they are will depend on historical and political contexts, prior social interactions, and family dynamics (Cramer & Gilson, 1999; Gilson, Tusler, & Gill, 1997; Tatum, 1999). Thus, when considering how people with disabilities think about identity, one must also consider contextual factors that may influence their identity construction.

Research on the school experiences of people with disabilities, for example, indicates that personal contact with others who have the same disability often influences positive identity development (Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002; Leigh, 1999). Moreover, supportive school environments with knowledgeable and understanding teachers and peers likewise influence the self-concept of a student with a disability (Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002; Leigh, 1999). It was suggested earlier that PWS may not encounter other peers who also stutter, and this may influence their identity (Daniels & Gabel, 2004). Therefore, the role of schools is very important to consider in the experiences of PWS.

Management of Social Interactions. People with disabilities not only negotiate identity within themselves, but they must often manage their social interactions with others (Merrigan, 1999; Olney & Brockelman, 2003; Petrunik & Shearing, 1983; Schneider & Conrad, 1980). Olney & Brockelman (2003) suggested that “people with disabilities seek to control the perceptions of others so that they have the opportunity to interact on an equal footing” (p. 36). In other words, people with disabilities strive for equal treatment and attempt to avoid being stigmatized and stereotyped. Thus, many often evaluate their social situations and consider the advantages and disadvantages the disability will present. This idea has important implications for PWS in the school setting. Because PWS may be labeled and stereotyped in the school setting by
teachers and peers, they may often develop coping strategies to manage their interactions with others (Bennett, 2006).

Research suggests that the two primary forms of interaction management in the experiences of people with disabilities are passing and disclosure (Collins & Blood, 1990; Gilson, Tusler, & Gill, 1997; Merrigan, 1999; Olney & Brockelman, 1999; Petrunik & Shearing, 1983; Rocco, 1997, 2001, 2004; Schneider & Conrad, 1980; Smart, 2001). Passing occurs when people with disabilities attempt to act as nondisabled as possible to avoid being stereotyped by others. Disclosure occurs when people with disabilities reveal their disability to others. These processes appear to be context-dependent:

- Self-disclosure is a contextual act that depends upon many factors including situation, life stage, familiarity, and necessity. People with disabilities and other socially stigmatised roles such as homosexuality employ a range of strategies to manage information about themselves such as sharing information on a ‘need to know’ basis, demonstrating their competence, or waiting until it feels safe to tell others about their difference. (Olney & Brockelman, 1999, p. 36)

In addition, it appears to be an ongoing, shifting process in which the person negotiates who they are and the rules of the interaction in which they are engaged (Olney & Brockelman, 2003).

Schneider and Conrad (1980), for example, explored how people with epilepsy managed information to control people’s stigmatizing reactions. Results of their study revealed three strategies: concealment, selective concealment, and instrumental telling. Concealment in this context referred to being coached or socialized to hide an epileptic condition. Individuals with epilepsy learned this strategy from others who devalued the condition. Thus, they were taught to hide it from others. The selective concealment strategy meant that individuals hid their condition
in some situations and disclosed in others. This strategy assumes that passing and disclosure are not stage-like or sequential processes; rather, individuals move back and forth between these states relative to the social context. Instrumental telling, a disclosure strategy, consists of two smaller strategies: telling as therapy and preventative telling. Telling as therapy refers to a process where individuals reveal their condition to others in order to release a burden. This process, meant to be cathartic, allows others to see the person’s true self. Preventative telling occurs when a person reveals a condition to educate or “warn” others before it takes place. This strategy keeps those without disabilities from judging the idiosyncratic behaviors and responses of those with disabilities as abnormal or strange. By knowing about the disability ahead of time, the person without a disability is not thrown off guard when the disability manifests itself.

Petrunik and Shearing (1983) discussed the issue of identity and interaction management for PWS. They suggested three strategies that PWS may utilize: concealment, openness, and disavowal. Concealment refers to hiding one’s stuttering for fear of negative listener reactions. PWS may select jobs with reduced speaking responsibilities, or strategically manipulate conversations so others say words anticipated as difficult. Openness refers to proudly disclosing one’s identity as a person who stutters so that others know, and gain knowledge of the experiences. In addition, this strategy alerts the listener that a communication disorder exists. Disavowal refers to not acknowledging one’s stuttering. In other words, both the speaker and listener overlook the problem and pretend it does not exist.

Collins and Blood (1990) explored the perceptions of nondisabled individuals toward PWS of varying severity levels. The participants included 84 female college students who did not stutter. Participants were divided into four groups, which resulted in 21 participants per group. Each group was asked to watch a videotape of two PWS. After viewing each person on
the tape, participants were asked to answer a series of questions as to their perceptions of the person who stutters, and also complete a bipolar adjective scale to evaluate the person who stutters’ personality characteristics. A total of four videotapes were used, each depicting a different speaking condition. Each group only viewed one of the four videotapes. The first two videotapes contained two PWS labeled as “mild.” In the first segment, the participant did not acknowledge being a person who stutters. In the second segment, the participant acknowledged being a person who stutters. The last two videotapes featured two PWS labeled as severe. These videotapes differed from the first two in that, besides the stuttering severity of the person, the order of acknowledgement differed; in the first segments, the person who stuttered acknowledged having a stuttering problem, and in the second segments, the person did not acknowledge having a problem. Results revealed that the participants rated the people who acknowledged their stuttering more favorably than participants who did not acknowledge their stuttering, which suggests that acknowledgement may, perhaps, place the listener at ease.

As one may observe, interaction management strategies, as well as identity negotiation, are important parts of the experiences of people with disabilities. This knowledge has profound implications for those who work in educational settings with people having disabilities. The following section discusses the experiences of people with disabilities in the school setting.

Educational Experiences of Students with Disabilities

The issue of disability in the educational setting has gained much attention in recent years (Bento, 1996; Fitch, 2003). Research suggests that educators experience challenges when working with students with disabilities in the educational setting (Bento, 1996; Crowe & Walton, 1981; Ginsburg, 2002; Rocco, 2001). The perceptions that educators have of people with
disabilities may affect student motivation, participation in classroom activities, and the student’s willingness to seek out mentoring relationships (Bento, 1996; Silverman, 1990).

Keefe, Moore, and Duff (2006) suggested that it is important to include the voices of students with disabilities into the literature in order to discover the meaning they attach to school experiences. This is also true for PWS. The literature, however, is sparse in this area (Ribbler, 2006). Therefore, in order to gain knowledge and insight of the ways in which PWS may possibly experience school, a review of the experiences of other disability groups is needed.

Learning disabilities and hearing impairment are two of the most commonly researched disability groups. These groups are similar, in some ways, to PWS because, on the one hand, their disability may not readily be apparent (such is the case with learning disabilities and “mild” or “covert” stuttering), or the disability may be readily apparent (such is the case with students with hearing aids and students with “moderate” or “severe” stuttering). Therefore, learning from the experiences of these groups can help inform an understanding of the school experiences of PWS.

Students with Learning Disabilities. Higgins et al. (2002) conducted a longitudinal, qualitative study on the impact of learning disabilities on life experiences. Participants in this study included 41 individuals diagnosed as having learning disabilities. An analysis of the interviews revealed five stages associated with accepting the label of a learning disability: awareness of a difference, the labeling event, understanding/negotiating the label, compartmentalization, and transformation. The first stage, awareness of a difference, was rooted in the participants’ school experiences. Many of the participants, for example, reported being aware that they were different from other children, as teachers often labeled them as “slow” or “not trying.” In addition, many reported academic differences, such as difficulty with reading and writing skills, and academic-related differences, such as difficulty with attention and
organization. These difficulties often resulted in negative value judgments from peers and the larger society. For example, the researchers stated that their participants shared “painful experiences of being teased, hounded, bullied, and ridiculed. In almost every case, the stigmatization and abuse received by this group far exceeds the severity of their difficulties” (p. 15). In addition, they cited the following statement: “It is one kind of problem to have a behavioral range different from social expectations; it is another kind of problem to be in a culture in which that difference is used by others for degradation. The second problem is by far the worse” (p. 16).

Students with Hearing Impairment. Leigh (1999) conducted a retrospective study which explored the mainstream educational experiences and personal development of deaf and hard-of-hearing adults. Participants included 34 adults who reflected back on their school experiences through an open-ended written questionnaire. Results revealed that supportive school environments, self acceptance and positive coping skills contributed to positive perception of themselves as hard-of-hearing individuals. For example, the author stated that “educators have to understand that schools do make and mold identity, self-perceptions, and perspectives on life, although the passage of time and new experiences will reshape all these aspects” (Leigh, 1999, p. 244).

Israelite, Ower, and Goldstein (2002) explored the influence of school experiences, peers, and teachers on the identity construction of hard-of-hearing adolescents. Participants included seven adolescents who identified themselves as hard-of-hearing. Participants attended both special and regular education classes during their school day. The investigators engaged in two focus group interviews with the participants. The first interview, labeled as “unstructured,” was designed to encourage the participants to speak at length about their school experiences and the
experience of being a hard-of-hearing adolescent. The second group interview, labeled as “semi-structured” was more focused on issues the investigators planned to explore. Following the second interview, each participant completed a written questionnaire which was designed to learn about educational and social implications of being a hard-of-hearing student. Results revealed that school experiences, teachers, and contact with hard-of-hearing peers were important factors in their construction of a positive identity. The three major categories that emerged from the data analysis were (a) the meaning attached to being hard-of-hearing, (b) fitting into the mainstream, and (c) the role of the hard-of-hearing program. Many of the participants discussed the ways in which they were stereotyped, misunderstood, and discriminated against by teachers.

As one can observe, people with disabilities experience many challenges in the school setting, and these challenges can have an effect on their personal development and life choices. Though PWS may have similar experiences to people with learning disabilities and hearing impairment, the experience of stuttering also differs in many ways.

*The Problem of Stuttering*

Stuttering has been described as a multifactorial and complex disorder of speech (Smith, 1999; Smith & Kelly, 1997). Researchers and speech-language pathologists often cannot agree on a universal definition. This may result because PWS exhibit a variety of speech and behavioral characteristics. Some people who stutter exhibit noticeable speech disfluencies (i.e., repetitions, prolongations, silent blocks), and secondary behaviors (i.e., eye blinks, facial grimaces, foot tapping, and so forth). Moreover, other PWS exhibit mild to no speech disfluencies, and very little observable secondary behaviors. Though physical speech disfluencies are hardly present, stuttering is still maintained through their history, language,
actions, and belief systems about communication. This latter group of individuals often goes unnoticed because their “stuttering” is not apparent to the listener. The incongruity of stuttering issues can be observed in the fact that many definitions, theories of causation, and treatment methodologies exist for people who stutter. In addition, society may not be as sensitized to issues of stuttering as issues of blindness or deafness, due to a lack of awareness. As a result, educators may not have as many informational resources to understand and work with people stutter. Bento (1996), for example, stated that “the physical landscape of academia is being changed to accommodate the special needs of the students with disabilities: ramps are being constructed; workstations are being modified; Braille signs are being added to classroom doors, elevators, offices, ATMs and soda machines” (p. 1). Thus, these physical changes are visible in academia and society. PWS, however, constitute a different and distinct type of disability group. Aside from the noticeable speech disfluencies and secondary behaviors, a large percentage of PWS may exhibit unobservable speech disfluencies, lifestyle adjustments, inner and emotional conflicts. For example, in the school setting, these invisible moments may manifest themselves in not raising one’s hand to speak, not running for a school office or joining an extracurricular activity that involves speaking, or limited verbal interactions with peers. Individuals may attribute these behaviors to one being shy or withdrawn rather than to a stuttering problem. Thus, these invisible moments of stuttering may cause some individuals to develop inaccurate stereotypes and perceptions of PWS.

Perceptions of PWS in School

PWS have been subject to many negative perceptions and stereotypes by peers (Davis, Howell & Cooke, 2002; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel & Greenwood, 2003; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Storch, Krain, Kovacs, & Barlas, 2002), schoolteachers (Lass et al., 1992; Silverman &
Marik, 1993; Swan, 1993), school administrators (Lass et al., 1994), college professors and university students (Bento, 1996; Dorsey & Guenther, 2000), and employers (Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004). These attitudes and stereotypes could possibly have a negative impact on their school experiences and identity construction. Therefore, one must explore the ways in which different groups of individuals have labeled and stereotyped PWS in the past.

Teacher Attitudes. School teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of stuttering and PWS are important for two reasons: (a) teachers are usually the first to initiate the referral process for PWS, and therefore need to have accurate knowledge of stuttering; (b) research has shown that school teacher attitudes can have an impact on one’s motivation, learning, and therapy (Deemer, 2004). Crowe and Walton (1981) designed one of the first studies to assess teacher attitudes toward stuttering. Participants included 100 elementary school teachers in a Mississippi school district. They completed an attitude towards stuttering inventory, and a stuttering knowledge test. Results revealed that a positive correlation existed between attitudes toward stuttering and knowledge of stuttering (i.e., more desirable attitudes correlated with increased knowledge of stuttering). A negative correlation existed between attitudes toward stuttering and whether or not the teacher had a student who stuttered in class (i.e., those teachers who had more desirable attitudes were less likely to have a student who stuttered in their class at the time of the study).

Yeakle and Cooper (1986) surveyed 521 school teachers in a school district (82% of the district’s teachers) in Alabama to explore their perceptions of stuttering. Approximately half of the sample (48.5%) taught grades K-6, and 41.9% taught grades 7-12. The remaining 9.6% taught either preschool children or adults. The survey questions sampled perceptions of stuttering etiology, the impact of stuttering on the person who stutters, personality characteristics of PWS, and teacher responses to PWS in classroom situations. Results of this study revealed that
teachers who were more knowledgeable about stuttering, took courses on stuttering, or who had taught students who stutter, expressed more favorable attitudes of PWS and more demanding expectations of PWS in the classroom.

Lass et al. (1992) conducted a study that explored the perceptions of schoolteachers toward people who stutter. The researchers surveyed 103 teachers in school systems across five states. These participants were asked to list adjectives that described four hypothetical persons who stutter: a typical 8-year old female, a typical 8-year old male, a typical adult female, and a typical adult male. Results revealed that the schoolteachers listed a majority of negative adjectives toward people who stutter, which included shy, insecure and nervous. In addition, most of the adjectives listed focused on personality traits, rather than appearance, intelligence or speech.

Similarly, Silverman and Marik (1993), attempted to replicate this study with fifty-eight participant schoolteachers in the state of Wisconsin. Their results likewise revealed that schoolteachers tended to view people who stutter as shy, quiet, nervous, insecure, frustrated, anxious and self-conscious. However, the researchers agreed that while these traits may be classified as negative, one could not assume that schoolteachers held negative stereotypes that were harmful to people who stutter. Instead, these adjectives may simply reflect the reality of how people who stutter behave in classroom settings.

School Administrator Attitudes. In addition to schoolteachers, Lass et al. (1994), also explored the perceptions of school administrators toward people who stutter. Participants included forty-two individuals who were school principals, assistant principals, superintendents, assistant superintendents, special education coordinators and elementary education supervisors. These school administrators were asked to list adjectives describing four hypothetical persons
who stutter: a male and female child, and a male and female adult. According to results, the school administrators listed a majority of negative adjectives to describe these four persons. Examples included traits such as shy, quiet and nervous. These findings appeared to be similar to earlier studies of schoolteacher perceptions.

**Peer Attitudes.** Though people who stutter are subject to negative perceptions and stereotypes by school educators, research suggests they also encounter negative perceptions and stereotypes from peers (Davis, Howell & Cooke, 2002; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel & Greenwood, 2003; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Murphy, Yaruss, & Quesal, 2007b; Storch, Krain, Kovacs, & Barlas, 2002). Frank et al. (2003) explored the perceptions of school-aged children toward their peers who stutter. Participants in this study were four groups of fourth and fifth grade students. Each group was asked to view a videotape of a speaker either stuttering or not stuttering while reading a poem, and to rate the speaker’s intelligence and personality traits. Results revealed that the participants held more negative views of the person who stuttered, as evidenced in lower mean ratings on an administered adjective scale and informal observations of the participants (e.g., laughing, insensitive comments) as they viewed the videotape. These negative perceptions can also be observed in the bullying experiences that people who stutter encounter from their peers (Davis, Howell & Cooke, 2002; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Storch, Krain, Kovacs & Barlas, 2002).

As one may observe, these studies have negative implications for PWS in school. As suggested earlier, labeling is a social process that results in stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001). Moreover, the school environment is an important time period in an individual’s identity construction (Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002). As students socially interact with teachers, peers, and school personnel within certain expectations
of the environment, they begin to formulate and reconstruct identity (Leigh, 1999). Because past research suggests that PWS are labeled and stereotyped in the school environment, one must explore the ways in which these perceptions and stereotypes affect PWS in the school setting.

Current Research on the School Experiences of PWS

Limited research has explored the school experiences of PWS. The existing research on this topic has focused on teasing and bullying experiences, and overall life experiences where school emerged as one theme among many.

Teasing and Bullying Experiences. Hugh-Jones and Smith (1999) conducted a retrospective mixed methods study that explored the bullying experiences of PWS. They interviewed eight adults who stutter, and used these qualitative results to inform a survey. The survey covered areas such as perceived severity of stuttering, school friendships, bullying experiences, parent and teacher awareness, and short and long-term effects of being bullied. The investigators distributed this to 276 members of the British Stammering Association. Results indicated that the participants had difficulties making friendships as a result of stuttering, experienced name calling, threats, and physical bullying, had belongings stolen, and were victims of rumors. In addition, 44% and 49% of the participants stated that teachers and parents, respectively, were not aware of bullying, 39% and 20% stated that teachers and parents, respectively, were aware but not nothing to prevent it, and 17% and 31% stated that teachers and parents were aware and did something to prevent it. Participants also reported that bullying had both short-term and long-term consequences in the areas of personal effects (e.g., anxiety, self-esteem, depression), school work, and speech difficulties.

Davis, Howell, & Cooke (2002) explored the relationships of children who stutter with their classmates. Participants included 403 children from 16 classrooms in 16 different schools
across England. Each of the 16 classes had one child who stuttered. Participants also included the 16 children who stutter, in addition to their 403 peers from the classrooms. The mean age of both groups was 11.9. The researchers met with each child individually and asked a series of questions regarding their classmates. For example, participants were asked to choose, from a class roster, three classmates of either sex that they liked the most and least, and to nominate three classmates who best fit predetermined behavioral categories (e.g., shy, assertive, cooperative, disruptive, leader, uncertain, bully, bullied). Results revealed that children who stutter were rejected significantly more than their peers, were less likely to be popular or nominated as leaders, and were more likely to be nominated as victims of being bullied.

Life Experiences. In addition to exploring perceptions that others have toward stuttering, researchers have also explored the impact of stuttering from first-hand experiences of PWS (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Klompas & Ross, 2004). Though these studies did not have school experiences as the central focus, participants in these studies did mention school experiences.

Crichton-Smith (2002), for example, conducted a qualitative study that focused on personal accounts of people who stutter. She engaged in semi-structured interviews with 14 participants. The three themes that emerged were (a) the lived experiences of stammering, (b) communication management, and (c) situational management of stammering. The first theme revealed several sub-themes related to social situations and coping strategies. Many participants discussed school as a social situation that was difficult. This is evident in the following participant statements:

Because I was the only one in the class with that sort of problem, the teachers didn’t actually want to make allowances whatsoever and I just had to muck in with the rest
of them. We had to read plays out loud and that was a nightmare. (Crichton-Smith, 2002, p. 338)

I was reading aloud at primary school, I must have been about six years old, and I just couldn’t get any words out, she just passed on to somebody else, it was a fairly traumatic experience and of course it rather alerted me to the possibility of it happening again which of course it did. (Crichton-Smith, 2002, p. 338)

Well I sort of started having tummy ache and not wanting to go to school and that sort of thing. (Crichton-Smith, 2002, p. 338)

I would have loved to have stayed on at school…you would all take turns to read at assembly or read out things of a report and the thought of doing that in front of the whole school just had me in tears and that was the reason why I left school…the staff they wanted me to stay on…but since then I just regretted it and it’s been like this for years now. (Crichton-Smith, 2002, p. 339)

Thus, the experience of stuttering resulted in many negative effects for the participants.

Klompas and Ross (2004) conducted a qualitative study with 16 South African adults who stutter in order to explore the effects of stuttering on their life experiences. The researchers specifically explored the life domains of education, social life, employment, speech therapy, family and marital life, and identity, beliefs, and emotional issues. In the domain of education, the participants’ stories revealed a major theme of perceived effects of stuttering on academic performance, with the sub-themes of oral presentations, others’ lack of understanding, reading aloud, self-confidence; a major theme of perceived effects on relationships with teachers; and perceived effects of stuttering on relationships with classmates.
These studies suggest that stuttering has an impact on the school experiences of PWS. They provide an important starting point; however, more research is needed in this area. For example, a number of these past studies have either addressed school experiences as one topic among many, or focused on one area of the school experience, such as bullying and teasing. Because school is a complex environment where individuals must interact on many different levels (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006; Westby, 1997), this topic warrants special attention.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, a number of research studies have focused on personal qualitative accounts of PWS (Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Klompas & Ross, 2004). The majority of these accounts have focused on general social experiences (Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004) and clinical experiences (Corcoran & Stewart, 1995; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Plexico, Manning, & DiLollo, 2005; Stewart & Richardson, 2004). To date, however, limited research has explored the impact of stereotyping and stuttering on the primary and secondary (i.e., K-12) school experiences of PWS (Ribbler, 2006). Many of the accounts in the area of stuttering and school experiences have focused on bullying (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999), and ways in which teachers can interact with PWS in the classroom (LaBlance, Steckol, & Smith, 1994; Pindzola, 1985; Swan, 1993). In addition, empirical findings in the area of stuttering and school experiences often emerge as themes within larger studies that did not intentionally focus on school experiences at the outset (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004). Other past studies have focused on attitudes and perceptions of stuttering from the perspectives of educators who work with PWS (Crowe & Walton, 1981; Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Yairi & Williams, 1970; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986), or the
perspectives of peers who do not stutter (Franck, Jackson, Pimentel, & Greenwood, 2003). These studies are important because they provide insight into the school context for PWS.

**Purpose**

The present research on school and PWS suggests that PWS experience difficulty in the classroom and in their relationships with teachers and peers. Therefore, one purpose of this study is to confirm existing accounts and speculations of the ways in which PWS experience school. In addition, more empirical research is needed to document the impact of stuttering and stereotyping on quality of school life from the perspective of PWS. Because research is sparse in this area (Ribbler, 2006), a second purpose of this study is to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which PWS experience primary and secondary school (K-12). This knowledge is important because it provides a lens into their quality of school life, and also sheds light on ways in which educators can facilitate better learning environments. In this study, school experiences will be explored using a phenomenological design that includes semi-structured interviews and focus groups with PWS from local chapters of the National Stuttering Association, college and university campuses, and clinical populations. This qualitative study will provide a thick, deep description of the school experiences of PWS.

**Research Questions**

Because PWS must interact and perform within a school culture where their problem is often misunderstood or viewed negatively, one must consider how stuttering affects their primary and secondary school experiences. Therefore, the following questions emerge to guide the present study:

1. In what ways do PWS describe their school experiences?
2. What coping strategies do PWS make use of in the school setting?
3. What effects do PWS report stuttering having on different aspects of school performance?

4. What variables appear to contribute to positive and negative school experiences?
CHAPTER 3

Methods

Qualitative Research

This study utilized a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is based on the philosophy of constructivism. This suggests that multiple realities exist in the world and these realities are context-bound (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). Researchers in this paradigm acknowledge that the researcher is the instrument of research, and thus plays a key role in how data are collected and analyzed. Qualitative researchers therefore do not advocate imposing standards on all participants because reality is constructed differently for each individual.

The depth of study offered by a qualitative design strengthened the present investigation of the school experiences of PWS, as compared to previous designs that only utilized a quantitative approach. For example, past studies have utilized survey designs that required school teachers to answer a series of questions about personality characteristics and academic experiences of PWS (Crowe & Walton, 1981; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986), questionnaires that required school teachers and school administrators to list adjectives that described hypothetical PWS (Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Silverman & Marik, 1993), and bipolar semantic differential scales that required university professors and college students to rate hypothetical PWS on certain personality traits (Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Silverman, 1990). In addition to surveys, researchers have also used experimental designs that required peers who do not stutter to rate characteristics of PWS (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel, & Greenwood, 2003). These studies utilized quantitative designs to sample populations of individuals who do not stutter. In the present study, the qualitative design broadened the
knowledge of school experiences with in-depth interviews of PWS. This design of including in-depth experiences from a first-person perspective makes an important contribution which is limited in the literature of stuttering and school experiences (Ribbler, 2006). Hugh-Jones and Smith (1999) conducted one of the few studies that explored stuttering and school experiences from a first-person perspective. The investigators interviewed eight adults who stutter, and used results to inform a survey that was distributed to 276 members of the British Stammering Association. This study, however, de-emphasized the qualitative component and specifically focused on bullying experiences. Because past research investigators have placed primacy on quantitative designs to explore school experiences, the present investigation focused on qualitative designs from the perspectives of PWS in order to gain a rich understanding of their school experiences.

In addition to utilizing a qualitative method, this study was also retrospective in nature. The researcher collected data from participants who were required to reflect back upon their school experiences. Retrospective studies have been well documented in the stuttering literature (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Klompas & Ross, 2004; Mooney & Smith, 1994; Plexico, Manning, & DiLollo, 2005; Stewart & Richardson, 2004) and appeared to be a suitable design for the present study. For example, the participants were able to speak at length about their K-12 school experiences, the meaning they attached to those experiences, and insight regarding how these experiences shaped their present course in life. Though children have been the focus of studies designed to explore school experiences, they may not have the necessary cognitive and linguistic skills to reflect at length on the meaning they attach to school experiences.
According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research was once thought of as monolithic. Moreover, methods of design were often confused with traditions of inquiry. Qualitative research consists of a number of traditions of inquiry, each having a different historical foundation (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) describes five major traditions: ethnography, in which the researcher attempts to describe a particular culture; life history and biography, which involve describing major epiphanies and life journeys of a single individual; grounded theory, in which the researcher develops theory grounded only in their raw data; case-study, which involves studying a “bounded system” such as an individual, event, or program; and phenomenology, which explores the meaning individuals give to a particular concept or phenomenon (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas; 1994). Because the present study seeks to describe the experiences of PWS in school, the phenomenological tradition was best suited for the topic of study. This tradition “focuses on the analysis of conscious and immediate lived experience and is sensitive to the uniqueness of persons” (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005). The purpose of the present investigation was to discover the lived experience of being a person who stutters in the school setting (K-12).

**Participant Selection**

*Semi-Structured Interview Participants.* The participants in this study were identified via maximum variation sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994), a method in which the investigator deliberately chooses participants based on differences across certain characteristics or shared experiences (Maxwell, 2005). Maximum variation selection, according to Maxwell (2005), is intended to achieve four primary goals. First, the investigator seeks to establish a representative population by selecting participants who are known to exhibit a particular characteristic, or
experience a particular phenomenon. In this study, the primary investigator selected adults with developmental stuttering who had at least a high school education. Second, the investigator seeks to establish heterogeneity. In other words, participants are selected across age levels, social backgrounds, and range of personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. The participants in this study varied by age, educational experiences (i.e., completion of high school, college, or professional school), race and ethnic backgrounds, severity of stuttering, and range of school experiences. In addition, because stuttering affects more males than females by a ratio of 4:1 (Bennett, 2006; Bloodstein, 1995), the gender ratio of the participants reflected, as closely as possible, the gender ratio of stuttering in the larger population. The third goal of purposeful selection is to explore cases that are pertinent to the phenomenon under investigation. For example, the investigator included participants who were known to have negative school experiences based on stuttering, and those who were known to have positive school experiences. The selection of “extreme cases,” according to Maxwell (2005), can “illuminate what is going on in a way that representative cases cannot” (p. 90). And finally, the fourth goal is to select participants for the purposes of making comparisons and illuminating differences.

Interviewees who participated in the semi-structured interviews were selected from the following regions and contexts: Dallas and Houston chapters of the National Stuttering Association by means of posted advertisements; and personal contacts in the Houston, Dallas, and Northwest Ohio regions. These selection sites provided maximal variation of participants. In other words, although PWS share the characteristic of stuttering, they exhibited varied experiences based on age, gender, geographic location, severity of stuttering, and type of schools attended. Clinical populations of PWS (i.e., those PWS who have had therapy) may differ in their school experiences from PWS who have never received therapy. People who stutter who
are active members of the NSA, or who actively participate in local NSA chapter meetings, may possibly view school differently than those who are either inactive or not members of the NSA. Thus, participants were selected from a variety of regions and contexts in order to capture a diverse range of experiences.

Eleven participants were interviewed. The participant selection process was ongoing until no new themes emerged from their stories (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Rubin and Rubin (1995) refer to this process as the principle of completeness, or data saturation. In other words, “you keep adding interviewees until you are satisfied that you understand the complex cultural arena or multistep process. When each additional interview adds little to what you have already learned, you stop adding interviewees. This is called the saturation point” (p. 72). Creswell (1998) indicates 7-10 are usually enough in phenomenological inquiry. The following table provides demographic information of each participant who engaged in the semi-structured interview. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants.
Table 1

Demographic information of semi-structured interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Reported Occupation</th>
<th>Interview Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Dena”</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Clinical Psychologist</td>
<td>Houston, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wayne”</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
<td>Dallas, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hector”</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>Dallas, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Benjamin”</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Full-time Student</td>
<td>Dallas, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Kenneth”</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
<td>Dallas, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“David”</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Interior Planner</td>
<td>Dallas, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Alan”</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Dallas, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Patricia”</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Retired Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>Houston, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Jonathan”</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>Fremont, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Tyrone”</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Medical Billing</td>
<td>Toledo, Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Edith”</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Fremont, Ohio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus Group Participants. The primary investigator conducted two focus groups. Participant selection sites included BGSU and the Royal Oak, MI chapter of the NSA. These selection sites were preferred for focus group interviews because participant groups were already intact. The first focus group consisted of 6 participants; the second group consisted of 4 participants. The amount of participants in each group was kept within a small range to increase the likelihood that each person in the group will contribute to the discussion (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997, 1998). Moreover, the groups consisted of participants who varied in age and severity of stuttering. Each focus group consisted of individuals who were familiar and comfortable with one another to ensure that all members of the group felt at ease when discussing topics. The following table presents demographic information for each focus group. As with the semi-structured interviews, pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants.
Table 2

Demographic information of focus group interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Reported Occupation</th>
<th>Interview Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Focus Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Clay”</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Engineering Records Specialist</td>
<td>Southeast Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Liza”</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Human Resources Associate</td>
<td>Southeast Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Janet”</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Real Estate Office Manager</td>
<td>Southeast Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Serena”</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Human Resource Associate</td>
<td>Southeast Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Stacey”</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Part-time Waitress</td>
<td>Southeast Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Earl”</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pipe Fitter</td>
<td>Southeast Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Focus Group</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lance”</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Full-time Student/SLP</td>
<td>Northwest Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“James”</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Full-time Student/SLP</td>
<td>Northwest Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Kevin”</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Full-time Student</td>
<td>Northwest Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Susan”</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Full-time Student</td>
<td>Northwest Ohio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development of Interview Protocol

**Development of Initial Interview Questions.** The primary investigator reviewed the literature on school experiences of PWS and individuals with other disabilities in order to locate a suitable set of interview questions for use during the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. No existing survey or interview protocol was located that suited the purposes of the study. Therefore, the primary investigator developed a set of interview questions (see Appendix A) based on personal experiences of being a person who stutters in school, informal conversations with adults who stutter, the current literature that addresses the impact of stuttering on school experiences (Klompas & Ross, 2004; Swan, 1993), and literature related to school experiences of other populations (Flynt & Morton, 2004; Israelite, Ower, & Goldstein, 2002; Kent, 2003).

**Development of Final Interview Questions.** The primary investigator consulted two board-recognized specialists in fluency disorders (one of whom is a person who stutters) to review the initial set of questions. These consultants refined questions that appeared vague, added relevant questions, and removed questions that appeared redundant or unnecessary. After incorporating feedback from the consultants, the primary investigator used the initial set of questions to interview a 23 year old male person who stutters about his school experiences. Following the pilot interview, the primary investigator elicited feedback from the participant as to which questions were helpful, vague, or appeared unnecessary or redundant, and potential questions that could be added to further investigate the topic of study. The participant reported that all interview questions appeared relevant to the study. This procedure of pilot testing interview questions helps to establish credibility and clarity of interview questions (Glesne, 2006; Klompas & Ross, 2004; Maxwell, 2005).
Procedures

Semi-Structured Interviews. The primary investigator engaged in phenomenological interviews with 11 participants. Before the interview, each participant completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was designed to systematically gather information about the participant’s age, educational background, family history, and personal history of stuttering. This information was gathered in order to make future comparisons across participants for the qualitative analyses. In addition, participants provided their consent to participate in the study. After completing the demographic questionnaire and consent form, the investigator described the purpose of the study, and then interviewed the participant according to guidelines for semi-structured, phenomenological interviewing (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006; Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 2006). This procedure involves asking the participants open-ended questions in a conversational manner. Questions were not asked in a serial manner. Rather, the primary investigator engaged in dialogue with the participant in an attempt to elicit responses to the questions of interest. Therefore, the meaning that the participants attached to their school experiences was a result of both interviewer and participant interaction. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided the following description of a qualitative interview:

An interview is said to be a conversation with a purpose, but it would be a rare conversation that was entirely one-sided, no matter how dominant one member of the dyad might be or how submissive the other. In a very real sense, then, investigator and respondent together create the data of the research. Each influences the other, and the direction that the data gathering will take place in the next moment is acutely dependent upon what data have already been collected, and in what manner. There is in the
investigator-respondent dyad a transitivity, a continuous unfolding, a series of iterations.

Each shapes the other and is shaped by the other. (p. 100)

Participants were encouraged to speak at length about each question. Follow-up questions were asked if clarification was needed, or if a participant failed to address a particular issue. These interviews were video and audio-recorded.

*Focus Groups.* The primary investigator conducted two focus groups: the first group consisted of 6 participants and the second consisted of 4 participants. Focus groups are employed in order to observe the interactions among participants, capture subtleties of interaction that would not occur in a more controlled, one-on-one interview setting, and support or explore findings from individual interviews (Bloor et al., 2001; Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005; Glesne, 2006; Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005; Krueger, 1994; Langford & McDonagh, 2003; Morgan, 1997, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). One major advantage of focus groups is that this method of interviewing offsets limitations in face-to-face interviewing of a single individual, because participants may be more likely to reveal information in a group setting where others in the group are revealing the same information (Glesne, 2006). A second major advantage is that individuals who are uncomfortable or shy in a face-to-face interview may feel more relaxed in a group setting among other participants who share similar experiences. Major disadvantages are that more talkative group members may dominate the conversation, or some individuals may feel more reserved in a group setting (Creswell, 1998). In these cases, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews will offset these limitations inherent in focus groups. Focus group members were not interviewed one-on-one.

The two focus groups were also video and audio recorded. Participants were asked the same set of questions (see Appendix A) as participants in the semi-structured interviews. The
primary investigator asked a question to the group, and participants were encouraged to speak at length on each question. Follow-up or probe questions were asked when necessary.

*Participant Observation/Field Notes.* The primary investigator kept a journal of observations and notes during the semi-structured and focus group interviews, and during informal conversations about school with adults who stutter and professionals who work with students who stutter. This journal documented important statements made by the participants, emotional reactions, body language of the participants, personal reactions of the primary investigator, and insights gained about school experiences from adults who stutter. Observations and field notes, whether formal or informal, are valued in the qualitative research paradigm (Glesne, 2006; Jasper, 2005; Johnson, Avenarius, & Weatherford, 2006; Maxwell, 2005).

*Treatment of Data*

*Data Analysis.* Each interview and focus group was audio and video recorded to allow for transcription and analysis of the data. Data were analyzed for common themes both within and across the participants’ stories according to procedures outlined by Kvale (1996), Creswell (1998), and Ryan & Bernard (2003). The primary investigator used the following procedure:

1. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including both interviewer’s and participant’s statements (McLellan, Macqueen, & Neidig, 2003).

2. The transcripts were read in full.

3. Each line in the participant’s transcript was reviewed and assigned a short code (a single word or phrase) that *summarized* (rather than interpreted) the statement (LaPelle, 2004). These codes were documented on a series of index cards. Because the transcripts were reviewed through the lens of school experiences, some statements were not coded. For example, some participants provided tangential information, such
as stories about family members, that did not related to questions about school. These divergent statements were not coded.

4. After generating a list of codes from the narrative transcript, the primary investigator looked at the complete code list and determined which codes were meaningful to the participant’s experience. Themes were determined by observing the commonalities that existed across the participant’s school experience, and grouping these into major and minor categories. The final coding list was thorough enough to capture all relevant statements about school experiences.

This process was done for each participant. When independent analyses of all transcripts were complete, the primary investigator created a diagram that included codes and themes of all participants. Major themes for the group were determined by looking across the codes and individual themes for each participant.

_Credibility_. The following steps were taken to assure credibility based on procedures outlined by Corcoran and Stewart (1998), Creswell (1998), and Plexico, Manning, and Dilollo (2005):

1. Each semi-structured and focus group interview was video-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2. The primary investigator is both a person who stutters and a speech-language pathologist; therefore, reflections of personal and professional biases were important to determine their potential influence on the interview process and data analyses. To do this, the primary investigator engaged in a 60-minute interview about his personal experiences as a person who stutters in primary and secondary school (K-12). This interview was analyzed for major themes (e.g., avoidance), including important time-event experiences
(e.g., middle school experiences). Results from this interview brought the primary investigator’s biases to a conscious level of awareness. This process, known as “epoche” in the qualitative literature, allows the investigator to “launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies – to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomena being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994).

3. Triangulation was used in order to gain more than one viewpoint of the data. A total of three reviewers were utilized to complete the analysis: the primary investigator, a specialist in stuttering therapy, and an individual with no previous history or clinical experience with stuttering. Results of all analyses (i.e., analyses of the primary investigator, a second professional, and a third person with no history of stuttering) were compared to determine consistency of the interpretations. All three investigators reached an agreement on the major and minor themes.

4. Credibility was also established by a process of member-checking (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). Member-checking is well documented in the stuttering literature (Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Plexico, Manning, & DiLollo, 2005). This process involves the investigator contacting all interviewees a second time and allowing them to verify, elaborate, or clarify the investigator’s interpretation of their story. Email was the primary means of making this second contact. The primary investigator traveled to a different geographic location to conduct some of the initial interviews. Therefore, when interview analyses were complete, it was not possible for the primary investigator to return to the same geographic location to conduct
follow-up interviews for the purposes of member-checking. The primary investigator sent each participant an email that contained the generated themes, and examples from the transcript that supported each theme. In addition, the participants were also provided with a copy of the full transcript. Eight of the eleven participants reported that the themes confirmed their school experience of stuttering. The primary investigator was not able to get in touch with the remaining three participants.
CHAPTER 4

Results

This study sought to investigate the K-12 school experiences of adults who stutter. Specifically, four questions guided this research: (1) In what ways do PWS describe their school experiences; (2) What coping strategies do PWS make use of in the school setting; (3) What effects do PWS report having on different aspects of school performance; and (4) What variables appear to contribute to positive and negative school experiences? Results of data collection (11 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups) are reported in this section. In this result sections, data will be presented in tables and quotes made by specific participants. The quotes used to support each theme were selected based on the specificity of information provided. The primary investigator made a careful attempt to include quotes from a variety of participants.

Data analyses revealed four major themes. Each of these major themes contained sub-themes. Table 3 displays both major themes and sub-themes from the participants’ responses.
Table 3

Major themes and sub-themes of the participants’ K-12 school experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes and Sub-Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Awareness of stuttering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Coping strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Physical (bodily) consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Psychological attributions/consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Physical (demographic) landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School size/demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Social landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Classroom participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Teacher behavior/relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Peer behavior/relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Extracurricular activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Cultural (organizational) landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Academic/learning benefits and costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Interventions or lack thereof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Post-educational consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Continued fear of speaking situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Career choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Difficulty with job interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Personal identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal reflections/observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. School climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Daily experiences of pws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The invisible experience of stuttering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Suggestions for schoolteachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following sections discuss these themes in more detail. In each section, participant quotes are provided to illuminate the theme.

Section 1: Themes Related to Student Characteristics

This section discusses the ways in which stuttering affected characteristics of the student. In particular, participants discussed their initial awareness of stuttering, coping strategies, physical (bodily) consequences, psychological attributions and consequences, emotions, and personality development.

Awareness of Stuttering. Most participants were not aware of stuttering until it was brought to their attention by another person, such as a classroom teacher, parent, sibling, or friend. Examples are as follows:

Dena: I didn’t realize that my stuttering was a big deal at that time [entering speech therapy in the second grade], I didn’t have any phobia about my stuttering, you know, because I wanted to read out loud in class, I wanted to be on program, et cetera. I didn’t realize that I really had a problem with my speech disfluencies, with my speech, until my third grade teacher, you know, she asked whoever could be, whoever learned the speech first would be the one on program, and I learned the speech first, I always liked to be out in public when I was a very young child, and I let her know I knew the speech, and I got up before her and said it, she told me she didn’t like the way I talked, you know I stuttered, et cetera, and I was really hurt about it, and I was really traumatized by it, I think I ran out of class, my mother was teaching at that school, and I told my mother what happened, and my mother got upset too, at that time. And then I really felt very hurt because I went to the program when the other person said the speech and I didn’t have the opportunity to say it.
Benjamin: It’s one of the most vivid memories that I’ve got as [an approximately 5 year old] kid because there’s a kid at church and he was 13 and so our parents were friends and so of course we’d always do things with each other when our families would meet for dinner or baseball games or this or that, well, me and my friends at church, it’s like we always looked up to this guy, his name is [John Doe] and we always looked up to him, he was 13, and we were all about 5, and for my birthday I had got a nerf boomerang, it was orange, and we were outside church, and we were throwing it, and he was kind of leaning up against the car, we had kind of walked over there, he goes, “hey,” he goes “what’s that?” and I went [imitates stuttering with tension and struggle] “n-n-n-nerf boomerang” and he went [imitates stuttering] “n-n-n-nerf”, and so he did that, and it’s like, I mean it just killed me, for one he would make fun of me in front of my friends, and two, the fact that it was the very first time that I had realized that I was different from everybody else.

James: The first time that I really realized that I had a problem with my speech, I was riding in my sister’s car somewhere, we were going somewhere for an errand or something, and I think I was 7 or 8 at the time, and we were driving over these railroad tracks and I was telling her something, something important, I forget what it was, and I was repeating this word over and over again, and she was like, “James, you’re stuttering, stop stuttering.” So I sat there, I’m like “Oh my God, what’s wrong with me.” And so that was a pretty significant moment for me, I felt. I felt after that I started thinking more about my speech and probably started to even stutter more, so that was around 7 or 8.

The initial awareness of stuttering began to trigger a myriad of coping strategies, which carried over to the school setting. The following section discusses coping strategies of the participants in the school setting.
Coping Strategies. The majority of participants discussed various ways that they coped with stuttering. Tables 4 and 5 highlight coping strategies of participants who engaged in the semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, respectively.
### Table 4

*Coping strategies reported by participants of the semi-structured interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Coping strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “Dena”      | Word substitutions  
Tapping on something while speaking |
| “Anthony”   | Word substitutions  
Saying “I don’t know” in response to a teacher’s question |
| “Hector”    | Word substitutions |
| “Benjamin”  | Developed a series of systems to avoid speaking or reading aloud in class  
Developed a keen level of discernment to identify “problem” teachers |
| “Kenneth”   | Word substitutions |
| “David”     | Played “dumb” a lot to avoid answering questions in class  
Didn’t get involved in school activities |
| “Alan”      | Developed a nonverbal signal with a classroom teacher to signal his intent  
to either participate in class or not participate |
| “Patricia”  | Absenteeism on the day of oral presentations  
Avoiding |
| “Jonathan”  | Avoiding oral book reports  
Feigning illness  
Writing assigned oral book reports  
Word substitutions  
Chose to take a non-speaking foreign language (Latin) |
| “Tyrone”    | Defended himself in response to teasing from peers  
Did not associate with peers who made fun of him |
| “Edith”     | Quit school  
Avoiding |
Table 5

*Coping strategies reported by participants of the focus groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Coping strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Focus Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Clay”</td>
<td>Avoided class (particularly college courses) that involved speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Liza”</td>
<td>Mother would talk to teachers before any presentation in middle school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “Janet” | Would sometimes have conversations in a sing-song manner  
Would sometimes clench hands or twirl hair when stuttering surfaced  
Spent hours writing spelling stories around troublesome sounds to facilitate an easier oral presentation of the story  
Sometimes gave speeches “in character” to avoid stuttering |
| “Serena” | Purposely change or skip words when reading  
Avoid talking |
| “Stacey” | Self-confidence helped to not internalize teasing from peers  
Worked really hard to be fluent (speech therapy techniques) |
| “Earl” | Answered questions with as few words as possible  
Attempted to delay oral speaking assignments  
Would arrive to school just before the bell rang to avoid speaking |
| **Second Focus Group** | |
| “Lance” | Walked around during recess to avoid talking  
Didn’t talk a whole lot in school  
Leader role in a band |
| “James” | Stopped and hesitated more  
Avoid talking |
| “Kevin” | Avoiding speaking situations  
Involvement in bands |
| “Susan” | Avoiding particular words and sounds |
Some participants used physical coping strategies to manage stuttering, such as therapy techniques, while others used different routines to manage stuttering. Three participants, for example, developed very structured routines of behavior to cope with stuttering. Examples are as follows:

**Benjamin:** I had a bit of a system down to where if, let’s see, [pause], well I’ll tell you some stories first and then I’ll get into my thinking. In the 4th grade, my parents were gone on a ski trip and I had a book report due the next day and I had my grandfather call the teacher at home the night before the book report and explain my situation to her so that I didn’t have to get up in front of the class and give the book report. If I thought there was a teacher that would randomly pick kids to read or would go down the row and everybody gets a turn, I’d have my mother talk to them and once again explain my situation, so that I did not have to read in class. . . . I would, like if, we would be given assignments to where we break up into groups and then we’d have to meet back and then give the results to the teacher and the class. I would only, I would try to position it so that our group sat closest to the teacher so that in case I had be the one to give the results… I would try to position myself closest to the teacher so that I would speak to her, but in case the rest of the class couldn’t hear, she would say, “Just in case you didn’t hear, he said…”…And so I was talking to the teacher roughly like I’m talking to you, and she would be the one that would I guess give, basically give the report to the class, so that I didn’t have to speak in front of the entire class.

**Clay:** For me, college was the worst place to be for me. Because I could take the courses back in the 60s back then. They were held in the huge halls and you didn’t have to talk at all. You could blend in with hundreds of kids in the classrooms. And I majored in history
and I have my degree and I didn’t have to get up in front of a class for 4 of the years in college, actually….Four years, ok, and got a degree and didn’t have to talk at all in school. Four years in class. That’s amazing that I did that. I picked the courses that you know had the huge classes.

I avoided. Four years. And I have my college degree. For four years, I was pretty clever, I was pretty smart. Didn’t talk a whole lot.

Janet: I think by high school I tried to tell my teachers before we started class, or the week before school even, I would go and try to catch them and tell them that I stutter. But even, I don’t even think I knew why I was telling them, I just wanted them to know. Because then they’d always say “oh do you not want me to call on you, or do you not want me to make you read” or whatever, and I’d always say, “no, just treat me however you treat everyone else” but then I’d hate for them to call on me or make me read. But just having them know, but then interestingly enough I didn’t really want anyone else to know or talk about it, or I didn’t want them to say it, I just wanted them to know. I think they were a little bit freaked out there because they didn’t really know what to do about it. They’re like ok, great, you stutter, I don’t really know what that means, I don’t really know what stuttering is, or what causes it, or how to help you, or anything, but you’re going to be sitting there, you know, so, but, and I remember even, sometimes I couldn’t get to my teachers ahead of time, and I’d have a prewritten note that I’d give them, like as soon as I’d walk into the classroom, so I’d make sure I knew where my classrooms were so I could get there before it started so I could give them that note so that they don’t make me introduce myself.
Benjamin not only developed systems to avoid reading and speaking in class, but also developed a keen sense of discernment in identifying teachers who could potentially require him to speak.

**Benjamin**: I knew which teacher would like kids volunteering, I knew which teachers would read themselves, I knew which teachers would call on kids, and which teachers would go down the row. And based upon that, within two or three days, a phone call would be made to whichever teachers or class I didn’t feel fully comfortable in. And so that takes care of the teacher for the entire year. And so from there it’s like I’m fine, you know, and then if I decide to say something out loud or participate, it’s when I fully feel confident, and it’s because I worked it. And so teacher-wise it would be done within the first three days of school… I would just watch them and the way they handled addressing the class. I would look at the way they went through the syllabus, that was huge….

Because if, because if they give out a syllabus, if they go through and read every single word in there, then that put me at ease because I felt like, ok, they’re going to do all the talking, they’re going to do all the reading, so don’t worry about it. If they would start to point and pick, or if they would go down the row, so the way they address the class, they way they went through the syllabus, and the way they would ask questions. Like if they would kind of ask a question and want you to think about it but not answer it, or if they would ask and be like, hey “John” what’s your opinion or this or that, if they would have us introduce ourselves, and “tell me a little bit about yourself” you know if they would do that or if they wouldn’t do that. Yeah, so I mean there are just tiny, tiny things that you could tell about the first day and the way they dealt with the class that would tend to resemble the way they taught class the rest of the year…. And so if I got through the first
day, and I felt good about it, then I would be ok. But if there was a teacher that did “this,
this, or this”, and I’m, ok, I’m putting a checkmark by their name, putting a red flag up,
and I’m going to watch them XXX too and if I’m still really uptight and nervous and
uncomfortable then XXX there’s probably going to be the phone call made.
Four participants pretended to “play dumb” or fake a lack of knowledge in order to hide
their coping strategy of avoiding stuttering.

David: I just became more withdrawn, I really didn’t like to talk, I didn’t want to read
out loud, I didn’t want to raise my hand or answer questions, so I basically played dumb a
lot to not direct attention to myself.

Janet: If I couldn’t start that first word [on] my paragraph, I’d skip down to another one,
and then they’d be like “You’re at the wrong paragraph!” and I’d be like, “Oh” and then
the teacher would be mad. And then I’d be like, I’d just pretend like I was dumb. That
was the worst part.

Serena: Sometimes when I can’t get out my words, my eyes will go up, they’ll go look
up, and that began in high school because I would pretend that, you know, I lost my train
of thought, or something, I’d be like [pretends to look like she’s lost her train of thought]
but it was just to get [words out].

Kevin: Middle school was tough, I think I just kept avoiding a lot, you know, I just
would avoid any chance that I would get to not talk, you know, I’d avoid people, I’d
avoid raising my hand in class, it was one of those things where if I had to speak I’d just
go ahead and do it and I would be able to incorporate enough secondary behaviors to get
by, you know, talk around a word or pretend I didn’t know what I was talking about.
Some coping strategies were perceived as being positive. For example, two participants used coping strategies to shield teasing from peers:

**Tyrone:** You know, they would make fun [imitates stuttering on his name], you know, whatever, and um that, that became, and then I was more vocal, `cause I got, you know you get tired of being made fun of eventually. So I stood up for myself, so that helped a whole lot.

**Stacey:** I just remember one or two times where kids teased me to my face, and I just blew them off because I figured they are the ones with the problems not me.

*Physical (Bodily) Consequences.* For many participants, stuttering induced increased physical tension, illness, and symptoms of anxiety in the school setting. This affected their performance both in the classroom and outside of school. For example:

**Dena:** Well one thing that I know that I went through in school was whenever you had to introduce yourself, if somebody went around the class, you know, in a line, and my heart would be beating pretty fast until it came to me `cause I really didn’t like introducing myself, so it was pretty embarrassing because it would take so long to get my name out, and that was really sad for me.

**Benjamin:** If I thought there was a teacher that would randomly pick kids to read or would go down the row and everybody gets a turn, I’d have my mother talk to them and once again explain my situation, um, so that I did not have to read in class because any time they started that my ears would get hot, I’d start getting nervous, I couldn’t sit still, I just start to sweat, and the only thing I could think about was counting down the time until I had to read.
Patricia: I was just so anxious all of the time, I was in a fight or flight kind of mode, and um to the point where that anxiousness interfered with everything. It interfered with my eating, and I know that sounds funny but when you’re anxious your stomach is nervous and when you’re nervous you try to eat and you just can’t eat or you can eat but you just want to throw up, you know, because your stomach just can’t handle it so I can remember frequently before I would go to school, and this was in high school, mainly, um that I would try to eat breakfast, and I couldn’t even eat it but I would try and then I would get physically ill after I ate my breakfast and I didn’t share this with my mother. And what I did, see these are more tricks, these are more avoidance, tactics that I used, but I used to go upstairs to the second floor bathroom and just keep flushing the toilet so that nobody could hear me getting sick.

Patricia: I can also think back to just um, just having physical feelings of tightness here [points to chest area], just, you know, muscle tightness, when you’re in that flight or flight kind of situation, and when you’re in it all day long, you know, somebody’s going to ask me a question, somebody’s going to ask me to do this or that, you sort of build a wall around you and you’re very, very rigid and tense and you’re just not relaxed enough to take a deep breath and just get some air in, so I was, I was, physically I was very, very thin. Very, very thin. And um I felt very self-conscious about that too.

Psychological Attributions/Consequences. Some participants assigned negative attributes towards themselves, or perceived their situation to be hopeless, as a result of others (i.e., teachers, peers) in the school setting. Other participants engaged in many “mind games” when reflecting on the idea of speaking.
Kenneth: I think what people don’t see [about stuttering] is . . . this emotional baggage that we carry around. These thoughts that roll around in our head like “My stuttering sounds horrible, I’m embarrassing my friends, I’ll never achieve anything, my stuttering will always hold me back, I suck at this, I can’t speak and so I’m never going to be good at this, I hate this” – all these thoughts, all these negative thoughts, they, when you get into a block, you have a frustrating speaking situation, they just flood your mind like that [snaps fingers] and they just weigh on you without you even, sometimes not being aware of each individual thought, they just flood your head and they weigh you down, and I think that affects your interactions with people, I think it affects your concentration in class, I think it affects, I mean it just affects your attitude in general which carries over to, you know, all sorts of activities in school, how you’re paying attention to the teacher, whether you feel like walking up to somebody and striking up a conversation.

Patricia: I would be able to comprehend well but as soon as they heard me orally read, they assumed that mentally I was not very sharp. So I can remember um having to be placed with the lower-functioning kids and thinking oh, I guess I’m a little slow.

Patricia: I think, I think what all of this is, is that I felt powerless. I felt powerless as a child in the public school….I could not control anything. I didn’t have the abilities to speak up for myself. I didn’t, but, you know, but um maybe that is normal. You know, maybe as a kid, you know, kids are shy, I don’t know, but I felt like I was a victim. I was a victim and that I was thrown into this system, and I had to make it through. I had to paddle my way through. And lots of times I didn’t want to paddle, I wanted to jump overboard because, yeah, there was just a lot of suffering.
Lance: The actual classroom itself was a very stressful time, knowing that I could get called on, and then you have to talk in front of this, it felt like it was a dead silent room where every ear was focused on my every sound, and to mentally get past that, at the same time trying that I stuttered, when it had been known in my entire school career, but still even in 12th grade still trying to feel as if I had to hide it or in some way talk perfectly for fear of being thought of as stupid. So it was a real mental obstacle course that I just could not break.

*Emotions.* The majority of participants expressed the emotional side of stuttering. Feelings of shame and embarrassment appeared to dominate some of the participants’ experiences in the school setting.

Benjamin: I can remember at times being very, very embarrassed, um giving book reports in 5th grade and I’d get up there and I’d freeze and I just burst into tears and run in the bathroom.

David: About 4 or 5 years after school, after high school, after I got out of high school, I was at this store and the girl working there was a girl that I went to high school with who I recognized. We talked a little bit, she goes, “I remember in school you were such a nice happy kid, you were always smiling” and I was just, I mean it made me mad….Because she didn’t know how much pain that I had gone through and it just made me mad to think that, for her to think “oh, you were such a happy kid” but she was a real nice girl even back then and I didn’t get mad at her, but inside I was like [imitated an upset demeanor] “I was not happy!”, you know, I mean I was just angry inside, [but said to the girl] “oh, whatever, thanks”.

Patricia: My memories of that school 1st through 3rd was crying, a lot of crying and I can think back that I was never happy about going to school. I was somewhat anxious and fearful and I remember the school people having to call up my mom and asking her to come and pick me up from school as I think back maybe my stuttering was part of that anxiousness, I don’t know, I just don’t know, but I know that 1st through 3rd grade was not a joyful time.

Personality. Some participants felt as though stuttering played a role in their personality development. These experiences ranged from positive to negative. Dena, for example, attributed stuttering to having a positive effect on her personality while Patricia and Liza attributed stuttering to having a negative effect.

Dena: Why my experiences were more positive? Um, one thing, I would try, maybe, well, I don’t really know, maybe ‘cause I looked at it, maybe I’m more of an optimist than a pessimist….And I always, you know I would reach out to help other people too being that I’m a psychologist, I’ve been practicing in this field probably since I was in elementary school, but um I didn’t, for some reason I didn’t internalize much negative feedback from my peers, and so I don’t really recall it in my autobiographical memory.

Patricia: But that is so strange because now, well, even then, I was a social person. I mean deep, deep down, I loved people. And I loved to talk but because of the stuttering it had just changed me into this shy introverted person. And only in the last 15-20 years has my real personality come out.

Liza: I don’t know if it’s related but I was very shy throughout kindergarten to kind of 5th grade and then I just kind of XXX and I was really only shy at school but I mean I remember thinking getting on the bus in kindergarten and first grade and sitting down in
a seat and the kids pushing me out of the seat. And I was so shy, and so I would just sit on the floor for a second and then I’d get up and I’d go find somewhere else to sit, and I did the same thing in school you know, kindergarten, there’s like that playtime, and I’d be playing with something and the kid would take it away from me and I would just let him and that was one thing that the teachers would tell my mom like at every conference, you’ve got to work with her on her assertiveness cause she lets people walk all over her, and I don’t know if that’s related to our speech because we’re so ashamed of ourselves that we can’t talk, and, I don’t know.

Section 2: Themes Related to School Characteristics

This section discusses characteristics of the school environment. In particular, participants discussed the physical landscape of school, which refers to size and demographic information; the social landscape of school, which refers to social interactions that take place in the school environment; and the cultural landscape of school, which refers to knowledge, routines, and common practices of school.

Physical Landscape of School: School Size and Demographics. Some participants were from small communities where there was limited diversity. This appeared to have created the perception of a supportive environment.

Dena: When I went to high school the seventh through twelfth grade was all in one school, and so we had the same classmates throughout the whole time, we never really XXX, we were all like brothers and sisters. And so they knew I stuttered, and if not, I felt embarrassed by it, but you know I would just come back in the next day like it wasn’t a big deal.
**Anthony:** I grew up in a very small town of approximately 1000 people called, uh, [names the town] and I, uh, our school, probably the old school, probably was no more than 200, 250 people. The name of the school was [names school]. At the time it was a, uh, well I guess the full time that that school was existed it was a segregated school in the sense that it was an all Black school.

**Benjamin:** I went through the same private school kindergarten through eleventh grade and then my senior year I was being a bit rebellious and got tired of the private school thing, I want to go to a public school, and so my senior year I went to public school….Size wise, the private school, kindergarten through twelfth grade, the entire school, had seven maybe eight hundred students, total. The public school that I went to, I probably had seven, eight-hundred in my graduating class. And so they were, they were very, very different. Private school, everybody knew everybody, you knew their families, you knew the teachers. Whether or not you were good friends with everybody, um, you still knew who they were, where they lived, their parents, their dogs, so on and so forth. Public school was very different, I knew a handful of five or six people going into my senior year there, and that didn’t grow by much. And so that was a pretty big adjustment and shock.

*Social Landscape of School: Classroom Participation.* The classroom affected the participants in various ways. Many felt anxiety at the thought of reading aloud in class, giving oral presentations, and introducing themselves to the class.

**Dena:** I did all of my school work, but I still could not read out loud you know in class. In seventh grade I went to junior high school. And the same thing happened in junior high. It really happened from junior high through the twelfth grade actually that I had a
speech block when I had to read because then I was beginning to develop all these secondary symptoms, I guess you would say, um, hand movement and became more increasingly aware of my speech problem, my speech disfluencies got worse, now when I was around my friends I could communicate but I had much disfluency because I was anxious, and then whenever I was around authority figures, you know I had to speak in front of the class, my speech also was very disfluent.

Patricia: I can remember um having to do a book report, an oral one, and getting very, very anxious about it because I knew that I would have to get up in front of the class and speak. And I can remember practicing at home and doing a wonderful job, I mean being very fluent and very thorough and then the first time I got up in front of the class to give this book report I guess I started off really good and then I just fell apart, just fell apart, again, I think I was crying, and I was directed to go back to my seat.

Liza: Probably the worst was when we had to read around the room and began in front of the room everybody read a paragraph. You counted exactly when it was your turn to read.

Earl: Sometimes the teacher might ask you something, and you might know the answer, but you won’t raise your hand. “Does anybody know that?” and you feel like, man, I know it, I was just too shy, I was afraid I was going to stutter, so I just didn’t raise my hand.

Susan: I really enjoyed participating in class as long as it was myself that had made the decision that I was going to participate. So I didn’t mind like going up to the board and doing something or raising my hand, or I didn’t even mind reading out loud as long as it was myself that raised my hand and said “sure, I’ll read this paragraph”.
Social Landscape of School: Teacher Behavior/Relationships. The participants reported varied experiences with classroom teachers. These experiences ranged from positive to negative. Examples are as follows:

Dena: I think my teachers were very good teachers being that it was an African American school, and the teachers were, had more of a parental role in their teaching, that’s different from today. They would just, um, they would empower the students, more invested in the students.

Patricia: I sort of looked up to my teachers but I never truly felt comfortable with my teachers. I don’t know, maybe because like I said I was shy. And um I, I really did not grow close to any of my teachers, I did like to please them, I wanted them to like me but I was always the girl that didn’t cause any problems, I was, I was always you know quiet and I did, for the most part, everything that they said. And so you know I was one of those students that you wouldn’t have to bother with. I just wanted to blend in, I just wanted to be blended in with the other students and not be heard from. So you know, students like that, teachers really, really like, you know, because they don’t have to take the time out to address them, to talk to them, to direct them, to monitor them because you know they don’t cause any problems.

Social Landscape of School: Peer Behavior/Relationships. As with teacher relationships, participants also reported varied experiences with peers as well. These ranged from positive to negative. For example:

Dena: I think they looked upon me as being one of them, in P.E, and in band, and ROTC, I kind of affiliated with large groups of kids, and I think I belonged to ROTC for about a year, and the band, I was always in the band, XXX, and in P.E. we would, everybody
would be in physical education together, and, you know, I would speak to people, and
was friendly with everyone, so I think I had positive, I know I had positive relationships
with my peers because I was elected in the ninth grade to be the queen of junior high
school, and in the twelfth grade I was reelected again, so, and that was because of the
popularity within the students.

Patricia: I do remember being teased a lot, being teased by my peers, I do remember that,
and not really knowing why I was teased but I knew that I just didn’t fit, fit in with the
other students there, and I seemed to be um more comfortable with the “not-so-bright”
kids or the “not-so-in” kind of group, I was always on the outskirts of this group and I
would always associate and play and interact with the children who just didn’t have the
right kind of clothes on, they were the poor kids in the school, and that’s where I felt a
little more safe and comfortable. I sort of felt like I was a protector over them because
they too were also being teased. You know kids can be very, very cruel.

Social Landscape of School: Extracurricular Activities. The majority of participants
engaged in extracurricular activities. Stuttering did not appear to hold them back from
participating in sports or clubs at school.

Dena: Like math was a strong pursuit for me and dance was a strong pursuit, modeling,
those are things that I did, I spent a lot of time in dance classes, and that kind of built my
self-esteem, and math competitions, and I went to math contests XXX, you know I was in
the Honor Society, you know, I was in the band, I played an instrument and I played the
flute, I competed solo. I kind of focused mostly on my strengths.

Anthony: I guess on my high school activities I was fairly active in school, I participated
in sports, mostly, uh baseball was my favorite and we had instructors there who really
enjoyed baseball. I can remember [names a few teachers] and they really encouraged us to participate in sports, I loved that part of them. Thinking back on my past, I really enjoyed that time. It was a wonderful time. But I was probably active in school, and participated not only in sports, but also in activities in my class, and I was elected to office, and certain offices of leadership at that time.

Alan: To me what was the biggest factor [to having a positive school experience] is that I was involved in lots of things, like [names school], that school, like our big sport, the big sport was soccer. And, now, while I was not the start player by any stretch, for my last two years I was on varsity, I was a first or second sub so I was playing something, and so like the jocks would see me as someone that’s also an athlete and so they couldn’t pick on me for being like the non-athlete, you know, at the same time I did well in school so it’s not like I was dumb. So, I mean, to me it was not a problem because I knew people from all facets of school life, from athletics, from academics, from doing stuff around campus.

Patricia: I was shy and very, very thin but I was very good when it came to running and jumping and doing gross motor skills. Because of my speech I wasn’t good at communicating but I was very quick at playing dodge ball and kick ball and all those games that the kids used to play in their, you know, early, early years.

*Cultural Landscape of School: Academic/Learning Benefits and Costs.* The academic and learning environment affected the participants in various ways. There appeared to be both costs and benefits to being a person who stutters. Some participants reported that stuttering resulted in lower grades and limited learning experiences:
Kenneth: Another chapter would be on how I wished, how I appreciated the academic and the aspect of learning for the fun of learning, I appreciated a little bit of that but for the most part I missed that, and when I went back to law school I got that fully, I really had a lust for learning and appreciated learning for the sake of learning instead of a degree or a grade.

Patricia: Oh, if I was called upon to read, which I hated that, I think that’s the worst part of it all, you know I couldn’t concentrate on what the subject was because I was so anxious. I was so anxious about, Oh God am I going to stutter when they call upon me to read this you know section of this text and my mind would be a thousand miles away from the classroom, away from what the teacher was talking about, so I think that my grades suffered a lot during my junior high and high school years.

Janet: I was thinking back to the classroom that a lot of kids have a lot of other things on their minds, or they’re ADD and this kind of thing, but I feel like I wasn’t even listening to like maybe 75 percent of what anyone was saying [Liza also nods in agreement] because I was thinking almost all the time about my speech and what would I do if they called, and what should I do if this, what if this, like replaying scenarios in my mind, when today if I were in school I would just be this sponge of information.

Janet: I had a couple of speeches that I had to do, and my mom tried to get me to be able to do them after school, and I had a couple of teachers of mine that argued it, and said, nope, where, she has to do it in class or she gets an “E”, and there’s this one teacher where I told him that I wasn’t going to do it, so we just, he gave me an “E” on it. And there were a couple of other speeches that I did in character, [verbal signs of agreement from focus group members] that was my spin on it, that I acted like I was Catcher in the
Rye character, XXX Caulfield, and just because I turned that character on, I was able to get through it and I got an A.

Susan: But as soon as we would do that thing where we would go up and down the rows, and each person would be assigned to read a paragraph, I would sit there counting and recounting over and over, seeing what my paragraph was, and I remember in my book like circling what sounds I thought I was going to stutter on. And at that time I really didn’t have any techniques to help with it, so I was basically just spacing myself out hardcore with that. So I would like sit there and be like freaking out the whole time, I wouldn’t learn a single thing ‘cause I wouldn’t hear what anyone else was saying.

Janet: I did really well in school, but like I was just saying, I feel like I would have learned more, I did good, I got good grades and everything, but I feel like I didn’t learn like even half as much as I would have if I could have been not thinking about stuttering.

Serena: I think it was probably in high school when I did more presentations and I’d either skip class and just take an “E” or I would go up there again and I would just change words, or not remember, or jump from here to there, and sometimes I would do it really great, it’s like I got like in this mode like where you’re out like an out-of-body experience, like where you’re acting. And I, I’d spend hours doing tons of like, whatever, like say I heard about [pause] a war. I would draw or I’d copy pages and pages and put them on the board, and then point as I was reading, so like they wouldn’t be seeing me, they would be seeing the XXX on the wall.

Other participants perceived benefits to being a person who stutters in school.

Stacey: I think with me I did better in school because I thought I had to prove myself to be better than everybody else.
Susan: I would say, and I’ve said this a lot before, that I really think that school has made me overcompensate a lot, like I would work really, really hard because I knew that, I thought something was wrong with me, but, so I’m going to make up for that by being a straight A student.

Cultural Landscape of School: Interventions or Lack Thereof. Many participants did not have positive experiences with speech therapy. Many reported that they would have appreciated more acknowledgement and discussions about stuttering, and interventions that focused on the emotional side of stuttering.

David: I don’t think they knew what it was or what, or how to make it stop, therapy was just a very rudimentary, and they were just learning basically on us on things that they were doing. ‘Cause I’m 41 right now, so I started out in therapy when I was a little kid in ‘69 or ‘70, sometime around there, and back then there really wasn’t real therapy. Even now you know you’ve got therapists who studied accents, who studied injuries, and all kinds of speech issues but not stuttering. And when they’ve got a job at a school they have to learn on you. They really didn’t know. So it really wasn’t much help at all.

Patricia: I was trying to be fluent in a fluent world. And um, and that, that was very, very hard. But you know had I had the support system back then, had I had parents who were willing to sit down and talk this out. You know, I think that the stuttering sometimes was just because nobody came to me and talked to me and said “you know Patricia a, um, you know, it’s ok to stutter, you, you know, if you don’t want to be called upon at this time, that is fine, just let me know when you’re ready to answer something and I will call upon you.” You know, if somebody had taken the pressure off of me. My school days would have been so much better. My social life at the school would have been so much more
fun. Um I don’t think that I would have had such butterflies in my stomach if I had known that I wasn’t going to be put on the spot.

Janet: But as of now I’ve been doing presentations for SLPs coming into, who are about to be SLPs and one’s who are right now, and they never heard of the NSA, they didn’t know there were support groups, they don’t understand why you’d even need to know other people that stutter, that is like the most mind-boggling thing to me so far is that I went to a speech pathologist for 15 years for a half hour a week out of my life, they didn’t know anything about stuttering except that one class that they had in college 10 years ago. So it’s hard to blame it on the teacher, the teacher should be able to go to their SLP resource in their school.

Section 3: Themes Related to Post-Educational Consequences

This section discusses the ways in which the experience of being a person who stutters in school permeated the participants’ experiences after school.

Continued Fear of Speaking Situations. Some participants reported that fear of speaking during their school years resulted in fear of speaking later in life. For example:

Patricia: I used to go upstairs to the second floor bathroom and just keep flushing the toilet so that nobody could hear me getting sick, and then that kind of physical behavior um lasted with me a long, long time because as a young adult and as an adult whenever I had a speaking situation coming up I would get physically ill, physically ill I can think back, you know, many, many times before I went out for my student teaching, I’m a former special ed teacher of 26 years, and before I’d go out for my student teaching practice, I would be physically ill. And that, and only in the last 20 years of my life have I stopped doing that.
Jonathan: My first public talk [in church] I was sick all night. So that fear of being up in front of people was still around.

Janet: I do that all the time [word substitute] and I even do a lot of it now at work. I will sit at meetings and I will know the answer and I just, if I’m asked anything, I’ll say, I won’t use the most intelligent words. So then I’ll go back to my desk and I’ll write a huge email, I still feel I need to prove that I’m capable. Everyone at work says I’m very [pause] very detailed. And I get the job done. Example: I get a phone call and they ask me something. It takes me 10 seconds to call them back and give an answer. No, I prefer writing an email, give them an answer, give them more, and I anticipate what they’re going to ask based my answer, and provide them with that information to avoid having them call me again and keep returning their calls with an email, it’s a lot work…. It’s a fear of being [pause] found out.

*Career Choices.* Stuttering also affected the career choices of some of the participants. Patricia, for example, chose a career in special education as a result of her experiences in school. Kenneth, however, developed a resilience to not let stuttering dictate his career of becoming a lawyer.

Patricia: Yeah I think they were connected and actually because of the stuttering I went into special ed which is my career that I chose, for 26 years I taught special ed children, I taught nonverbal, I taught mostly, which is very, very interesting. I taught nonverbal children, and, but I always felt very comfortable around those kinds of students, I felt like I could protect them from the society, I felt like I could protect them from peers that may want to tease them, see so there’s that same thing that keeps coming up again. I wanted to protect them, I felt comfortable with them. Um, and uh, and I also thought about teaching
deaf children too, that was one other career goal because I really got into signing, Total
Communication, and my first job I taught at a state school for severely institutionalized
mentally handicapped adults, and they were older than I was, my first job, and a lot of
them could not speak very, very XXX, very, very clearly so I was taught to sign and I
taught them to sign too so a large part of my first 5 years teaching, I was signing a lot as I
spoke to these kids and I was teaching them on how to sign back and um and I really got
good at doing that. So, um, yeah.

Kenneth: You know it was, it’s definitely an issue, I mean communication, oral
communication is a huge part of my job. But what’s maybe a little ironic is that I, I have
a real passion for oral communication, for public speaking, for trial work, for, and so I
had a passion for being a trial attorney, I wanted to be a trial attorney, I knew what it was
all about, I knew that being a person who stutters, it was going to be a challenge, but I
had just such a passion for it, there was no way that being a person who stutters was
going to get in the way of it.

Difficulty with Job Interviews. Many participants reported difficult times with job
interviews, especially participants who reported positive experiences with stuttering during their
K-12 school years.

Dena: Once I got my PhD I had to start interviewing for jobs, and those disfluencies
starting coming back, well it was still there, and so I, and so I still tend to avoid any
situation where I had to speak in public with the PhD, but I had jobs, you know in
between times, if I was speaking with people who maybe were not as educated as I was
then I probably was more fluent, but with any large group of people I would get very
anxious, and particularly, you know, whenever I had to say my name, some things you couldn’t substitute anything for, I would block more on those types of things.

Alan: Yeah, and job interviewing was really the time that it became apparent. I mean, you know, perhaps before like you’re a freshman and you’re meeting people, yeah perhaps at that point you’re kind of aware of it, you know some bad consequences, but really the time, like probably, like for summer jobs during my junior, or my sophomore and junior years, at that point I noticed it. Or it became obvious that there could be some negative consequences.

*Personal Identity.* Participants reported both positive and negative experiences of how stuttering played a role in their identity construction.

Dena: They probably think because I stutter, they probably think it’s a liability to my profession, and I think in some ways it is a liability to my profession. Because, you know, that’s just part of life. I have other assets and strengths that some people don’t have….Well, I’m really good one on one in a clinical situation, I’m very sensitive, you know, probably because of my speech problem, I, um, I think I have some good analytical skills that are an asset to my profession as a psychologist, I’m very creative, so, you know, I kind of stay focused on the positive, and try not to be so focused on the negative, and then sometimes I even tell myself, you know, back in the day if I really could talk a lot it’s no telling what type of person I would be today.

David: But I think now that I’ve gotten older, you know I’ve tried to like buy my self, my self-image. I’ve always had to buy nicer cars than everyone else had to have. Because I wanted to have something that shows everyone that, look, see I am worth something.
Section 4: Themes Related to the Participants’ Personal Reflections/Observations of School

During the final portion of the interview, participants were asked to synthesize their personal experiences, and the experiences of people who stutter. Each participant provided thoughts on the current school climate of PWS, the daily experiences of PWS, and suggestions for school teachers.

School Climate.

Dena: Well one thing I can say is, it appears to me that you have more speech therapists in the schools now, and you have special education mandates that are supposed to meet the needs of kids with speech impairments, and so even though I know that there are still not enough speech therapists but um I would think that the kids will get therapy from elementary all the way through high school if they need it, and that they will have opportunities probably to practice some of the pragmatic, I guess you would call it that, just practice speaking in situations perhaps instead of avoiding those situations. So I think that a … child that stutters now, they have more opportunities for good interventions, I think.

Patricia: The system doesn’t address the unique individuality of each of their students. Ok. Um, the system has one way of doing things, one mode of teaching style, one mode of discipline style, one mode, and it seems to cover most of the general population, except for, you know, a few kids here and there that might be emotionally different, that might be physically different, and if you stutter, you know, like we were saying tonight, it’s not a observable handicap. You know, so physically I looked like everybody else in that classroom, I had two eyes and a nose and you know a mouth and ears but I did not have the motor skills, the oral-motor skills that everybody else had. And I was expected
to be on the same level as everybody else. And I, and I couldn’t change it. I didn’t have the power to change it.

*Daily Experiences of PWS.*

**Patricia:** A lot of physiology, a lot of um central nervous system kind of feelings, sweaty palms, I mean I had sweaty palms all the time when I in school, you know, I had sweaty palms, my heart would be racing a lot, a lot of fear of what’s going to happen next, so I guess that’s anticipatory fear of what may or may not happen next, you know, am I going to be put on the spot, am I [going to be] asked to read, am I, you know all of that. Um, what other, oh, just a lot of um mind chatter. A lot of mind chatter. Now I don’t know if other stutterers go through this but like [pretends to think deeply] “alright. Um alright now, now let, now let me see” you know things like saying [pretends to self talk] “ok now um, now I think it’s going to be a good day, um, I think this is going to be a good day but what if this happens, you know, what if I get teased today, or um what if the boy who’s sitting next to me starts picking on me, you know, what am I going to do.” But see I did not have any coping skills. I did not have any coping skills because nobody would, nobody knew that I was feeling these fears and so I didn’t know how to cope. And um so just a lot of mind chattering um what else. [Pause]. Crying. I know when I was a little, little girl I was crying a lot and I didn’t know why I was crying. So there was some real emotional issues with that [Pause] Not having a boyfriend when the other girls my age had boyfriends, just being very, very shy. Feeling like I wasn’t good enough.

Some participants felt that a disability hierarchy existed, and that stuttering was not as socially accepted as other disabilities.
Kevin: I think about where I’m at now, I kind of like try to take a step back, and it’s almost kind of like this touching scene, seeing someone with special needs, they may not take the form of stuttering, but you have this team, it’s like an IEP team, and it’s almost touching if you really think about it, all these people come together around the table helping someone out, you know talking about “oh, this kid needs this, this kids needs this” and it’s very, it’s very touching, like a lot of people are caring about kids with special needs. But I think people define stuttering differently where it’s like “well they may not need special needs” you know it’s like, I mean, so I think that it’s different, maybe, I think that people who stutter may kind of slip through the cracks on this.

James: One of the problems for people who stutter, I think, is that we can sometimes hide our stuttering when we choose to, where it’s not as noticeable as somebody who’s in a wheelchair or somebody who has Parkinson’s, and so it’s something that doesn’t always stand out that much. So it’s easier just to sort of push it aside, push it into the cracks, and maybe over time, it’ll go away. So that’s my view on that.

Susan: I think a lot of it is how we perceive ourselves. Like a person in a wheelchair isn’t going to pretend that they can walk, whereas all of our avoidances and stuff are essentially pretending that we’re fluent speakers. So I think the fact that we are so uncomfortable with it, that makes other people uncomfortable with it as well. Whereas a person in a wheelchair, they’re in a wheelchair, they’re not going to hide it, like they’re obviously not like comfortable with it but they’ve come to terms with that, so I bet like them just being comfortable, I’m here and here’s what’s wrong, here’s what’s going on, makes other people respond to them.
Jonathan: Just unawareness. You know, just insensibility toward you know, we live in such a culture, in a culture that judges by appearance, and so if it’s not readily seen, then, and the thing that’s really bringing out more to the fore is the mental illness issue, that, it’s, you know, if you’re going, I think if I was going to classify stuttering, it’s not a mental illness, it could be maybe probably be classified as an emotional illness, just judging from my own experience. And so if I, you know, I can’t tell if you’re anxious, I can’t tell if you’re sad if you can put on the good front, there’s people that smile all the time, there always smiling, but they’re the most depressed people you ever want to meet, so it’s not readily apparent stuttering, and as you’re lining people up in a room, and you’re told, ok, now pick out the people in a wheelchair, ok, one, two, three. Pick out the people that stutter, you don’t know until they stutter. And when they do start usually it tends to be comical because they’re struggling to, you know, it’s like the slapstick comedy, what makes slapstick comedy so funny, well it’s an experience that, you know if somebody got smacked in the face with a pie, well what makes that funny, well if you got smacked in the face with a pie you wouldn’t like it at all, you know, stuttering I think falls in that category, you don’t really, it’s not apparent and when it happens you’re more drawn to the plight that the person has, and so you view it as funny then.

Serena: They [teachers] may not view it as different, as your average handicap, like you know, they don’t have a walker, they don’t have a limp, they’re not autistic or Down’s, so, there’s nothing, it’s not like a common, no one knows about it, ok, yeah they talk weird it doesn’t matter.

Janet: Or even more so, they’re going to think that that speech impediment [stuttering] is the same as not being able to say your “r’s” and “l’s” and it’s day and night.
The “Invisible” Experience of Stuttering. This sub-theme refers to aspects of the stuttering experience that are not observable. Participants commented on various components to this experience, such as internalizing hurtful comments, dealing with the emotional side of stuttering, and manipulating discourse to avoid potentially troublesome sounds and words. The following quotes explicate the participants’ opinions on the “invisible” experience of stuttering:

Anthony: I think most people just don’t realize how hurtful that comments can be, even people who are well-meaning and your friends, sometimes they will make comments either for joking purposes or just general comments, and it really does affect you, and it affects you personally, and you go home, you think about it and, you know, they would never have any idea that what they said had such a drastic effect. I think that was one issue.

Hector: Well I guess number one, people would tell me sometimes to slow down. And you know at my early age I didn’t really like them telling me to slow down because I thought I sounded ok. But looking back, yeah, I needed to slow down. I think we who stutter, I mean some of us, need to slow down. Because our rate becomes better. But here again, some people are, and sometimes I’d be speaking about telling a story or something, and sometimes people will, you know I’ll have a hard time saying “ra-ra-ra-ra” [imitates stuttering] and someone will jump in and say the word for me. And that’s something that happens occasionally, I guess, to all of us and you don’t really like it but you just kind of go with it and stuff. I never would tell the other person, hey, let me finish my words because, see that one sentence right there would be a tough time saying that sentence, so I would just forget that and continue on.

Benjamin: I would say how it controls your entire life from the time you wake up until
the time you go to sleep. I was talking to a buddy about it, this was a couple of years ago, he’s like “hey”, he’s like “I’d like to ask you a couple of things if that’s ok” and I was like “yeah, sure, that’s fine”. And I told him imagine every single thing that you say or that [you] want to say, it’s like reading off a teleprompter inside your head. I go every single thing that comes out of my mouth or even doesn’t come out of my mouth it’s, it’s like, you know those little tickers at the bottom of the TV screen and it shows the stocks and everything, and it just goes across, I go that’s what’s going through my brain every time I talk and I’ll think or I’ll read three, four, five, six, seven words ahead and I’ll feel comfortable until I get to this one word and then for two or three seconds it’s a buildup until I get to that word and I’ve got to decide if I’m going to say that word or if I’m going to change the word, if I’m going to change the subject, if I’m going to just completely quit talking and try to get you to take over the conversation.

James: Yeah, also some “behind the scenes” stuff, when I was in school and the teacher went down the rows, you know, and you’re waiting for your turn, behind the scenes I was like freaking out, you know my heart was racing, I was sweating, just totally freaking out and so by the time it was my turn I was all stressed out and I stuttered through every word and kind of pushed through as hard as I could and got totally worked up. And so that was my experience for every usual “around-the-class” speaking situation everyday.

Liza: I’d say it’s the beating yourself up afterwards. People don’t see what’s going on in your mind for the next 8 hours of the fact that you couldn’t say 5 words. That’s huge.

Earl: There’s a lot of emotion. I’m a covert stutterer and there’s a lot of emotion involved there too, like you feel like “how come I’m not like this person or that person, am I a little bit less because I’m a stutterer,” and I guess you have to come to your own
terms with that, how you feel about that, and I think that’s a lot of stuttering too, a lot of it is the emotional side too that you have to really deal with. I think that’s part of it too.

Janet: I think they’d never know that you substitute words and say “my mother’s son” when you very well could have just said “my brother”. They don’t know why you’re doing that. Or that you even did it ‘cause a lot of times I would say “my father” instead of “my dad” and they would never know that in my mind I was going “I want to say ‘dad’, I want to say ‘dad’ but I’ll just say ‘father’”. And I didn’t like the way that father even sounded. Or when we would say things that sound stupid and you hate that you just sounded stupid, that you didn’t know the real word for it, or you act like you didn’t know. Like you’ll say “um, what’s that thing called where Abraham Lincoln wrote on the thing” like you act like you don’t know.

Janet: I would have to write spelling stories every week that we would read out loud, and I, that class we had to read all the time out loud, and so I’d write my spelling stories very specifically around the sounds and letters that I couldn’t say, so I spent hours and hours on my spelling story every week. But I usually got through all those reading times somehow.

Suggestions for Schoolteachers and Speech-Language Pathologists.

Dena: But I think for young children, I think that they probably not only need a speech therapist but they may need a psychologist to help them, and a speech therapist could probably help them do it, they need some relaxation methods, they need to use some cognitive restructuring methods, they need to use some desensitization methods, they probably need to be, to practice talking, I think if you catch them at a very young age, and you get them to participate in activities where they have to talk more, and to
encourage them to talk, I think that would be very important. They should be the ones on program. You shouldn’t discriminate against kids because of their disfluency.

Patricia: I think just to have them know who in the school is trained and capable of in giving them the support to help this student and um and just be there for the staff if the staff have questions. Because I don’t think [pause] back in the sixties and seventies I don’t think there were, well maybe there were guidance counselors, I don’t even know if we had a speech pathologist staffed in the local schools when I was going to school. Yeah. I don’t know, I think sometimes these teachers you have to connect with these teachers and you have to find their time and their schedules to talk to them. It’s just very, very hard. It’s hard um as a special ed teacher just to talk to the regular ed teachers about modifications, accommodations, paperwork, you know they were, they just didn’t have the time to follow through with all this but if you can give the regular ed teacher some guidelines, some guidelines that they could easily follow when they interact with this child who has the stuttering problem in their classroom. And if they can’t follow through, you know, or if they don’t have any knowledge, you know, find another teacher in that school who’s possibly teaching on the same grade level and transfer that child out. You know, sometimes I think that, that you have to pair the student up with the teacher, and the teacher and the student need to be paired together, if there is one teacher at that school who is emotionally and mentally aware of a learning issue or a stuttering issue, you know, put that child in that teacher’s class.

**Conclusion**

From these results, one can observe that stuttering can have profound and varied effects on the school experiences of PWS. In addition, these effects extend beyond one’s school life and
also impact career choices and identity construction. Knowledge of these experiences has important implications for classroom teachers, speech-language pathologists, and other professionals who interact with PWS. Chapter 5 will discuss implications of these effects on the experiences of PWS in relation to prior theory and research.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a detailed understanding of the K-12 school experiences of adults who stutter. The primary investigator used qualitative methodology as a means to gather this knowledge. Results revealed themes related to student characteristics, school characteristics, post-educational consequences, and personal reflections and observations of the participants. This chapter will discuss these themes in relation to prior theory and research on school experiences, discuss limitations and strengths of the study, and discuss implications of the findings for speech-language pathologists and classroom teachers.

Student Characteristics

Prior research has shown that stuttering can play a major role in shaping an individual’s personal experience, such as their identity construction, personality development, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Daniels, Hagstrom, & Gabel, 2006; Hottle, 1996; Petrunik & Shearing, 1983). Petrunik and Shearing (1983), for example, discussed three major strategies that PWS developed to manage their social interactions: concealment of stuttering; openness of stuttering; and disavowal, or not acknowledging stuttering. Corcoran and Stewart (1998) conducted a qualitative study on the lived experiences of PWS. Findings of this study revealed themes of helplessness, fear, shame, and avoidance. Daniels and Gabel (2004) discussed the impact of stuttering on an individual’s identity construction. Their literature review revealed personalized costs of stuttering, such as anger, guilt, and shame. Findings of these prior studies were also reflected in the present study of school experiences.
Because stuttering often sets an individual apart as different, and due to the comical and negative portrayals of stuttering in society (Tanner, 2003), many PWS will go to great lengths to fit into a mainstream school environment (Hottle, 1996; Klompas & Ross, 2004). At their own emotional expense, many are willing to endure roundabout forms of communication, such as substituting words, producing sometimes awkward phrases and sentences, and traveling great distances to avoid telephone contact; accept others peoples’ perceptions of them as shy and withdrawn; introduce themselves with false names; design written reports and presentations around troublesome words; pretend to not possess knowledge of a certain subject; and internalize fear and anxiety. The participants in this study, for example, developed numerous coping strategies to avoid stuttering, handle difficult speaking situations, and prove their worth as individuals. Those participants who chose to hide their stuttering incorporated various routines to prevent being discovered as a person who stutters. For example, most participants reported that a fear of stuttering limited their attention in class when instructors required that everyone read aloud. Instead of focusing on the task at hand, they experienced anxiety over reading an upcoming paragraph. Many participants counted the number of students ahead of them, and counted the number of paragraphs in the reading selection, in order to determine which paragraph they would eventually read aloud. Consequently, when the class engaged in oral reading tasks, these participants would spend time reading over their anticipated selection, practicing troublesome worlds and circling troublesome sounds, instead of comprehending the reading material as their classmates read aloud. This routine of counting paragraphs in fearful anticipation has become a common coping strategy to the experience of PWS in school.

Some participants went to great lengths for acceptance by adopting very structured school routines centered on stuttering. For example, many developed highly calculated and consistent
routines, such as discerning when to have parents make phone calls to teachers to exempt them from speaking assignments, planning out ways to personally inform teachers not to call on them in class, or writing reports around troublesome words and sounds. Benjamin, for example, paid close attention to his classroom teachers on the first day of class, and carefully analyzed the ways in which the teacher covered the syllabus and called on students. From this process, Benjamin was able to determine whether or not he needed his parents to inform the teacher to restrict his participation in class. Janet made sure she arrived to all classes early in order to deliver prewritten notes to her teachers, so they would not call on her at random. In addition, Janet reported that she wrote her spelling stories so as not to include troublesome sounds and words. She perceived that this process would assist her in a subsequent oral presentation of her spelling story. These levels of scrutiny and precision have become common characteristics to students who stutter.

These numerous coping strategies of avoiding stuttering induced many physiological characteristics and negative emotions. Participants commented on experiencing tense speech blocks, sweaty palms, rapid heartbeats, and flushed faces of embarrassment when engaging in verbal classroom assignments. For some, these forms of behavior resulted in sickness. Patricia, for example, commented on experiencing physical illness before having to deliver an oral presentation. These findings appear to be consistent with the literature on stuttering and anxiety. This relationship has been explored in prior research studies (Craig, 1990; Craig, Hancock, & Tran, 2003). Research suggests that PWS, as a whole, are not more anxious than people who do not stutter, though PWS tend to experience higher levels of anxiety in speaking situations. Moreover, Klompas and Ross (2004) found that participants in their study experienced negative emotions in the classroom.
Though many participants expressed negative emotions, anxiety, and went to great lengths to avoid stuttering, other participants did not experience this phenomenon. Hector and Alan, for example, reported positive school experiences. Alan attributed his positive school experience to not being aware that stuttering resulted in negative consequences:

Alan: To be honest, to me it was never that bad. And I think that was for a number of reasons. I think it was because, well the biggest thing is that I was never conscious of my stuttering. I mean I was aware of it, but I was never aware of it in terms of like negative consequences.

In addition, Alan reported being involved in extracurricular activities and not being teased by peers. Likewise, Hector was aware that his speech differed from his classmates’ speech, but did not experience negative consequences as a result of stuttering.

As identity models and research on stigma would suggest, an individual’s experience is largely determined by the implicit and explicit messages they receive from their surrounding environments (Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Link & Phelan, 2001; Tatum, 1999). Link and Phelan (2001), for example, wrote that stigma is largely a social process that involves labeling, linking differences to stereotypes, separation, and status loss and discrimination. Moreover, stigma is also dependent on power. This chronology of stigma was highly supported by the participants’ experiences.

For example, as reported by Link and Phelan (2001), stigma begins with the process of labeling, or the social selection of differences, those that become salient for a particular individual or community. Many participants in this study were not aware of stuttering until a significant event occurred in their lives. Prior to this awareness, the participants engaged in communication and social interactions without any perceived negative consequences. A majority
of participants recalled specific events when stuttering was brought to their attention. This significant event usually occurred during the elementary school years. Elementary school is generally the time period when students perceive stuttering to have possible negative consequences (Guitar, 2006). Dena, for example, became aware of being a person who stutters when her third grade teacher called attention to her speech in an unfavorable way. James became aware of being a person who stutters when his sister questioned why his speech was disfluent. Benjamin reported that he first became aware of being different when a friend imitated his disfluent speech in a comical way. Stuttering, for many participants, became a difference that was socially salient in their environments. This discovery either propelled the participants into hiding their stuttering, or persevering openly without a desire to hide it. Those participants who chose to hide their stuttering began to develop many coping strategies and secondary behaviors as a result of internalizing the important value of fluency and negative consequences of disfluency. The participants who did not develop coping strategies, such as Hector and Alan, did not internalize negative messages about their speech. Stuttering did not result in a difference that was socially salient in their home and school environments. This process is consistent with models of identity construction which emphasize the importance of context, environment, and interactions with others as being salient in one’s concept of self-definition (Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Hottle, 1996; Tatum, 1999).

*The School Environment*

In addition to student characteristics, the participants’ experience of school also involved classroom participation, relationships with teachers, peers, and speech-language pathologists, and involvement in school routines.
Previous research has shown that PWS often experience anxiety over these school characteristics (Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004). For example, Hayhow, Cray, and Enderby (2002), conducted a study to investigate the effect of stuttering in the lives of PWS. Results of a postal questionnaire (N=332) indicated that 56% of the participants reported that school affected their lives more than occupation, leisure, friendships, and relationships. Moreover, participants in this study were able to cite several examples of the ways in which their school life was affected: “The most commonly cited response to stammering at school was to avoid such difficult situations as reading aloud and asking or answering questions in class. Many also remembered being unhappy at school because other children teased them and of feeling that their difficulties were not understood by teachers. Some commented they had not benefited from school as much as they might have done” (Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002, p.5-6). These findings were consistent with the present study. The majority of participants reported that reading aloud, delivering oral presentations, answering questions in class, and introducing themselves induced anxiety. In addition, a few participants commented on how their concentration in class was affected, and learning opportunities limited, as a result of expending lots of energy towards the thought of stuttering. Therefore, instead of benefiting from the educational opportunities of orally presenting information, answering questions in class, or participating in group work, these participants felt as if learning was sacrificed and replaced by confronting long-standing fears.

In addition to classroom participation, relationships with teachers and peers emerged as being important to the school experience. Klompas and Ross (2004) found that participants in their study expressed both positive and negative experiences with teachers and peers. Positive experiences included teachers who were understanding and did not single out the student as
different, and peers who accepted the students. Negative experiences included teachers with limited knowledge of stuttering, teachers who exerted pressure on students to perform in the classroom, teachers who provided them special treatment, and peers who engaged in teasing. Participants in the present study likewise mentioned varied experiences with teachers and peers. When asked to provide suggestions to schoolteachers, many reported that teachers should be understanding, sensitive, exhibit knowledge of stuttering, and become familiar with resources for students who stutter. Prior research has shown that teachers with accurate knowledge of stuttering exhibited more favorable attitudes and realistic classroom expectations of PWS (Yeakle & Cooper, 1986).

All of the participants reported experiences with speech therapy. For most, speech therapy focused primarily on behavioral techniques through activities such as reading aloud, rather than focusing on psychosocial issues. Many reported that speech therapy and involvement in support groups would have improved their school experiences. Janet, for example, reported:

But as of now I’ve been doing presentations for SLPs coming into, who are about to be SLPs and one’s who are right now, and they never heard of the NSA, they didn’t know there were support groups, they don’t understand why you’d even need to know other people that stutter, that is like the most mind-boggling thing to me so far is that I went to a speech pathologist for 15 years for a half hour a week out of my life, they didn’t know anything about stuttering except that one class that they had in college 10 years ago. So it’s hard to blame it on the teacher, the teacher should be able to go to their SLP resource in their school.

In addition, most participants were involved in therapy at a later point in life, and many felt as if their later periods of therapy were more beneficial than the therapy received in school.
They attributed positive experiences with later therapy to the speech-language pathologist addressing their socio-emotional needs in addition to speech production. Though speech-language pathologists have become increasingly aware of the need to address psychosocial issues, they have traditionally been less comfortable working with PWS as compared to other speech and language disorders (Yairi & Williams, 1970; St. Louis & Durrenberger, 1993; Yaruss & Quesal, 2002).

These experiences in the school environment (e.g., classroom participation, and relationships with teachers, peers, and speech-language pathologists) lend support to the remaining components of Link and Phelan’s (2001) concept of stigma. The next component, following labeling, is linking to a label to a negative attribute (or linking differences to stereotypes). Research on this component of stigma is highly prevalent in the literature on stuttering (Davis, Howell & Cooke, 2002; Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel & Greenwood, 2003; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Silverman & Marik, 1993). Results of these studies have consistently shown that school teachers, school administrators, and peers associate stuttering with negative attributes. Participants in this study reported varied experiences. Dena, for example, felt as if her participation on a school program was restricted due to her third-grade teacher’s negative evaluation of her speech. Patricia experienced being placed in a lower reading group due to a classroom teacher’s evaluation of her speech during an oral reading assignment. Liza commented the following regarding some of her peer relationships:

Liza: There were those moments though that I still remember vividly being teased. . . . I still remember being in the lunch line and talking with somebody and this little boy
turned around and said “you talk just like Porky Pig” and I just stood there, and I went home and I cried and cried and I never forgot that.

These experiences of being stereotyped were both person-specific and situation-specific. In addition, for some participants, such as Hector and Alan, their differences were not linked to negative attributes. Consequently, Hector and Alan did not judge stuttering to be a salient part of their school experiences.

Following labeling and linking differences to stereotypes, the next components of Link and Phelan’s (2001) concept of stigma, are separation, and status loss and discrimination. Separation occurs when a label and stereotype results in an “us” versus “them” division. As a result of stuttering, the participants clearly recognized that they were set apart from classmates. Many reported not having contact with another person who stutters, or access to a stuttering support group. Regarding status loss and discrimination, they state that “stigmatized groups are disadvantaged when it comes to a general profile of life chances like income, education, psychological well-being, housing status, medical treatment, and health” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 371). The participants in this study reported experiencing academic and learning costs, negative psychological attributions and consequences, and physical/bodily consequences, such as rapid heartbeats, sweaty palms, and muscle tension. In addition, many felt as if these experiences distinguished their school experiences from students who did not stutter.

Finally, Link and Phelan (2001) reported that power is necessary in order to stigmatize an individual or group. In other words, the dominant group has the resources to enact their beliefs onto another group. Patricia provided a clear example of this component:

Patricia: I think what all of this is, is that I felt powerless. I felt powerless as a child in the public school.
Interviewer: And why did you feel powerless?

Patricia: I didn’t, I could not control anything. I didn’t have the abilities to speak up for myself. I didn’t, but, you know, maybe that is normal. Maybe as a kid, you know, kids are shy, I don’t know, but I felt like I was a victim. I was a victim and that I was thrown into this system, and I had to make it through. I had to paddle my way through. And lots of times I didn’t want to paddle, I wanted to jump overboard because, yeah, there was just a lot of suffering.

Patricia’s experience speaks to the fact that some PWS feel helpless. Prevalence data suggest that PWS are likely to be outnumbered by classmates who do not stutter (Bennett, 2006; Bloodstein, 1995; Guitar, 2006). Therefore, their needs as students may not always be known or apparent to a classroom teacher. In addition, school teachers and peers who do not stutter can have a major influence on the school experiences of a person who stutters. For example, a classroom teacher prevented Dena from performing on a school program and assigned Patricia to a lower reading group. Benjamin’s classroom teachers, however, provided him with classroom accommodations when necessary. School teachers are in a social position of authority, and have the power to enact their beliefs onto students, either on a personal level or institutional level.

Post-Educational Consequences

The experience of stuttering is an ongoing process. People who stutter exhibit complex psychological and emotional reactions (Bennett, 2006; Guitar, 2006). The experience of PWS in school is dependent upon many factors. In addition, this experience may shift from positive to negative, and vice versa, depending on the school and classroom context. These school experiences can also have implications for PWS outside of the school context and later in life.
Participants in this study commented not only on their experiences within the school setting, but also the consequences of these experiences following school. College, job interviews, and career choices were important turning points in the participants’ lives. Clay, for example, went through 4 years of college having never spoken in class. Patricia continued to experience physical illness during her student teaching experiences and when reading aloud at her Bible study. She chose a career in special education, in part as a result of her school experiences. Alan commented on the difficulty of job interviews. These observations appear to be consistent with prior research, which has shown that stuttering often influences a person’s employment experiences (Gabel et al., 2004; Klompas & Ross, 2004).

In addition to college and career choices, participants also commented on the ways in which their identity and personality were affected by stuttering. Dena felt that she became more humble, empathetic, and sensitive as a result of her experiences being a person who stutters. Anthony expressed a similar experience of becoming more humble and sensitive. Research has consistently shown that stuttering plays an influential role in personality, self-image, and identity construction (Petrunik & Shearing, 1983; Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Daniels & Gabel, 2004).

**Personal Reflections/Observations**

During the final portion of the interview, participants commented on the school climate of PWS, and the daily experiences of PWS in relation to people who do not stutter, and people with different types of disabilities. Many perceived an improvement in the current school climate for PWS, as compared to their past school experiences. These improvements were a result of new special education mandates designed to benefit students with disabilities, such as speech impairments, and increased awareness of speech-language pathologists to address the socio-emotional needs of students who stutter. Though some participants perceived improvements,
other participants felt that aspects of the school climate were still problematic for PWS. This impression receives support from the work of Franck et al. (2003), who found that peers who do not stutter rated the intelligence and personality characteristics of a person who stutters more negatively than a person who did not stutter. This suggests that PWS may still be more vulnerable to teasing experiences (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002).

Another major theme that emerged was the participants’ thoughts of how stuttering compared to other types of disabilities. Based on their experiences in school, and life in general, many feel as if PWS do not receive as much emotional support or sensitivity as people with other types of disabilities. In other words, PWS appeared to rank low on perceived disability hierarchy. The participants attributed this observation to the limited awareness of stuttering in the mainstream. Research is still needed to explore this phenomenon in greater detail.

A final major theme that emerged was the participants’ comments on the “invisible” experience of stuttering. It is a well-known concept that stuttering involves disfluences of speech production, however, it also involves a host of behaviors and feelings that are unknown to people who do not stutter. According to the participants, these less observable behaviors and feelings include substituting words, expending a great deal of mental and emotional energy when speaking, anxiety over upcoming speaking situations, not having dates, and internalizing hurtful comments. Patricia, for example, stated: “I mean talking was an effort, talking was painful, talking was a chance of me showing them that I was different.” Participant comments on this theme provide support to the notion of stuttering as a multidimensional experience (Smith, 1999; Smith & Kelly, 1997; Yaruss & Quesal, 2002).
Interpretation of Results in Relation to Previous Theory and Research

The school experiences reported by the participants provide support to previous theory and research on the disability and stuttering experiences. As noted in Chapter 2, disability has been defined according to medical, social, and environmental models (McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Smart, 2001). Medical models have focused on physical manifestations of disability, and social and environmental models have focused on activities of daily living and participation restrictions of the individual. As with the concept of disability, stuttering has also been explored according to either behavioral or multidimensional frameworks (Johnson, 1944; Perkins, Rudas, Johnson, & Bell, 1976; Smith, 1999; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004).

Results of this study lend support to viewing stuttering as a multidimensional problem, and employing a systems approach to exploring school experiences of students with disabilities such as stuttering. Analyses of narrative transcripts revealed that a study of school experiences involves exploring student characteristics, interactions of students with teachers and peers, policies and practices of the school environment, and demographic information about school (see Figure 1). These components all emerged as themes in the participants’ stories. In addition, the systems approach is consistent with other multidimensional approaches to school experiences that have been reported in the literature (Baker & Donelly, 2001; Cousin et al., 1995; Murray & Greenberg, 2006; Simeonsson et al., 2001; Stumpers et al., 2005).

The themes of the participants’ experiences demonstrate that an individual can be just as disabled by people’s perceptions and behavior towards them as they can by the physical manifestations of stuttering alone. Research indicates that individual and group perceptions of PWS by people who do not stutter can play an influential role in an individual’s experience of stuttering (Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Franck et al., 2003; Gabel et al., 2004). Therefore, it is
important to study these aspects of the stuttering experience. Research on individual and group perceptions toward PWS by people who do not stutter, as well as research on the social experiences of PWS, illuminate important knowledge for researchers, clinicians, and educators.

Limitations and Strengths of Study

Qualitative research is an interpretive endeavor that allows participants to speak at length about their experiences. As with any research methodology, however, there are limitations that the researcher must acknowledge. A first limitation of this study is that it is retrospective. The participants were asked to reflect back on their K-12 school experiences. Therefore, the participants’ memories and recall of information may have been limited in scope or skewed towards negative experiences (as painful or traumatic experiences tend to be more salient). This limitation was addressed by recruiting participants of various age levels, and including interview questions and probes to extract potentially positive experiences. A second limitation is that the primary investigator presented the coding system to the participants for validation. Therefore, one may contend that this coding system was imposed upon them. However, during the final portion of the interviews, the primary investigator asked the participants to summarize their stories and generate their own themes. The primary investigator used these personally generated themes as a starting point to developing the coding system. In addition, in qualitative research it is an accepted belief that the researcher is the instrument of the research (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Maxwell, 2005). A third limitation is that results of this study cannot be generalized to all PWS. Instead, the results can only describe participants who engaged in the study. Though results cannot be generalized, the study’s purpose was to uncover themes and issues associated with the school experiences of PWS. Moreover, the themes and issues that emerged can be used to investigate this phenomenon on a larger scale through quantitative measures.
Though qualitative research has its limitations, the strengths of this paradigm have enhanced knowledge in many areas of stuttering research (Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004; Plexico, Manning, & DiLollo, 2004). A strength of the current study is that it allowed for the detailed exploration of school experiences from the perspective of PWS. Ribbler (2006) stated that research in this area is sparse. Prior research has investigated this topic by using surveys and experimental paradigms with schoolteachers, school administrators, speech-language pathologists, and peers of PWS (Crowe & Walton, 1981; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Silverman & Marik, 1993; Yairi & Williams, 1970; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986). However, PWS have rarely been able to express their personal experiences in school. Therefore, the qualitative paradigm was well suited to address this need.

In addition, this study lays the foundation for future studies aimed at exploring school experiences and disability experiences. Future research in this area may include: (1) survey methods to explore the school experiences of PWS in larger populations; (2) qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the concerns of classroom teachers towards students who stutter; (3) developing principles and guidelines for classroom teachers; (4) cross-sectional and longitudinal designs to explore the school experiences of PWS who presently attend school (K-12); and (5) large-scale qualitative and quantitative designs to explore the experiences of students with different types of disabilities.

Implications for Speech-Language Pathologists and Classroom Teachers

The participants in this study provided detailed information about their experiences as PWS in school. This information has important clinical implications.

Implications for Speech-Language Pathologists. Speech-language pathologists may often be asked to assess a student who potentially stutters. While it is important to observe the
student’s speech production skills, it is also important to recognize that some students may hide behind a number of coping strategies. The student may not necessarily exhibit core behaviors of stuttering (e.g., part-word repetitions, sound prolongations, blocks), but may still exhibit difficulty in school. This difficulty may be covered by a range of self-taught coping strategies. Therefore, the speech-language pathologist should expand assessments to address potential coping strategies that may hinder students. In addition, treatment should likewise address the student’s needs beyond speech production skills (Murphy, Yaruss, & Quesal, 2007a, b). Many participants expressed a need for speech-language pathologists to work with the emotional aspects of stuttering.

*Implications for Classroom Teachers.* Classroom teachers play an important role in creating supportive learning environments for students in school (Deemer, 2004; Murray & Greenberg, 2006; Stasinopoulos, 2006; Stumpers et al., 2005). In addition, learning about students’ personal experiences can be beneficial for classroom teachers and students. Stasinopoulos (2006), for example, discussed the issue of limited research on students’ personal experiences in schools in relation to ESL students:

Actually, most research tells very little about who students are as individuals, not just as numbers in classrooms. It tells very little about the varied experiences each student brings to class and how teachers can take advantage of such knowledge to reach those students most effectively. There is indeed very little information available to teachers about the personal and cultural experiences of students. There is also very little information about the teacher-student relationship, and how such a personal relationship can help students as well as teachers. This is vital information that can help teachers better understand their students and hence teach them more effectively. Teachers need to know more about the
obstacles students have had to overcome in order to come to class, and their academic, professional, and, most important, personal backgrounds. (p. 151)

This observation can extend beyond ESL students and apply to students with all sorts of difficulties in school, such as students who stutter. By learning about the experiences of PWS in school, classroom teachers can become familiar with persistent patterns of behavior that may indicate a problem with stuttering, rather than shyness, or a lack of interest in a subject matter.

Conclusion

Prior research studies on school and PWS have provided important information to educators and professionals who work with PWS (Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986). However, it is important to extend beyond the surface, and probe deeper into students’ experiences (Moore, 2006; Stasinopoulos, 2006). By knowing what students experience in school as PWS, teachers and therapists can be more effective in their teaching practices and clinical interventions. Moreover, it is also important to liberate the voices of previous generations, and record their stories in documented form, so that future generations of PWS have access to cultural frames of reference. This project attempted to gain an understanding of the different ways in which PWS have experienced school, validate their experiences through research, and use their voices as springboards to future studies that will deepen our understanding of school life for PWS.
Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study of school experiences of people who stutter (PWS).

School Culture:
1. Classroom participation
2. Participation in extracurricular activities
3. Policies and practices, such as teacher expectations, classroom expectations, and implicit social rules for acceptance

Individual Characteristics:
1. Speech production (e.g., severity of stuttering)
2. Personality and psychological factors (e.g., self concept, anxiety)
3. General health
4. Internal expectations (e.g., personal goals)

Social Interactions Within School:
1. Relationships with teachers
2. Relationships with school personnel
3. Relationships with peers
4. Relationships with speech-language pathologists

Identity Construction:
1. Personal identity (Who am I?)
2. Social identity (Where do I fit?)
3. Personal goals and life choices (e.g., achievement and performance)
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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Open-ended questions

1. Give me some background/demographic information about the schools you attended.
   a. Size of the school
   b. Location (rural, urban, suburban)
   c. Racial/Ethnic make-up
   d. Type (public, private, parochial)

2. Tell me what your experience has been like in school.
   a. During elementary school
   b. During middle school
   c. During high school
   d. Why is this?
   e. What role did stuttering play?

3. How would you describe:
   a. Your academic performance
   b. Your participation in the classroom
   c. Your participation in extracurricular activities
   d. Why is this?
   e. What role did stuttering play?

4. Tell me about your experiences with teachers.
   a. During elementary school
   b. During middle school
c. During high school
d. Why is this?
e. What role did stuttering play?
f. How would you describe the ways in which you were viewed by others?

5. Tell me about your experiences with peers.
a. During elementary school
b. During middle school
c. During high school
d. Why is this?
e. What role did stuttering play?
f. How would you describe the ways in which you were viewed by others?

6. How would you describe the school climate for people who stutter?

7. If you were writing an autobiography of your experience as a person who stutters in school, what would the title be? What would the themes be?

8. What do you think school experiences are like for people who not stutter?
APPENDIX B

Demographic Information for Individuals who Stutter

Directions: Please fill in or check the blank with the most appropriate response.

1. Your age _____

2. Gender: _____ Male  _____ Female

3. How would you best describe your ethnic background?
   _____ African American  _____ Hispanic/Latin American
   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander  _____ Native American
   _____ Caucasian

   Please specify if not listed above ________________________________

4. Are you presently a student in school? _____ Yes  _____ No

5. If you answered “Yes” to question 4, please indicate your current school status. If you answered “No” to question 4, please proceed to question 6.
   _____ High school  _____ College freshman  _____ College sophomore
   _____ College junior  _____ College senior  _____ Trade school
   _____ Graduate school (Master’s or doctoral)
   _____ Professional school (e.g., Medicine, Law, Dental, Optometry)

6. How would you currently rate your stuttering?
   _____ Mild  _____ Moderate  _____ Severe

7. Are you presently receiving therapy? _____ Yes  _____ No

8. Have you had therapy in the past? _____ Yes  _____ No
APPENDIX C

Select Interview Transcripts

The remaining pages are full-length transcripts of the first nine semi-structured interviews and both focus group interviews. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants. Throughout the narratives, the symbol “XXX” is used in place of an unintelligible word or phrase.
INTERVIEW WITH “DENA”

Date: July 19, 2006
Place: Houston, TX

INTERVIEWER: But I guess to start off with, if you could just maybe tell me a little bit about the schools that you went to, like the background/demographic information about your elementary school, middle school, high school: the size of the school, the location, racial-ethnic make-up, just general background information.

DENA: Well, I started off at – you want the names of the schools too?

INTERVIEWER: You don’t have to give me the names, just the demographics of the schools.

DENA: Ok, I started off at probably a small African, all African American school. As a kindergarten student I was born in September so I was six almost right after school started. And my mother started me in kindergarten because she wanted me to learn to read kind of young. And so I went to this school, which was in the Houston Independent School District, but it was in the Acres Home community of the Houston Independent School District, which is a Black, very lower income Black community. And then from that time, instead of going to the first grade, I went directly to the second grade. I went into the Aldine Independent School District, my mother’s a teacher there, and I went there for the second and third grade. At that time I had been stuttering probably before I was five years of age. My mother told me that she remembered my first stuttering when I discovered that my pet animal was, had died. I think I was around three or four years of age. But then I actually got into a formal speech therapy class in the second grade and, from a certified speech pathologist who was at the school where I was going to. It happened from the second through the third grade when I was seen for speech therapy maybe twice a week. But I didn’t realize that my stuttering was a big deal at that time, I didn’t
have any phobia about my stuttering, you know, because I wanted to read out loud in class, I wanted to be on program, et cetera. But I didn’t realize that I really had a problem with my speech disfluencies, with my speech, until my third grade teacher, you know, she asked whoever could be, whoever learned the speech first would be the one on program, and I learned the speech first, I always liked to be out in public when I was a very young child, and I let her know I knew the speech, and I got up before her and said it, she told me she didn’t like the way I talked, you know I stuttered, et cetera, and I was really hurt about it, and I was really traumatized by it, I think I ran out of class, my mother was teaching at that school, and I told my mother what happened, and my mother got upset too, at that time. And then I really felt very hurt because I went to the program when the other person said the speech and I didn’t have the opportunity to say it ‘cause I was really XXX I was competitive. I worked, I don’t know why I’m like that, but I always wanted to be in the front and I worked hard. So I was very, very painfully struck by the fact that I wasn’t able to say the speech and then I began to realize that I actually did have a speech impediment. Then in the fourth grade, after that trauma, I went to another school in the Klein Independent school district which was still a very poor Black school in Acres Home, or a different part of Acres Home, it was a very small school, it was only one grade per school, and at that time I was in the spelling bee, I was trying to win the spelling bee, so I got in the spelling bee, and I studied extremely hard for the spelling bee. And I advanced to seven pages but when I actually, and I was being teased a lot too in that school mainly because of my skin color I think but not so much because of my stuttering but then when I went to compete in the spelling bee I missed like the sixth word on the first page, I advanced to the pages beyond that, and I forgot I still remember that word I missed, and when I came back to my class I was very embarrassed because I was competing with this boy that I always, you know, competed against, and I thought
I was representing the girls in the class, and then I came back, and then the teacher told us to line up, you know back in the day we used to have make a line around the class for the spelling, and when it came my time I realized that the words wouldn’t come out of my mouth, so I developed a speech block XXX I developed a speech block and maybe for about three years I couldn’t get, whenever I was in public the words would just not even flow, the air would not flow through the right pathways such that the words would come out, so whenever I opened my mouth no words would come out if I was called on to read in school. And I changed schools again in the fifth grade and had a really, very, very nice teacher, a very sensitive teacher. But even though he was extremely nice and everything was kind of low stress, the words still were not flowing, they were just, they just bottled up in me. And then in sixth grade I went to another school, elementary school, the schools were in an all Black community because when I was growing up schools were segregated and so we only could go to a Black school. I feel that Black schools are very good schools too, we learned a lot, but anyway I went to sixth grade, I had a teacher that was an extremely stressful teacher but she was very sympathetic with me though, she really didn’t put much pressure on me to talk in class, she gave me straight A’s, and I worked, I did all of my school work, but I still could not read out loud you know in class. In seventh grade I went to junior high school. And the same thing happened in junior high. It really happened from junior high through the twelfth grade actually that I had a speech block when I had to read because then I was beginning to develop all these secondary symptoms, I guess you would say, hand movement and became more increasingly aware of my speech problem, my speech disfluencies got worse, now when I was around my friends I could communicate but I had much disfluency because I was anxious, and then whenever I was around authority figures, you know I had to speak in front of the class, my speech also was very disfluent. And I did one, I gave one speech I
remember, probably the eleventh grade in front of all my classmates because I was running for the school queen and so we had to get up and give a speech about our (what do you call it?), we had to give a speech, and I had rehearsed that speech quite a bit so the words went out fluently with that, they came out fluent with that speech, but whenever I was in a class situation I always had this blockage, and then when I went to college, although I had this disfluency and stuttering I was always involved in everything else, like math was my strongest pursuit but I didn’t have any speech therapy, after the third grade I didn’t have any speech therapy. Then my parents, my mother particularly, you know, she said she was going to get me a speech therapist but she never did but she decided not to even focus on my speech, she focused on other areas, mainly my strengths, like math was a strong pursuit for me and dance was a strong pursuit, modeling, those are things that I did, I spent a lot of time in dance classes, and that kind of built my self-esteem, and math competitions, and I went to math contests XXX, you know I was in the Honor Society, you know, I was in the band, I played an instrument and I played the flute, I competed solo, XXX I kind of focused mostly on my strengths, my mother didn’t really focus in on my weaknesses, and then I applied to college and I studied real hard, you know, for my SAT, and at that time that was during the Civil Rights movement when they were recruiting African Americans to go to Ivy League schools so I was blessed, and I worked hard too, and I got into Stanford, and so when I got to Stanford, I really, there were maybe one or two times when I had to present in class and the disfluency was still there, significant disfluency, but I still did what I had to do, I talked to my professors, you know, stuttered sometimes, but typically one-on-one, I started getting better, it was just in groups that you saw me with disfluency. And then when I applied to clinical psychology program, the PhD program, and again I was met with having to present more as a graduate student, the disfluency came about again, it got pretty bad too because
I was stressed, speech blocks. And so, um, and then, ok, and so, but then they paired me with a psychologist who also stuttered as a supervisor during my practicum, and that was very, very helpful for me, we could talk about the stuttering, and they also suggested I go to speech therapy, so I went to the University of Houston (UH) because I needed speech therapy, and I used the breathing techniques to help me become more fluent, and then sometimes I even used some anti-anxiety agents, that would help out somewhat, but I didn’t really like the side-effects with the glassy eyes and all that, so I didn’t utilize that method much at all, but I did see a psychiatrist, and we talked about disfluency and then once I got my PhD I had to start interviewing for jobs, and those disfluencies starting coming back, well it was still there, and so I, and so I still tend to avoid any situation where I had to speak in public with the PhD, but I had jobs, you know in between times, if I was speaking with people who maybe were not as educated as I was then I probably was more fluent, but with any large group of people I would get very anxious, and particularly, you know, whenever I had to say my name, some things you couldn’t substitute anything for, I would block more on those types of things, but during my latter years, I guess after really the recent times, I’m 53, probably in the last five years I’ve pursued opportunities to talk more, kind of enjoyed taking in front of people now, I know XXX I get mildly anxious but not much and I guess I just don’t really care that much, and I just focus on trying to enjoy the talking. I don’t know if, you know, I’m still a little bit shaky, but I kind of, what I do now, to kind of um, like I had to give a presentation yesterday at UH, it was a very small group of people there, but um, still it was kind of a formal classroom presentation, and it was like, I just had fun with it actually, I didn’t even care about the stuttering.

INTERVIEWER: I’m kind of like that too.
DENA: I didn’t even care. And then I did a presentation up in HISD [Houston Independent School District], a little bit nervous but you know what the heck, you know. And now I’m at the point now where I just, at this age now, stage in my life, I really don’t care that much anymore. And I don’t really stutter that much in front of groups that much, I stutter, you know, I stutter, everybody has some disfluency anyway, but, um, I stutter but I don’t get stuck like I used. But I still can’t say that I’m not going to get stuck in the future. But the main thing is that I’m going to have fun with it. If I get stuck I may do something real crazy and make a joke out of it. And so I don’t care anymore.

INTERVIEWER: You had talked about this earlier but I guess I kind of wanted to dig a little bit deeper about . . . [telephone interruption]

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I was going to ask you to maybe, I guess if you could elaborate on your academic performance, elementary school, middle school, and high school, just in general what was your academic performance like?

DENA: My academic performance was always above average to superior. You know, it was always good. I didn’t have any problems with academic performance. You know, being that I’m a psychologist I can say that if I reflect back, I probably had some, what do you call them, expressive language, um, disabilities, maybe some receptive language problems, however, I tended to compensate for it, you know, with my, high skills in the abstract nonverbal fluent, fluid reasoning skills, math skills. I don’t think my, there’s probably a significant discrepancy between my language and my nonverbal skills, but still it didn’t appear to impact my actual academic skills because I worked very hard, I did a lot of homework, you know, and I just did my work, and then in college I even worked harder, so then in graduate school worked hard too, but I
typically would use my abstract nonverbal fluid reasoning skills to compensate for my verbal limitations.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think stuttering played a role in your academic performance K through 12?

DENA: No, I don’t think so.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

DENA: I think my teachers were very good teachers being that it was an African American school, and the teachers were, had more of a parental role in their teaching, that’s different from today. They would just, um, they would empower the students, more invested in the students.

INTERVIEWER: How about your classroom participation, like elementary, middle, high school?

DENA: Well, really, um, I would participate, like if I had to raise my hand if I knew an answer, it was only a brief response, and if I had to get up and give a whole dialogue, then I would raise my hand because I had this competition, I’m a competitive person, and I wanted to always prove that I knew something. So I was eager to let them know that I knew it. So I don’t think it really, it didn’t play that part. I was in the major works classes, back in the day they kind of separated the smart kids from the average from the et cetera, so I was in the group of kids that was supposed to be the college bound children, and we took all of our classes together, and we would use the kids in honor society and all that and so um because of that I was in from the seventh through the twelfth grade with the same group of children, because when I went to high school the seventh through twelfth grade was all in one school, and so we had the same classmates throughout the whole time, we never really XXX, we were all like brothers and sisters. And so
they knew I stuttered, and if not, I felt embarrassed by it, but you know I would just come back in the next day like it wasn’t a big deal.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And that’s something you mentioned that’s kind of important, your relationships with teachers and your relationships with your peers, and the role that that played. I guess if you could maybe elaborate on that, your teacher relationships and your peer relationships going through school.

DENA: Well, one thing, my stuttering, to me, in some ways, um, it has been a, it’s been a benefit in a couple of, in several ways. Being that it’s made me more humble, you know, and I look at, you know, when I would compete to be the most popular girl in the school, or the queen of the school during those days, and the kids had to vote for that, and so maybe because of my stuttering, I probably wasn’t as arrogant, and maybe some of the kids probably looked at me as being, even though I was separated by the, by the advanced classes, I think they looked upon me as being one of them, in P.E, and in band, and ROTC, I kind of affiliated with large groups of kids, and I think I belonged to ROTC for about a year, and the band, I was always in the band, XXX, and in P.E. we would, everybody would be in physical education together, and, you know, I would speak to people, and was friendly with everyone, so I think I had positive, I know I had positive relationships with my peers because I was elected in the ninth grade to be the queen of junior high school, and in the twelfth grade I was reelected again, so, and that was because of the popularity within the students, and then with regards to my teachers, I guess for some reason my teachers seemed, I had positive relationships with my teachers too, I had some very good teachers, supportive teachers. And I guess with the math, and the band. And teachers just, students who were trying, XXX They were very supportive.

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever teased at all or mocked at all through school?
DENA: Just minimally in junior, senior high school, in elementary school, probably teased a little bit more. But the kids were generally very nice though.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

DENA: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting, so it sounds like you’ve had lots of positive experiences with your stuttering compared to, you know, a lot of people whose experiences weren’t so positive. Why do you think that was for you in particular?

DENA: Why my experiences were more positive? Um, one thing, I would try, maybe, well, I don’t really know, maybe ‘cause I looked at it, maybe I’m more of an optimist than a pessimist.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

DENA: And I always, you know I would reached out to help other people too being that I’m a psychologist, I’ve been practicing in this field probably since I was in elementary school, but I didn’t, for some reason I didn’t internalize much negative feedback from my peers, and so I don’t really recall it in my autobiographical memory, I don’t really recall a lot of teasing. I don’t really remember, I was teased more about my skin color in elementary school, more so probably, that’s, I probably remember that more than, the only time I really remember being belittled for my stuttering was when my third grade teacher did that. I don’t really remember my peers teasing me much about my stuttering, I think they were very sensitive, my peers were, it just so happened that my boyfriend that I had from junior high through senior high school, he was a stutterer too, he was a very high achiever as well, and so I don’t ever think he even felt that anybody teased him either.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting because in school, you know, people go through lots of things, you know, it could be skin color, it could be stuttering, people, you know, school
experiences can be affected by a wide variety of things. So I guess where would you probably rank order stuttering in the whole mix. Like, you said you had issues with people teasing you because of your skin color, and stuttering was in there I’m sure, there probably were other things that were going on in your life that may have played a role in what school was like for you, so where do you think stuttering would be, would it be at the forefront of your school experience, towards the back, in the middle, I guess where would you put stuttering?

DENA:  Well, really, actually, you know, being, again going back to being a psychologist, I would say that stuttering was probably way up there because my son was, youngest son, had a program over at my high school. And I could tell when I walked in the door that conditioned response kind of got in there and I began to think about everything I suppressed and I noticed that the stuttering started to surface just automatically. And that had to be more of a conditional learned response, I guess you could say, so it, I think I’m using the right term, I hope so, but anyway, it um it was in the forefront but it was like at the same time I had so many other experiences going on. It was significant but I was probably focused on a lot of things going on simultaneously, you know, I had other things that were just in the forefront, I had a type of lifestyle that, you know, my dance was in the forefront, I was really into dance and performing, and then my math was in the forefront, and being a flutist, being a flutist was in the forefront, um, dating, boyfriends, that was in the forefront, getting into a good college was in the forefront, so I had quite a few things, and I worked too, in the summers and sometimes I even worked during the school year, so I had some things going on in my life that were all kind of up there.

INTERVIEWER:  So you were always involved in extracurricular activities?

DENA:  XXX

INTERVIEWER:  So do you feel stuttering held you back from any extracurricular activities?
DENA: The only thing it kind of held me back from was one time I wanted to participate in a speech competition. But I really didn’t really have time to participate in the speech competition because I was in so much, but one time I did anyway, I did an oral speech presentation, and I learned the speech, and I was determined to do it just for the heck of it, but I did it, and I don’t think I remember, I didn’t stutter that much because I, again, if you practice something, a part of your brain kind of takes control, and the more the speech comes out a lot more fluent because you don’t have to think about it, I think it kind of doesn’t go to certain parts of your brain, I think it just comes and flows right out and so um yeah but it did inhibit me from giving speeches, I never really volunteered to do any type of speech on program unless I just had to, and I didn’t like to introduce myself to other people, and especially strangers, and I wouldn’t, and then sometimes in class you had to talk but if we had to do a presentation in class I would kind of avoid it.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. That sort of brings me to another issue, I’m going to see if I can try to get it across, because it’s kind of hard to explain, but sometimes, you know, um, some experiences, people can just, like being a person who stutters, a person would say “well if a person stutters they’re going to have trouble reading aloud, they’re going to have trouble giving a presentation in front of the classroom”, people can just figure that out by intuition, but there are some things, I guess I call them “backyard experiences”: people would never know that you’re going through it unless they were in the situation. So I guess what are your thoughts on that for people who stutter? Like, if you ask any person on the street, “what do you think a person who stutters experiences in school?” they probably could tell you the obvious things like giving speeches or raising your hand in class but then do you think there are experiences, things that people who
stutter go through in school that teachers or no one would even know that they’re going through, the subtle, hidden types of experiences?

DENA: Well one thing that I know that I went through in school was whenever you had to introduce yourself, if somebody went around the class, you know, in a line, and my heart would be beating pretty fast until it came to me ‘cause I really didn’t like introducing myself, so it was pretty embarrassing because it would take so long to get my name out, and that was really sad for me. And then, um, maybe they didn’t know I substituted, um, words sometimes, when I had a hard time saying some words, and them, um, [phone starts to ring…silent pause] That may be about it, really. I can’t think of anything else.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. [pause] How about your speech therapy experiences, what was that like back in the third grade, you said it was?

DENA: Yeah, second and third grade.

INTERVIEWER: Second and third grade.

DENA: I really, I was, I was going to speech therapy but I didn’t think it was for my stuttering, I thought it was because I had problems saying “th” words.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

DENA: Yeah, I didn’t realize that I really had problems with, uh, stuttering. I thought that I was kind of like didn’t pronounce some of my words clearly. I guess my mother didn’t want me to know I stuttered but then that teacher let me know it, I was a stutterer.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think stuttering affected the way you were viewed by other people in school?

DENA: For some reason, I guess, I’m quite sure it did but I didn’t think so. Not really. Probably as I grew older in graduate school I think it had an impact because people didn’t, they probably
think because I stutter, they probably think it’s a liability to my profession, and I think in some ways it is [phone rings] a liability to my profession. Because, you know, that’s just part of life. I have other assets and strengths that some people don’t have.

INTERVIEWER: And what would some of those assets and strengths be?

DENA: Well, I’m really good one on one in a clinical situation, I’m very sensitive, you know, probably because of my speech problem, I, um, I think I have some good analytical skills that are an asset to my profession as a psychologist, I’m very creative, so, you know, I kind of stay focused on the positive, and try not to be so focused on the negative, and then sometimes I even tell myself, you know, back in the day if I really could talk a lot it’s no telling what type of person I would be today [phone rings].

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that sort of led me to my next question, being a person who stutters, what, um, now you’re a clinical psychologist, do you think that your past experiences being a person who stutters influenced where you are right now, standing right now?

DENA: Do I think it influenced my choice of profession as a psychologist?

INTERVIEWER: That, or any other major decisions that you’ve made in your life?

DENA: You know I think in some ways but I think it has a very subtle influence. I think maybe I’m more empathetic because of my stuttering, I am more likely to look at other people in ways of “how can I help them” because of my stuttering, and maybe some of the emotional pain that has been associated with being a stutterer, um, and so that might of caused me to become more interested in psychology. Now I went into psychology mainly because I had a lot of classmates who happened to be African American males who I knew were very brilliant. But by the time they were in about the sixth or seventh grade they just began to lose interest in school, and that was one of my major reasons, it was one of the things that kind of led me into the interest, ‘cause
I really didn’t know what a psychologist was when I was coming out of school ‘cause I didn’t know any Black people that were psychologists, and really wasn’t not any that were actually, but, um, I knew that it had to be something in education that I could do to impact the lives of others, and to motivate people to have a higher quality of life. And so um that was the reason that I went into psychology, and also math was my first subject but when I went to Stanford I didn’t feel like I was prepared for a major in math because I just didn’t have the classes in high school that I needed, but I was really grateful that uh, that I pursued graduate studies in psychology and then I became a clinical psychologist, so it was a blessing to me that it happened in my life, because I really wanted to become an educational psychologist but I didn’t know it was a big difference between clinical and educational but I just ended up by accident applying to clinical psychology and it kind of provided a broader educational perspective for me, and it’s opened a lot of doors, XXX doing what I want to do to help a lot of people, and so um, my practice mainly consists helping a lot of poor people primarily, and so it’s been positive. I know that I’m on the down slope of my practice.

INTERVIEWER: So going through school as a person who stutters, and now being a psychologist in HISD, and, you know, you’re in the schools, how would you describe the school climate for people who stutter? So if you had this five year old person who stutters, they’re about to go through twelve years of school, what issues are going to come up for them in school? So how would you describe the school climate for a person who stutters?

DENA: Well one thing I can say is, it appears to me that you have more speech therapists in the schools now, and you have special education mandates that are supposed to meet the needs of kids with speech impairments, and so even though I know that there are still not enough speech therapists but um I would think that the kids will get therapy from elementary all the way
through high school if they need it, and that they will have opportunities probably to practice some of the pragmatic, I guess you would call it that, just practice speaking in situations perhaps instead of avoiding those situations. So I think that a smart person that stutters, well I shouldn’t say smart, but a child that stutters now, they have more opportunities for good interventions, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Now I’m really interested in the school experiences of people who stutter, but there are some people who would argue, well school is tough for anybody, school is tough for people who have hearing impairment, school is tough for people with cerebral palsy, school is tough for, you know, minorities, so, um, I guess how would you respond to that. So for a person who stutters, um, you know, is their experience, um, any different, are there unique issues and challenges, or, you know, is school just difficult for anyone?

DENA: Well I think that it depends on not only the attribute or the liability or the disability of stuttering, it also depends on what other, um, assets and liabilities you bring to the table. Now if you have a person that stutters and is, he has superior performance in school, or above average performance, and they’re also self-motivated, they are involved in extra curricular activities where they excel, and they have supportive parents, then I don’t think the school environment is not going to be as challenging for that child whose parents, or they come from a very stressful home environment, they’re probably low-average to borderline intelligence, they’re not involved in extracurricular activities, they may have some, not only the anxiety that’s affiliated with, associated, with stuttering, but they may also be dealing with other fears and um experiencing depression. So it depends on um what goes along with the stuttering. But I think if you control for those, um, factors and you just said “well stuttering is the XXX” all this depression, anxiety, low average intellectual skills, extracurricular activities, you control for all that and you just want
to focus on the stuttering, well, I think that, um, that it’s a mild problem, and um I don’t think it’s really that serious of a problem, actually. I know that there are various severity levels of stuttering too, that’s something else, there are so many um confounding factors that you really have to be able to control for, mild, moderate, severe, um, are there any other problems besides stuttering, you know besides the disfluencies, are there some articulation problems which I bet you see often times with people that stutter anyway, I know I have some articulation problems, and if there are some comprehension, reading comprehension, just a lot of issues that go with it.

INTERVIEWER: Now do you think it’s different for, because different cultures view different disabilities differently, so for an African American child who stutters, do you think there is, um, a difference in how they may experience the school environment being a person who stutters, are there any unique challenges and issues, you think, or does that even make a difference?

DENA: With culture? Um, Black people tend to make jokes out of things pretty easily, so they may be more likely to get teased but it will be teased with a sense of humor so you may also get teased with, you may also begin develop a sense of humor about your own speech too, which is good to have that too, but um, I think if you’re expecting to be this high achiever and et cetera, et cetera, and you have this speech disfluency and in some other cultures, you know, it may be a, it may be pretty stressful for a person.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Well, actually, I have two more questions. This next one is if you were writing an autobiography talking about your experience as a person who stutters going through the K through 12 environment, what do you think the title be, and what would some of the themes be?

DENA: That’s a good question.
INTERVIEWER: You can take a moment to think. That’s kind of a “bring everything together” question.

DENA: I guess, well I maybe would call it the tap, tap, touch, or something because a lot of times when I would stutter I would always be hitting on something, and some of the themes would be, um, first I would probably talk about how I was such a happy little girl, you know, didn’t have any fears speaking, I didn’t really think stuttering was a big deal, and I really, probably look back at it, and I see little kids that stutter, probably thought it was kind of cute in some ways, you know, ’cause nobody acted like it was a big deal, you know, my parents didn’t really make it a big deal, but then I got this teacher who was something like a witch almost, and the strange thing is that, yeah, she was like a witch I have to say, I kind of look upon her as almost like a witch, and it kind of had a turn in my life and I had to go through this struggle over a speech block but I don’t understand why I was always so very, very competitive, I guess that’s just a part of my life, being an extremely competitive person, and so um I often wonder if I didn’t try to compete so much maybe my stuttering wouldn’t be a problem, but then I just had this perseverance thing going on, kind of a compulsive, determined stutterer, “who cares”, so I probably have that theme too, and then sometimes I would just get so frustrated, somewhat depressed, but only for a very brief period of time, maybe if I stuttered during a presentation in graduate school, I would go home, I maybe would cry a little bit, maybe about 30 minutes, then maybe a couple of hours after that I was back to normal, and then I, I just felt blessed to be who I am with the strength that God blessed me with, and maybe think maybe, sometimes I think well if I did have a very fluent speech XXX I probably would have been, pretty much would have been a very vain person too, sometimes I’m thankful, this has been a very humbling experience
for me. And I just use it to my advantage. And I’ve had a long time to sit back and listen to other people, and I feel like I have a story to tell and so um that’s the way I look at it now.

INTERVIEWER: And my last question is what do you think the school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter?

DENA: Hmm. Well if I was to be compared with my counterpart who’s probably a high achiever and wants to get a PhD, and participates in extracurricular activities, and if they don’t stutter in the elementary through senior high school years, well they didn’t have that to really be concerned about, so that was good that they didn’t have to worry about being disfluent and I guess, you know, it was just a part that they had an advantage of and um I guess it’s just that simply put.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So is anything else that you think that hasn’t come up during the interview, anything that you think is central to understanding the school experiences of people who stutter, that maybe wasn’t addressed in your story or our conversation, any issues that you think people who stutter go through in school, you know, I guess anything additional.

DENA: Yeah, I guess I know people that do, um, stutter, and one thing I’d like to say is that some people stutter in situations that are one-on-one in which they’re in a one-on-one personal relationship with others, and then when they have to say a speech in front of a group of people or if they’re on a debate team et cetera they may be very fluent, and I think the fears that are developed around stuttering have a lot to do with where that fear started, if you started, if you were introduced, if your onset because of the fact that you were not able to say a speech on program then maybe you begin to become fearful of that situation, but the fears were, and you became more aware of your stuttering just talking one-on-one then maybe that’s where you’re gonna, you know, stutter more. Some people that stutter actually don’t stutter when they’re in
front of a group of people. And maybe their problems are one-on-one. So I don’t know if you can say that most people stutter uh in big groups. And also I’ve noticed that some people who do stutter, they compensate, they may use a sing-song approach to saying their name, introducing themselves, and um, people pick up all types of coping mechanisms too, to kind of avoid stuttering.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about accommodations for people who stutter in the classroom? What are your thoughts on accommodations?

DENA: Well I actually think, you know, that, um, one young lady that I um worked in my office with me, she used a um, some kind of feedback apparatus, I think she had it on her ears, I don’t know if you’re familiar with that?

INTERVIEWER: Oh, ok. Yeah.

DENA: But I think for young children, I think that they probably not only need a speech therapist but they may need a psychologist to help them, and a speech therapist could probably help them do it, they need some relaxation methods, they need to use some cognitive restructuring methods, they need to use some desensitization methods, they probably need to be, to practice talking, I think if you catch them at a very young age, and you get them to participate in activities where they have to talk more, and to encourage them to talk, I think that would be very important. They should be the ones on program. You shouldn’t discriminate against kids because of their disfluency.

INTERVIEWER: So I guess that’s where I was going. Like if you were giving a presentation to classroom teachers, is there any suggestions or advice you would give to classroom teachers.

DENA: Yeah. I would say to really give that child, and always call on that child in class, give that child things to read out loud, also educate the other classmates about [stuttering], and let the
child stand up and educate their classmates about their disfluencies, and then talk about all the problems, we all, nobody’s perfect, we all have some issues, and sometimes we don’t, and some of them are very private issues, but stuttering happens to be a public issue, and, um, and talk about it, you know, and say that we’re going to work with you instead of putting it under the rug. I think that person should be asked to talk and speak more than XXX.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I guess that’s it.

DENA: Ok then.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much.

DENA: You’re welcome. You know one thing we didn’t say. I think there, I think some disfluencies may be more organically involved than others too. I think others have more of a psychological influence, and so that’s something else that, I know you all are probably already doing research in that area.

INTERVIEWER: That kind of influences people’s perceptions ‘cause for people whose disfluencies may be more organically based, they appear to be more severe, they may be judged one way, but people who maybe still stutter, and then maybe it’s a little organically based, but they have lots of fears and coping strategies, they may be perceived as different, or people may perceive them as being nervous or shy or they just have idiosyncrasies that people may not label it as a true problem, so I guess those were some of my concerns, is for those people, those children, who, they’re not perceived as people who stutter or people who have a real problem, what are their experiences going to be like in school, how are they going to be perceived, and um, you know, those children, I think, may pay a heavy price in school because of how people view them.
DENA: Well one thing, I know the kids that I’ve seen who I think their stuttering is more organically involved, more involved with other parts of the brain functions, you also see some other physical disabilities, you know, maybe some cerebral palsy or you may see some, um, cerebral palsy and mental retardation tend to go hand in hand most of the time, so you may see some other serious issues with that though. Kids whose stuttering appears to be more of a psychological base, and organic, but mildly organic, then, like you said, they’re perceived as probably being nervous and anxious sometimes. You know, I don’t think, not all the time. Yeah, only certain situations, I think there’s a situationally based to situation to specific situation.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

DENA: ‘Cause I’m kind of laid-back most of the time, and I don’t know if people see me as being that nervous, sometimes they probably do, I don’t know.
INTERVIEW WITH “ANTHONY”

Date: July 25, 2006

Place: Dallas, TX

INTERVIEWER: Well first I just wanted to say thank you again for doing this interview, I think it’s important to get the stories of people who stutter because our experiences are so valuable, I think, and, you know, little research has been done on just what school is like for people who stutter, so that’s why I wanted to engage in this interview with you, and so this tape is very confidential, no one’s going to be looking at it but me and my advisor, just so we can go back and transcribe and analyze the story. So I have questions here, but I’m not going to ask them, you know, ‘one, two, three, four,’ it’s going to be kind of an informal chit chat that we’ll have and I’ll just kind of refer to my questionnaire as I need to. But I guess to start off with, I was wondering if you could give me some general background, demographic information about the schools that you went through, like your elementary school, your middle school, your high school, like the size of the school, the location, like rural, suburban, urban area, maybe racial, ethnic make-up, just general background, demographic information about the schools you went to K-12.

ANTHONY: Ok. Well thank you very much, I don’t think I’ve ever done an interview like this, but I look forward to it. I guess for my background, my name is [says name] but I go by [says name]. I grew up in a very small town of approximately 1000 people called, uh, [says name of town] and I, uh, our school, probably the old school, probably was no more than 200, 250 people. The name of the school was [names school]. At the time it was a, uh, well I guess the full time that that school was existed it was a segregated school in the sense that it was an all Black school. And our class I believe was the next to the last class to be at that school. And
immediately after that it was um, after the racial integration came about, that school was
converted into a junior high school or a, I’m pretty sure that it was a junior high school for a
couple of years, or maybe for 4 or 5 years, and then it eventually was just torn down. The school
was located 10 or 15 miles I guess from the, from the school that they integrated to because we
had to be bussed there even though there was an existing school that was within a mile of where
we lived, we were bussed to maybe 10 or 12 miles away, and it was inconvenient for us, and it
was probably also inconvenient for others who had to go there to junior high school, so it was
eventually torn down.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

ANTHONY: Um, I guess on my high school activities I was fairly active in school, I
participated in sports, mostly, uh baseball was my favorite and we had instructors there who
really enjoyed baseball. I can remember [names three teachers], and they really encouraged us to
participate in sports, I loved that part of them. Thinking back on my past, I really enjoyed that
time. It was a wonderful time. But I was probably active in school, and participated not only in
sports, but also in activities in my class, and I was elected to office, and certain offices of
leadership at that time, and I did ok from an academic standpoint.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

ANTHONY: Ok.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you sort of answered my next question, I was just wondering if you
could maybe just walk me through what your experience was like in school starting from
kindergarten and all the way up through twelfth grade, if you can just reconstruct what was
school like for you.

ANTHONY: In a particular regard, or just general…
INTERVIEWER: Oh, it’s a general question.

ANTHONY: Oh, just a general question, ok. I, um, being in a very small school, we knew each other, I mean everybody knew each other, so the teachers knew each other, and they knew the students so going to kindergarten was a new experience for us but it wasn’t quite as erratic because, well we didn’t go to kindergarten, we started in the first grade, and we went from first through twelfth, but my experience there was generally good, I did pretty well in the academic portion of it, and I participated in everything, and of course it was somewhat different for me and a few others because of the, because of the stuttering, it did affect the way we looked at, and I say “we”, at least I know there was one other person in our class who also stuttered. And it probably affected the way we looked at a few things, but we were so small and we knew each other, I mean my whole class was 25 people at the most, and sometimes it was less than that, but it was never more than 25, so we all knew each other and we all had something that we could joke with each other about but generally speaking I would say from first grade through twelfth it was very positive experience for me.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And so you said that stuttering did affect the way you viewed certain things? Could you elaborate on what types you things you mean?

ANTHONY: Alright. Well I think stuttering is different from other types of um, whatever you could call it, if you would call it a disability or a, I don’t know if you would call it a handicap, but it certainly is more visible, because talking is something that people just sort of expect people to do without a lot of interference and so when anyone doesn’t sound like everyone else, then it causes attention to it. And I think that’s especially was the case in any kind of formal situation, like participating in class, having to recite anything verbatim, which also meant reading itself could be difficult. Stutterers have a tendency to be able to change words if they’re uncomfortable
with it fairly quickly but if you have to read it or recite a poem or a Gettysburg address or anything that’s verbatim it becomes more difficult. And I was not exempt from that, I mean I dreaded having to participate in class sometimes because, at first it wasn’t too much of a problem in the lower years, but as you got older and you want to make more of an impression on girls and just other things, you want to make an impression on your, I mean, you know, you want to be impressive in terms of presenting yourself, it becomes more difficult. And I suffered from that even though we were pretty jovial about it, inside it was always tough because it seemed so simple to be able to speak or to say your name or to do other things like that, so it became somewhat difficult, a little bit traumatic from time to time.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So how would you describe your academic performance in school? Elementary, middle, high school.

ANTHONY: Well my academic performance was generally good. I mean I finished at the top of the class and pretty well stayed there throughout the career. I think I finished maybe second in class, I never know if I finished second or third but we were all within two-tenths of a point of each other, so I was right up there, and so the academic performance wasn’t so difficult to accomplish in some ways and it was difficult in others. I mean for instance sometimes stutterers, and I speak of stutterers in general but I speak of myself, probably sometimes it was easier to take the easy way out because sometimes the teacher would call on me and I obviously knew the answer to the question, but I knew I was going to have difficult getting it out so to speak without stuttering, and so I would just say ‘I don’t know’ when in fact I did know and of course that would come out on exams and that kind of thing but it was just easier to not to try to recite it than to try to, you know, give the right answer and to be, have to be, embarrassed and so in that regard
academic performance was probably affected but it was not so much so that it affected my overall academic performance.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. How about your classroom participation throughout school?

ANTHONY: Well classroom participation varied. I mean most of the time I participated but on occasion, as I just would pointed out, I did not because it was just so difficult to have to recite. I think where I may have fallen down is that I was not always so active to hold my hand up to volunteer for information, I mean if they want to get it from me they have to drag it, drag it, try and drag it out of me almost. But then on the other hand I had this thing where that I wanted to overcome it so I was very active in class offices, leadership, and sometimes tried to make up for that, I maybe even over compensate for it. I was sometimes, you know, three or four different offices at the same time, which was an attempt to overcome it I think, and a little bit easier circumstance than in the academic environment.

INTERVIEWER: So you wouldn’t say that stuttering affected your extracurricular activities, your participation in extracurricular activities, that fact that you stuttered?

ANTHONY: Uh, I can’t say that it did not affect it, what I would say is that it either drove the behavior that I would not have otherwise, uh, have done, or that it, sometime I would just not do something that I really wanted to do but on the other hand I sometime would, I mean, like I was class president a few times and I had often wondered would I have been class president had I not stuttered or did I really want to be class president, or was it just simply that I did to demonstrate that I was not going to let it affect me but either way, whether it drove the behavior or whether it affected it in a negative way, stuttering was always sort of at the core of um, let’s see how would I describe that, it was, it uh, it always sort of, sort of defined me for others because others thought of you as a stutterer. I would frequently not think of myself as a stutterer and I would say
that ‘I stutter’ rather than ‘I am a stutterer’, and I think it was that kind of attitude that sort of helped me to kind of get through, in other words it was something that I did rather than something that I am.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. That’s interesting because that’s one of my questions, how do you think you were viewed by others? And so you mentioned that stuttering was at the core, do you think?

ANTHONY: Yeah I think it was the core of maybe how people looked at me or at least how I thought other people looked at me, uh, as I’ve gotten older I sort of realized that I probably overreacted uh to that. Most people really don’t think of you in a way uh necessarily as you think. Looking back on it, I don’t think my career or my school life was particularly, at least through high school, was particularly different than anyone else’s. And I don’t recall anything other than kids being kids, and they’re going to joke and they’re going to make fun, and they’re going to imitate you, and do all those kinds of things, and those things sometime can be hurtful in the sense that you really do want to improve, but you have to play it off. And so that was kind of what I did, and I just kind of played it off, but I think it, it definitely had an effect on the way I thought people probably [thought] about me, and probably I reacted to that in a way that is in so many different levels that I probably couldn’t even define it because you sort of do it for each individual situation. And at some point you don’t know whether you’ll do anything because you do it or because you sort of reacted to this stuttering deal. And as a kid quite frankly it was very difficult to understand. Very difficult to understand why I stuttered and someone else didn’t or why did, well you know, why this happened to me because it did feel like occasionally that it was happening to me rather than something that I did. It’s just that I just wanted to put the more positive spin on it rather than kind of letting it dominate me.
INTERVIEWER: Now when did you first become aware of your stuttering? Or when did you first become aware that you were a person who stutters, I guess your earliest memory?

ANTHONY: Well that question comes up from time to time and people sometime ask me have you always stuttered and I would say well I didn’t always stutter I just, I’ve only stuttered since I started talking which is probably not the case. I, at least in the beginning if I stuttered, and I think I did stutter even before starting to school because parents and other people who were well meaning will tell you to stop and to slow down or to do this or to do that and they would come up with some kind of primitive sort of ways of trying to get you to stop stuttering but you know they’re just doing the best they can because they don’t want you to stutter so I think I was pretty much a, pretty much aware that I stuttered when I started to school but I would guess it was probably third or fourth grade when I really started to, to where it started to have an effect on me, sort of a secondary stage when I started to, now started to respond to it, and actually that, probably the fourth grade was probably a pretty big year for me because up until that time I probably just stammered or blocked or did something different maybe from what others were doing at least enough for people to notice it, but then at some point you really start, one starts to try to stop from stuttering and you start to do odd things to, odd things to keep from stuttering and it’s sort of a behavior that’s odd and that behavior becomes more noticeable than the stuttering itself, you know, I mean, you know, you, I can’t remember because it’s getting fairly old now, I can’t remember all the things that I did but I can just remember trying so many different things, and then, facial grimaces, and stuff like that, you know, you’re struggling to get the words out, and when actually, um, it didn’t help at all. All it did was brought attention to the stuttering, and that became what I call secondary stuttering because now I’m really reacting to it.

INTERVIEWER: Now did you ever have speech therapy in the schools?
ANTHONY: I never had speech therapy in high school. Uh, I did get some in college for a year or so, off and on, probably for a couple of years, probably, but not in, not in high school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, so like K through 12 you didn’t, so college was your first experience with therapy?

ANTHONY: Oh yeah. That was first experience and probably it was my second year, probably my second and third year XXX in college when I was sort of exposed to it.

INTERVIEWER: And what were your relationships like with your teachers, I guess in elementary school, middle school, and high school?

ANTHONY: Well the relationships with teachers I always considered to be very good. I was a good student and I was a fairly sort of obedient student because I was afraid not to be, and so I think I got along well with the teachers, I think the teachers understood, you know, from a stuttering standpoint that I did have a problem but there was no great attention brought to it and I don’t remember ever being treated any differently than others, even when it was in [a] difficult situation, and I remember we had the, I guess it was FFA then, I think then I used to, well no the NFA, New Farmer’s of America, I think now that call it the FFA, uh, Future Farmer’s of America, but we had these ritual, this routine that we had to go through like a parliamentary procedure, and you have to do all the things that you have to do, and the words, you can’t deviate from the words, and I remember that was an especially difficult time for me. But I will say that even though I had a good relationship with the teachers, my stuttering was directly affected by anyone in authority when they were acting in the role of their authority. If a teacher would come over to our home to visit, that was one thing, but if they were teaching, and in their capacity as a teacher, I reacted differently. I always react differently to people in any kind of authoritative
position, and it always brought out the worst in my stuttering. Probably still does to a certain extent.

INTERVIEWER: How about your peer relationships?

ANTHONY: I would have to describe it as generally good. I mean I loved friends, I was open to it, and pretty jovial about things, and so I never, I don’t think it affected my friends, I mean try to be a good friend to people, but I think where it did affect me was in the early days when I started to date, I think it made me fairly bashful and a bit timid and that became really almost another stage, I mean I went from an early recognition, I mean where I did not recognize it particularly, and then I did have the early recognition, and then I went through this like eighth, seventh, eighth, ninth grade where I really did recognize it then as being a problem, being an issue, but we just didn’t have any ways to deal with it, our teachers, you know, were not particularly trained in that area, we could not afford to get speech therapy, and even if we could, because of the racial situation, it may not have been available to us because we were in a pretty much a segregated environment, and we just didn’t have a lot of things that even others had in the small town that we lived in, so, you know, there was just no way to handle the problem other than just to come up with these kind of self-made remedies and other remedies that other people would tell you from time to time.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now I know school can be challenging for a variety of reasons, you know, people have all kinds of issues that go on in their lives, but where would you probably rank stuttering in the mix, would it be like, would you say at the forefront, in the middle, at the back, compared to when you think about everything that has gone on in your life, as far as your school experiences are concerned, where would you probably put stuttering?
ANTHONY: Well I mean if you were going to rank it from 1 to 10, it would be a 10. Ten, because stuttering always affected pretty much everything that I did one way or the other. Uh, it wasn’t that I always wore it on my sleeve, but it affected the behavior because everything that I wanted to do, I would think about “am I going to be able to get through this” from a stuttering perspective, I mean it was even ahead of grades and everything else because I mean the studying, studying for them, because you know everything was couched in terms of how will stuttering affect what I do. So it was always in the forefront of my mind the whole academic experience even, and I felt myself in fairly challenging positions, you know, throughout my academic career, so it was always there, it was a factor. No question.

INTERVIEWER: Now, there are certain things that people experience that are visible and they’re observable, like let’s say that you have a difficult time reading aloud in class, or giving an oral presentation, that’s something that’s visible, people can observe it. You know, if you were to ask anyone on the street “What do you think a person who stutters would experience in school, what do you think school would be like” any person could probably just by intuition say “Well I think they may have difficulty, you know, reading in class or maybe answering a question” those are all things that people can either know by intuition or things that are observable, but then there are other experiences that, other things that people go through that are kind of hidden and subtle, and no one would even know that you were going through that experience unless you told them or unless you were in those shoes, so, and I kind of call those, you know, “behind-the-scenes” experiences or “backyard” experiences, so I guess for you personally, and for people who stutter in general, what do you think those “behind-the-scenes” experiences are, things that you would go through in school as a person who stutters that no one
else would even think that that would even be an issue unless they either in your shoes or you
told them specifically?

ANTHONY: Well I think that’s a really good question, I think most people just don’t realize
how hurtful that comments can be, even people who are well-meaning and your friends,
sometimes they will make comments either for joking purposes or just general comments, and it
really does affect you, and it affects you personally, and you go home, you think about it and,
you know, they would never have any idea that what they said had such a drastic effect. I think
that was one issue. I think the other one was just not being able to do some of the simplest things.
And I would mean like if you go and order, you want to, for me, for instance, talking on the
telephone when I was younger was a real XXX because when I’m looking at a person I can
pretty much gauge what’s going on, the reaction, I get a sense of it. When I’m on the telephone
then I couldn’t do that and it was difficult for me and I doubt anyone would imagine that I would
have a difficult, I would feel bad about talking on the telephone, now that time telephones were
not nearly as plentiful as they are now. But still that was a difficult experience for me to talk on
the telephone or to go to a drive-thru window to order food and you get there and you really want
a hamburger but you start saying “hamburger” and that person would say “are you there?” or
“did you forget what you want?” so you really want a hamburger but you order a hotdog just
because hotdog became easier to say than hamburger, and I think it’s little things like that that
most people would just never think about as being that big of a deal when in fact it did become a
pretty big deal to a stutterer at the time.

INTERVIEWER: And would you say, was that a big issue for you in school, those sort of
“behind-the-scenes” experiences?
ANTHONY: Oh yeah I think so, I think it was hard to balance the fact that I was considered to be a good student and thoroughly bright if you will on one hand, but not being able to do basic sort of things. Not being able to say your name, for instance, your name is one of things like a verbatim, like giving a, like giving a speech or, I mean something you have to stay on top of, well a person can’t be considered very bright if they can’t say their names without stuttering and people would say little stuff like “look, do you forget your name?” That’s a pretty hurtful comment because, you know, you’re doing the best you can, uh, and you’re trying to keep from stuttering, of course then that makes it worse, so you do these kind of almost dumb things to keep from it and bring a lot attention to it, and I think, yeah, I think that it affected me because I was XXX balance, it didn’t balance, I mean here I am doing well over here, but I can’t do basic things over here, and it’s not like I’m handicapped except for that you really can’t do anything about, at least, I mean you really couldn’t do anything about it but it just seem like so natural to be able to talk, and most people just thought that if you stutter it must be something wrong with you, and maybe they were right, I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: I used to tell people, “My name is Eric,” and they would say “Oh Eric” and I would say “No, with a ‘D’ in front of it” and then they would say “Oh Derek”. So I would trick them into saying “Derek” because “D’s” are hard for me.

ANTHONY: That’s the kind of thing. That’s the kind of thing. Little tricks and little methods, it’s that kind of thing, just what you were saying that sort of reminded me of that, yeah, you do all kind of things like that to get people to buy into it.

INTERVIEWER: But it appears so natural that no one would even know that that was what took place unless I told them about it.
ANTHONY: And I think that’s right because stutterers tend to develop techniques to help them to get through it, and stutterers, generally speaking, tend to be fairly bright people even though I’ve seen some exceptions to that, I could be one of them, but they tend to be fairly bright, creative, and innovative, but it just become[s] an avoidance, something that you do to avoid, I mean but you’re really not approaching the issue forthright, and if one does that too many times then it becomes a bigger problem, but I do remember doing little things like just what you said, I remember coming up with little ways, and just, and of course I used humor, I always enjoyed a good story, I enjoyed telling stories, and I tended to sort of laugh at myself as I got older and sometimes I would laugh right along with others, I would start to say something, and it was so difficult, and you get to a point where it gets funny, and I would laugh, I would laugh as well because it was just a defense mechanism to be able to kind of say “I’m not going to let this, you know, I am going to overcome it in some way” but at some point it does become funny, I mean the behavior just becomes, you know, kind of silly or you just can’t get it out, and sometime it was embarrassing, but I don’t mean to say that it was always funny, sometime it can be very embarrassing and I certainly suffered that, suffered through that as much as anyone.

INTERVIEWER: Now what was your personality like going through school? Like if I pulled someone from your elementary school, someone from your middle school, and someone from your high school, what would they say Bill was like?

ANTHONY: Oh, you know, I don’t know, you know, we always want to think that they would say good things but my guess is they would say that I was probably funny, you know I laughed a lot, I enjoyed, I was always telling stories, and uh I think all throughout the, my high school career, I think people would say that I was probably, was always in a good mood, kind of having fun, but yet even that, you know you really wonder, you know, did I really have as much fun as I
thought I had but was it just a way to, when I tell you that stuttering sort of defined everything, it really did. It really did for me because on one hand I was pretty easy-going but deep down I was pretty serious, and anytime you’re serious in anything that means a lot to you, you work at it and if you just can’t get it down XXX but I think teachers would say that I was a pretty easy-going sort of guy.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, ‘cause I was going to ask was that, do you think that was kind of part of your nature or nurture, like do you think that you were that way by nature or did circumstances sort of mold you into that personality?

ANTHONY: And see that’s sort of hard to know…

INTERVIEWER: I guess we’re all defined by…

ANTHONY: It’s hard to know, but what I do know is that even now that I enjoy sort of resolving conflict, part of what I do professionally as a mediator, and I think, and I was one of those kind of guys that always wanted to help people, always kind of wanted to see things better than worse, and looked for the best in people even though sometimes it was difficult. But I think I always look for the best in people, and I expected the best, and, so yeah, I think it was a defen-, I think it sort of helped me to get through things, it certainly did in college, because my college experience was traumatic in some ways, and I think because of the personality that I developed, I think that was, made it easier for me to, to address issues, problems in life. Yeah I think I learned a lot from having stuttered because I think I look at life differently than I would have had I not.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. How would you describe the school climate for people who stutter? Just, when you think about your school experiences, and then just what you know about schools, how would say the school climate is for people who stutter? So if you had this five year old who
stutters whose just about to enter school, what issues or challenges do you think they would face?

ANTHONY: You mean back when I was in school?

INTERVIEWER: I guess both, back when you were in school and then now?

ANTHONY: Well obviously now I think people are much more sensitive to issues like stuttering, they have all kinds of fancy terms for it, you know you learn differently, you do this, you do that, and they have so many more ways to address any behavior that’s different from what people consider to be the norm. I think when I was in um, I don’t think it’s less traumatic on the child necessarily but I do think they’d probably take some comfort in knowing that they are doing something there, a value, there’s something available to them and they’d probably see others who are similarly situated. In a very small school like mine there was one guy in my high school who stuttered as well, but he didn’t come over until the ninth grade, and so for a long time I was the only stutterer that I knew, I just didn’t know anyone else who stuttered. And I think the climate was ok but there certainly wasn’t any kind of special effort made to address that issue. And maybe that was good because had there been more attention brought to it, then it would have seemed like it was some type of second-class citizen if you will, whereas when you’re in a small deal you throw everybody together, everybody has something, there’s something about everyone, you know, that’s not perfect. It’s just [that] stuttering is one that’s more obvious and I don’t think the climate was particularly, you know, was conducive to working with it in a way but, who knows, I mean maybe that’s the best thing that could have happened. I think now it’s different, I think, I think stutterers still are very, there’s sort of a visible, I mean sort of an invisible sort of a group out there whereas, you know, you look ok and everything else, and then you speak, and then most stutterers just kind of disappear. So you really never see them because
they’ve become fairly quiet and every so often you’ll hear of someone who was visible, a singer or somebody who doesn’t, but for the most part stutterers are just now the quiet group, I mean, you know, we don’t really want to be identified too much particularly but maybe that’s tainted because I haven’t kept up over the years, but that’s least was my view.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. There’s some people, ‘cause I know I’ve talked to at least a couple, who say that well school is difficult for anybody, you know, school is difficult for people, you know, who have hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, you know, minorities, school is just a difficult place for anyone, so why should we, um, I guess investigate or be concerned about the experiences of people who stutter, school is just a difficult place for anyone. So I guess how would respond to that?

ANTHONY: Well I think that statement is correct, uh, I think there are a lot worse things that people can have than stuttering. Stutterers probably have it easier than, you know, people with some of the disabilities, hearing impairment, or visually impaired, or other type things which you may call real disabilities, uh but it’s no less painful. Stuttering is just one those things that’s hard to, hard to state exactly how it affects you unless you are a stutterer. But it’s very painful, it’s very consuming, it just sort of consumes you, and it’s an invisible sort of consumption, and everyone reacts to it differently, and so you really never know how it’s going to affect one person from another because everyone will look at it differently.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now this is sort of like a “come-together” kind of question is that if you were writing an autobiography about your school experiences from kindergarten through the twelfth grade what would you think the title would be and what would some of the themes be of your school experiences. And you can take a moment to think or reflect if you need to.
ANTHONY: That’s a tough question. I guess an autobiography of what my school experiences. I think [pause]. It would have to be something with over commenting. I, maybe “I met the enemy and I overcame” or something like that because it was an enemy to me and I couldn’t tell whether I was doing it or whether it was doing it to me and I think my theme would be that I dealt with it the best I could. I think it drove me to possibly greater heights than I wouldn’t [have] reached otherwise. And even though I said that, the other side of it is every stutterer believes, I believe, that had I not stuttered, I would have gone further because, you know, that if I was, if I’m class vice-president if I hadn’t stuttered I would have been president, if I, you know, if I became a paralegal I would have become a lawyer if I hadn’t stuttered, so I think all stutterers tend to use stuttering in odd ways or different ways because in one hand it’s a defense mechanism for something that maybe you didn’t do that you wanted to do or maybe you just didn’t have the guts to do it but you thought “well I stutter so I could never do this” so I think my theme would be “I am better off than I would have been” because at least I have an appreciation and a sensitivity to things about people that are a little different. I think I can sometime try to put myself in the position of how someone feels and it definitely makes me more sensitive to people not just in stuttering but just in all across the board, I mean, you know, if someone is having problems academically or having problems, stress or whatever, I think I try to empathize with them in a way that maybe I would not have and so had everything always been alright with me. And I think that’s the same thing about race. Race was a bigger deal when we were coming along that when you came along. And your journey will be less so, and I think that’s the way that it should be. But even more than the ill effects of racial discrimination and other things, because that was something that we could not control, that was something that was the way that people treated us, we didn’t do it for ourselves, stuttering was much more personal, it was something
that I was doing, or something it was doing to me, or whatever, and that I was not controlling it very well, but even in spite of that I managed to at least proceed to the next step rather than stopping, so I think it made me stronger.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you brought the issue of race up. I did my master’s thesis on Black men who stutter, which I was hoping to get you at the time, but I just couldn’t coordinate it all, but do you think that’s an issue, how would you, I guess what do you make of that experience, of being an African American, or Black, however you, whichever term you use, and being a person who stutters?

ANTHONY: Well, you know, I mean in the environment that I grew up in, being Black and going to Black schools [was] the only thing that I knew so I really didn’t have anything to compare it to. I think as I went into college, I think it was [pause], in my particular situation, stuttering became um almost a positive for me because of the educational environment that I was in, because I went to an all integrated, or all white school at the time. It became something that was less threatening to other white students around me than it would have been otherwise. The climate at the time was people were kind of afraid of everything and very distressing of anyone. Well if you had someone there who obviously had his own struggles and was trying to get through it, people did not believe that I was there to cause any other problems, it was just that, it probably drew people to me because everyone wants to help people, and I found people wanting to help me, whether it’s to finish a sentence or to finish a word or to help you to get something out, or whatever, it became more of a thing that um, I wouldn’t say a positive, maybe that’s not the right word, but it was less intimidating, so I don’t know how to describe Black men versus others because I’ve just, I mean I’ve never been White so, I don’t know, I don’t know how that would affect it as far as the reaction. I didn’t see any particular reaction to me being Black any
more than anyone else in an academic environment, I think I in a social environment I think it’s a factor because I think women especially really would like for men to be, you know, as perfect as possible, I mean, you know, to, when you first meet them, you know, it’s to make the best impression, and stutterers, it’s hard to make a good impression first deal because the first thing they know about you is that you stutter, but back then when we were coming along, people would not say you stuttered, they said that you can’t talk, and that would be even more, I mean that’s a rough thing for people to say, well you can’t talk, but that’s what people would say. That phrase itself would hurt you, it was something that would affect you for a while.

INTERVIEWER: I just have one other question. What do you think the school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter?

ANTHONY: Well again that’s a difficult question because I’ve always stuttered, and so um, you know, I mean I said that I’ve always stuttered people would say you know the opposite of, you know, have you stuttered all your life, sometime I would say no since I started talking, the other time they would say have you stuttered all your life, and I’d say not yet, meaning that I haven’t finished my life but up till this point I’ve always stuttered. So, but you always imagine is if I didn’t stutter, life would have been so much easier. I would been able to have done this, I could have made this speech, I would have been able to have made this impression, I could have done this, I could have done that. So you sort of imagine non-stutterers as being, as having it really easy. But the older I’ve gotten I think I have realized that that’s just not so. While non-stutterers don’t stutter, we all have limitations of some sort. And so while I may have viewed them with some envy when I was younger I would not say that is the case today, but I probably did. And envy was a, kind of a benign sort of envy, not that I begrudged them speaking well, it’s just that it was something that I wish I could have done, you know, I mean could have done without
stuttering, every stutterer, you go home at night, and you think about “why I did this, why I did this, I mean this person doesn’t do it” you know and you say well this person’s not a good student, or not as good at this, and then I stutter and I look like stupid or something. But you know like I say, I don’t know what it’s like to be a totally nonstutterer but I’m somewhat better today than what I was at that time that it’s almost like being a nonstutterer, but it just never quite goes away, just something you do, something I learned to do I think, I think I learned stuttering.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, is there anything else that um that you think is important to your school experience or school experiences of people who stutter in general that maybe didn’t come up in the interview that maybe you think it’s important to mention or talk about?

ANTHONY: Ok, and you’re mostly concerned about through high school?

INTERVIEWER: Right, K-12, but also any other issue, as well, is fine.

ANTHONY: Well I think anything, I mean I think we covered most of the areas and concerns that I had, I think it’s just very difficult to describe the effect that it has on you, even looking back on it at this point, I tend to put more of a positive spin on it than maybe I felt at the time. I mean I think the best thing that anyone can do on any issue, stuttering included, is to address that issue forthrightly, get whatever training or therapy that you can get early on, but treat it the same way you would anything else, if you having problems studying, or with your studies, get help, get a tutor. Address the issue, just don’t assume that it will go away, or that you will grow out of it, as many people used to tell me, well you will grow out of it, well some people do, and some don’t. I don’t know what the percentage is, but I would guess most people don’t totally. On the other hand, stutterers are so sensitive, and I became more sensitive to speaking and to stuttering as I was going along. I was class president my senior year, and president of the student council, and it was a very small school but nonetheless I had to speak, and others had to speak from time
to time. And someone would speak ahead of me sometime, and what I would consider to be just a terrible speech, they would “ah” and they would stop, and they would hesitate, and they’d do all these kind of things that stutterers try not to do, um but they felt nothing of it whatsoever because they didn’t see themselves as a stutterer. Whereas, I would get up and maybe do less of some of the things that they did but I saw myself as a stutterer. So at somewhere along the line I started to realize that stuttering is a bit of a perception, but it’s the inner perception, but I’m not sure where one starts and the other one stops, I mean, but it is real. But on the other hand, the perceived effect of it is probably much, not nearly as much as we think of it as being, so at some point I just start to try not to think of myself as someone who stutters but just as someone who spoke and sometimes blocked on a few words. And I still haven’t overcome that, so I just think some things stay with you, and I think that has stayed with me, the other thing is that I would say what I’ve tried to do was to never look back on things that have happened. If I had a particularly bad experience it would affect me for a little bit. Maybe if I tried to do that same thing the next couple of times I would certainly be thinking about it as I’m going into it, whereas I could have a good experience and that experience wouldn’t seem to carry over to the next one, you know, I would always be frightful and fearful, not in a way some people just tend to freeze up, but you just feel that inner “am I going to stutter”. And it was always getting started was the biggest thing. Once you start and you can communicate, stutterers tend to be good communicators, but not necessarily great speakers obviously, but they tend to communicate very well, and people are comfortable talking with stutterers because I think they tend to have this inner sense that you’re really communicating, and I think stutterers try to do that with one, I think they really do try to communicate because you have to use other things to communicate, other than just speaking. So
I think it makes them a better communicator than most people would be. So I think that would be my comment.
INTERVIEW WITH “HECTOR”

Date: July 25, 2006

Place: Dallas, TX

INTERVIEWER: But to start off I just wanted to know if you could give me some general background information about the schools that you went to, just like the size of the school, the location, was it in a rural, suburban, or urban area, just general background/demographic information about your elementary, middle school, and high school.

HECTOR: Well I was born and raised in Dallas. I’ve been here all of my life. I went to public schools, pretty good public schools, elementary, junior high, and high school, and they were good schools.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And what has your experience been like in school. So if you started in kindergarten and if you could walk me through all the way up to twelfth grade. What has school been like for you?

HECTOR: Related to my speech or just everyday?

INTERVIEWER: Well it’s just a general question, so wherever you decide to take it.

HECTOR: I think I had a good upbringing in schools, there was good classmates, I had friends, no fights, I wasn’t in sports or anything you know I had good friends and good groups and stuff like that, just healthy times in school.

INTERVIEWER: What role would you say that stuttering played in your school experience? So I guess if you could talk at length maybe starting with elementary and going up through high school.

HECTOR: With me, I want to tell you that I’m kind of different. I began to stutter when I was in high school. I was like, I think sophomore, something like that. Growing up I think I had a pretty
rapid rate of speech, and in high school I don’t know what is was, there was no real pressure, no illness or anything like that, it’s just that my speech rate picked up. And it become a gradual stutterer, you know, sophomore year, it just kind of picked up more and more and more, and in school I was kind of quiet anyway, so I kind of, you know, got by in school, you know, just “hey how are you” or “hey” or hi” or “yes, no”, those kind of short answers to get by.

INTERVIEWER: So stuttering, you would say, probably played more of a role in your high school experience versus…?

HECTOR: Yeah, later, later. You know, like junior, sophomore, junior high school. And again I just, quick short answers, you know, that got by and stuff.

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe your academic performance? What was that like in school?

HECTOR: You know I was average student. You know, looking back I wish I applied myself more. But I didn’t really apply myself, you know, I just kind of wing it. It wasn’t because of my speech, I just didn’t really like it or get into it, I just, I wish I had, but I just, you know I passed on that, but didn’t really apply a whole lot.

INTERVIEWER: So was it the same throughout your school years?

HECTOR: Yeah, yeah it was.

INTERVIEWER: How about your participation in the classroom? How would you describe that throughout your school years?

HECTOR: You know, very seldom raised my hand [to] answer a question, very, very seldom. Just occasionally if I knew an answer that was real short answer, like a quick number answer, like quick “25”, or whatever, or XXX, or whatever, just a real quick answer, but pretty much, you know, didn’t really speak up.
INTERVIEWER: And would you say that was pretty typical?

HECTOR: Yeah, yeah, maybe because of speech, maybe because of shyness, and, you know, the fear of speaking and new classmates, if you say the wrong answer, you know, all what happens, stuff like that. The typical pressure that I guess I, well, you know, we all put on ourselves.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how about prior to high school, like elementary school and middle school? How would you describe your classroom participation, was it similar or…?

HECTOR: Yeah, it was similar. Here again I’m pretty quiet and shy, and you know, growing up, you know, I was teased about that sometimes but that’s how it was, you know. Here again, I don’t think it had anything to do with speech, it’s just that I was a real shy guy.

INTERVIEWER: So when did stuttering start to really play a major role in your life?

HECTOR: You know, early 20s, 20, 21, something like that. About a year of two after high school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, so you had already graduated school when stuttering really started to play a significant role, would you say?

HECTOR: Yes, uh-huh.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

HECTOR: Yeah I went to junior college part-time and didn’t really like that too much, so I just got a regular job, just working, and the speech rate really picked up, and pretty heavy stutter, you know, lack of confidence, so early 20s was a tough time.

INTERVIEWER: How about extracurricular activities? Were you ever involved in extracurricular activities in school?
HECTOR: Not at school, no. No band, no sports, no anything. I just um, I guess I wasn’t big enough in school, I guess, for sports. But I just wasn’t into anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think that was so?

HECTOR: Oh, just shyness. Just, for no other reason. Just uh, you know wasn’t really encouraged to “how about doing this or doing that?” Maybe if someone asked me, I might, I don’t know, I just uh, you know didn’t really get into anything.

INTERVIEWER: So would you say you were always a shy person by nature, or did circumstances kind of mold you into that?

HECTOR: Yeah, that’s correct. I feel that way towards shyness. You know I had friends and all this but just uh, just kind of, shyness kind of took over at an early age.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So you’ve always have been a shy person through school?

HECTOR: Yeah, through school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how would you describe your relationships with your teachers? What were those like, you know, during the early years, through middle school, and also through high school?

HECTOR: Yeah, I think they were fine, you know, I was a good student, I was there every day, and I just, uh, I didn’t cause any trouble, I think it was fine, you know, I liked them all.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And how do you think you were viewed by your teachers?

HECTOR: You know that’s a good question, I don’t know exactly, but I assume I was fine. You know, when you see a student who, again, was there everyday, was polite and was there XXX I guess it’s better to have those kind of students than the trouble makers I guess. You know, I guess a fine student.

INTERVIEWER: How about your peer relationships, what were those like?
HECTOR: Pretty well, yeah I had some good friends, you know that I spoke to a lot, and we got
together after school, and you know, did hobbies, rode bicycles, and stuff like that, so I always
had friends.

INTERVIEWER: Now I know you said your stuttering really didn’t start to manifest itself until
later in your school years, but were you ever teased at all by any of your peers because of your
stuttering?

HECTOR: You know, not at school, sometimes if I, if somebody asked me a question, and I
spoke real fast, sometimes I would be teased then, you know rushing my words out and I would
be teased. And I heard that but I didn’t really catch on to what they meant until later on.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now where would you say, ‘cause I know school can be difficult for a
variety of reasons, where would you put stuttering in the mix, was it at the forefront, in the
middle, sort of like on the backburner, I guess when you consider everything that you’ve had to,
when consider all the issues that you’ve had to face in school, you know, where would you rank
stuttering?

HECTOR: Well again because it happened late in my life, you know, in my high school years I
think stuttering was really, back then it wasn’t, I can’t remember it being that big of an issue, I
guess. And then during the elementary, junior high even though I didn’t stutter, my speech was
ok I guess, it wasn’t, I guess, an issue.

INTERVIEWER: Now how would you describe, I lost my question, um, oh, speech therapy.
Did you have, stuttering didn’t start until later into your school years but did you ever have
therapy in high school, or did you have therapy later after high school?

HECTOR: Well you know I did have therapy in elementary, 5th, 6th grade, something like that,
it’s been so long ago, and I was pulled out of class, once a week, whatever, I had a hard time
saying the letter /r/ , so I was the only one taken to a separate room, and this one person, I guess the speech therapist, I don’t know who she was, we worked on pronunciation of words, and I know I had a hard time saying /r/’s, you know, “Robert” or “robot” and there wasn’t really anything to do with stuttering I don’t think but it was one year or six months of class, and then I had therapy after high school.

INTERVIEWER:  Ok. Now there are certain experiences that, you know, are visible, things that are observable, things that you can see, like people who stutter often report that it’s difficult to raise their hand in class, or to read aloud in class, if you were to ask someone off the street what do you think a person who stutters, what trouble do you think they would have in school, they could probably tell you some of the obvious things. But then there are other experiences that are more subtle, more hidden, I guess what I would call “backyard experiences,” “behind-the-scenes” experiences, the things that people wouldn’t know that you go through unless they were in your shoes or unless you told them. So I guess for people who stutter, what do you think some of those experiences might be, I guess for you personally, and then for people who stutter in general, um, your thoughts about the “behind-the-scenes” experiences, things that people who don’t stutter wouldn’t even know it would be an issue for you in school unless you told them.

HECTOR:  Well I guess number one, people would tell me sometimes to slow down. And you know at my early age I didn’t really like them telling me to slow down because I thought I sounded ok. But looking back, yeah, I needed to slow down. I think we who stutter, I mean some of us, need to slow down. Because our rate becomes better. But here again, some people are, and sometimes I’d be speaking about telling a story or something, and sometimes people will, you know I’ll have a hard time saying “ra-ra-ra-ra” [imitates stuttering] and someone will jump in and say the word for me. And that’s something that happens occasionally, I guess, to all of us
and you don’t really like it but you just kind of go with it and stuff. I never would tell the other person, hey, let me finish my words because, see that one sentence right there would be a tough time saying that sentence, so I would just forget that and continue on. You know, I mean I would say it now but back then I would just continue the statement I’m making.

INTERVIEWER: Now how did those experiences make you feel on the inside, when people would say things like that or finish your sentences, or tell you to slow down, what did that make you feel like?

HECTOR: Yeah, you know, obviously I didn’t like it at all, I felt terrible, I felt ashamed, you know, low self-esteem, just uh, the bottom of the barrel, the worst of times, you know, being young and having this “I don’t know what it is, why can’t I say this word correctly” [were] the worst times. But because of that I feel it’s what built me up to XXX go out and need that, at times speaking up, put in place, well yeah sometimes I need to slow down or speak up and say, hey, let me answer this question by myself.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

HECTOR: These are things I learned now where back then I was just petrified of saying that.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how would you describe the school climate for people who stutter? I guess if you had this five year-old child who stuttered and they’re about to enter school and have 12 years ahead of them, what would you say would be the issues and challenges that they would probably face?

HECTOR: Yeah, that’s a great question, that’s like, gosh, I probably could go on and on, I guess. Number one I would wish them the best of luck. I just would encourage them. You know what I’m thinking more nowadays, I think kids and parents need to go to the principal of each school before school starts and say hey can I talk to my classmates on the first week of school
sometime and say hey can I take 10 minutes, and tell the class, hey class I stutter, this is what it is, I’m like you, I can run, I can catch, I can eat and have a good time XXX I have a tough time saying my name saying my name or speaking and this is why, and just explain that, and I think kids will understand that. Where if a child comes in, in a wheelchair, you know, it would be the same thing. It’s like hey classmates, I’m going to have a tough time getting in and out of the room, this is why, you know, give it a try to educate them.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any particular parts of the school atmosphere that you think may be more or less difficult for people who stutter? I guess if you think about what you’ve gone through in school, and just knowing what you know about schools, do you think that there may be, is there any one or more parts of the school environment that people who stutter may be more challenged with?

HECTOR: Well I guess I’m thinking, here again I didn’t play sports, but I’m thinking, I’m sure there’s a lot of people who want to play sports, you know they may have a slight stutter, and you know playing a team sport, you know football, basketball, whatever, you have to communicate with one another, to teammates, and you have to, you know, be pretty fluent, or as fluent as you can, and hope the teammates will see this and understand that. You know I guess I’m thinking if you’re a star athlete that person can speak anyway they want I guess, because they’re a star athlete, big and strong, but I’m sure some athletes may not understand that but, at least to your question, sports would be a big issue to begin speech-wise, you know band, I don’t think it would be that huge of a XXX, you know playing an instrument, whatever, but I’m sure there are areas of school.

INTERVIEWER: Now, there are some people, you know, I’ve talked to a couple of people who say well school is difficult for anybody, every person is going to have some trouble or some
difficulty in school, school is tough for any kid, so why should we even focus on the school experiences of people who stutter, or why should care, or why should we investigate school experiences of people who stutter, I guess how would you respond to a position like that?

HECTOR: I think, yeah, I think it’s very important, I feel go full-steam ahead on it in trying to end all this jealousy and fighting and hazing about everything, about, you know, if someone has a limp, someone’s not so smart, or if someone says an answer in class and it’s the wrong answer, you know let’s just all sit down and figure out, let’s just all calm down and get all this straight. That not everybody is going to know the right answer, not everybody’s going to be six-feet tall, or strong, or all that kind of stuff, you know, we’re all different, just understand where everybody comes from.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now did you ever try to hide your stuttering or use tricks that people who stutter sometimes use, did that ever happen to you in school?

HECTOR: Well, yeah, I did a little bit in school, I did a lot of that after high school, but, uh, yeah a little bit in school.

INTERVIEWER: And what were some of those strategies, do you remember?

HECTOR: Yeah, just changing words, just, trying to get by, if I’m thinking if I’m going to stutter on a word, I’ll stop and say “I think tomorrow is uh, uh, uh meatloaf day at lunch” or whatever it is, you just kind of stall a little bit. You know, you just learn tricks. Mostly changing words, that’s uh, something that we see coming up in our minds, and that’s something I did a lot of.

INTERVIEWER: Now what do you think school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter? I know you’re kind of on both sides of the coin because you went through a period where
you didn’t stutter, and then you did stutter. But I guess for a person who doesn’t stutter, what do
you think their school experiences would be like? That’s kind of a big question.

HECTOR: No, it’s a good question, I guess I’m thinking, I guess maybe peer pressure, if you’re
wearing the latest clothes or fashions, you know if you’re too big of a person they may tease you,
if you’re real smart, they may tease you, if you’re not as smart, or whatever, if you don’t live in a
certain neighborhood, I guess. Those kinds of things that everyone kind of goes through I guess
when you’re fluent.

INTERVIEWER: Now do you think there are unique experiences that people who stutter go
through in school that maybe no other group or no other student who doesn’t stutter would go
through?

HECTOR: I would say quite possibly, but I’ve heard more and more fluent people, you know,
they aren’t the most brave people either…

INTERVIEWER: That’s true.

HECTOR: …You know they don’t raise their hand every time either when they have questions
to ask, they don’t speak in front of the class about a subject, you know, there’s a lot of shyness
there too, when you’re fluent you have hesitations and drawbacks too. But we who stutter, we
don’t see it or we don’t think that you should for some reason ‘cause you’re fluent, but yeah
everybody has their own little niche that is tough for them. And I guess we who stutter XXX.

INTERVIEWER: Now if you had a group of teachers at your attention right now, what would
you tell them about the experiences of people who stutter in school, what should they know, do
you think?

HECTOR: Yeah, it would be good to talk with them and educate them. Tell them, hey, we’re
good people, we’re there to learn, we want to find a good job and find a good life, we just have a
tough time speaking, and kind of tell them why XXX we have a tough time speaking, that it just happens XXX and to have patience with us, and then maybe have them stutter on purpose, kind of have them pretend they had to block or say their name kind of bumpy a few times, just kind of get the feel of that, and feel that you can be real bumpy saying “Joe-Joe-Joe-Joseph” but it can come out and you can communicate to anyone.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now if you were writing an autobiography of your school experiences, so if this was the autobiography of Joseph’s school experiences from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, what would the title be and then what would some of the themes be?

HECTOR: You know again I’ve had a really good life, really good childhood life, I went to two elementary schools growing up, and they were both really good schools, and again I’ve always had good friends, and I can’t think of a title right now, but something like “Present Times in School,” something like this. And the first few years, you know, first grade through third, you know, I was real shy, I didn’t go to kindergarten back then, I don’t know if they had it then, but I was always at home, and then from home to the first grade at six years old, you know I was with my mom and where’s everybody else, and my family, I was kind of there on my own and didn’t know anything. And you just kind of had to fit into the everyday routine of school. And junior high was, from elementary school going to the 8th grade, was more of a larger 8th grade, it was the other schools combined together, you know I was amongst more kids and different schools, I saw them different sizes, different looks, different builds, different personalities, and then going to high school was another larger, it was a larger school, you know different phases of seeing my classmates that I used to go to elementary school, I would see them occasionally because now the schools were so large they were missed because I didn’t really see them as much, and then seeing their looks and how they changed and seeing them become friends with someone else.
was just a whole everyday, every year adjustments. I think adjustments is what school is, every year is an adjustment. And having to fit into the right environment, and fit into the right choosing of classes, and choosing of teachers, and just trying to fit in and trying to do what you can to carry on every year.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now do you think there is a relationship to where you are right now in your life and stuttering? I guess what I mean, I guess we’re all shaped by our past experiences, do you think stuttering played a role in where you are today in your life, as far as career, job, or general interest.

HECTOR: I would say yes. Job-wise, my job I’m doing now and jobs I’ve always have had, they’ve never dealt with the public or anything. I’ve never had to, stuttering didn’t stop me from applying for this job, applying for that job, so it wasn’t really, you know, there where some people it is. But yeah it has played a part of it. I’m sure a large, ten-year part of my life, ‘cause for about ten years I was going through a lot of tough times with my speech, and dealing with it until I finally hit bottom, and then I just kind of started speaking up about stuttering and started to tell people that I stutter, and I got that open, and that really changed my life overall. But yeah it’s been a part of my life.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. I think we’ve sort of gone through everything I had on here. But is there anything that maybe didn’t come up in the interview that you think is central or important to your school experience that didn’t come up, or maybe important or central to the school experiences of people who stutter in general that didn’t come up, any issue or topic that you think has to be mentioned about the school experiences that maybe wasn’t talked about?

HECTOR: Yeah I can’t think of anything. I guess with me, I guess the more I think about this, you know my stuttering, my whole life kind of evolved in my early 20s, it didn’t really seem to,
well my speech really seemed to hit then. Going back in school, everything was fine in school, again I had a good upbringing, good classmates, surprisingly my speech was not a big involvement in my speech in school?

INTERVIEWER: ‘Cause what age would you say would have been the onset of your stuttering, do you think?

HECTOR: Well I think like a sophomore in class.

INTERVIEWER: So like tenth grade, maybe like 15 or 16 or so?

HECTOR: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

HECTOR: Yeah, 15, 16.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, that’s interesting. What would you attribute to that, do you think? ‘Cause usually the onset is earlier, but what would you probably say?

HECTOR: Well, you know, here again I don’t really know. I had a good life, my family was fine, I didn’t get sick or anything. If anything, I’m thinking maybe because I was going to be a senior pretty soon, I didn’t know what I wanted to do, go to school, go to college, or what I wanted to do for a living. You know if anything, those thoughts may have made my mind race or get antsy or nervous. And my rate just picked up.

INTERVIEWER: So for you stuttering was really an issue later in life?

HECTOR: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: High school and on?

HECTOR: Yeah it was.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Ok.
HECTOR: Where, leading up to that, I was, you know, spoke fast, and I was just real shy and reserved. I guess I wish I wasn’t that shy but you know you can’t go back so.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah
INTERVIEW WITH “BENJAMIN”

Date: July 26, 2006

Place: Dallas, TX

INTERVIEWER: I have questions here that I want to ask, but I’m not going to ask them like “question 1, question 2, question 3,” I’m going to lay it off to the side, so it’s really just going to kind of be an informal chit chat, or informal conversation between the two of us just about your experiences. And at times I may just make some notes but that’s just so I won’t have to interrupt you, maybe I can just go back later and follow-up on some things that you said. But to start off with I guess I’d just like to know a little bit about the schools that you went to, just basic background, demographic information about elementary school, your middle school, and your high school, so things like the size of the school, the location, was it like in a rural, suburban, or urban area, just general background, demographic information about all of the schools that you’ve gone through K-12.

BENJAMIN: Sure. Um, well, that will be pretty easy because I went through the, uh, same private school um kindergarten through eleventh grade and then my senior year I was being a bit rebellious and got tired of the private school thing, I want to go to a public school, and so my senior year I went to public school. Um, both schools are in suburbs of Dallas, um, size wise, the private school, kindergarten through twelfth grade, the entire school, had seven maybe eight hundred students, total. Um, the public school that I went to, I probably had seven, eight-hundred in my graduating class. And so they were, they were very, very different. Um, private school, everybody knew everybody, um, you knew their families, you knew the teachers. Um, whether or not you were good friends with everybody, um, you still knew who they were, where they lived, their parents, their dogs, um, so on and so forth. Public school was very different, um, I
knew a handful of five or six people going into my senior year there, and that didn’t grow by much. Um, and so that was a pretty big adjustment and shock.

INTERVIEWER: So it was pretty close-knit, K through 11th grade because ‘cause everyone sort of knew everyone?

BENJAMIN: Right. Right. I mean, um, whether it was, ‘cause, ‘cause uh, almost everybody went to uh certain churches in the area um they all kind of lived in the similar area and everything and so it was, it was like a giant family almost. Um, especially within your own grade. I mean, um, there were kids that I went to school with from kindergarten through eleventh grade and so I knew them their entire lives. Um, when I went to public school, um, you know it was different. I mean, I had, uh, met a handful of friends beforehand and I knew them for two or three, four years, and that was about the extent of it. Um, some of their parents I knew, some I didn’t know, and so it was, it was a pretty big difference there.

INTERVIEWER: Now how would you describe your experiences in school, so I guess if you could just walk me through from kindergarten up through twelfth grade, just in general what have your school experiences been like?

BENJAMIN: Um, in terms of stuttering or just in general?

INTERVIEWER: I guess you can take it however you want to.

BENJAMIN: Ok, in general, I guess I mean um I would say they were pretty typical. Um, you know you get picked on by some older kids, you know and you have your certain group of friends that you um hung around with, um, but in terms of anything big happening, um, you know I mean it was all just pretty typical go-to-school, recess, lunch, math, science, and all that stuff, um, when I talked to others or when I see kids now you know um it doesn’t seem to be too drastically different. Um, with stuttering, I don’t ever remember being picked on a lot, um as a
student. Now I do remember friends kind of bringing it up because we’d be like in chorus and they’d be like “XXX well I notice you don’t stutter whenever you sing, you know why is that” and I’m like, I don’t know, and, I mean when you’re in you know 4th or 5th grade, you know, you don’t really, “I don’t know, I just don’t stutter when I sing”. Um, I can remember at times being very, very embarrassed, um giving book reports in 5th grade and I’d get up there and I’d freeze and I just burst into tears and run in the bathroom and everything and, but when I came out I don’t ever remember kids like making fun of me a lot, which I don’t know if the teacher said something to them while I was in the bathroom, like “hey, don’t say a word to Brian about this or else you’re in trouble” or what not, but I would always work it somehow so that I never had to read out loud or give a book report in class. And I started doing that back in 4th grade.

INTERVIEWER:  Ok.

BENJAMIN:  I had a bit of a system down to where if, let’s see, um, [pause], well I’ll tell you some stories first and then I’ll get into my thinking. In the 4th grade, my parents were gone on a ski trip and I had a book report due the next day and I had my grandfather call the teacher at home the night before the book report and explain my situation to her so that I didn’t have to get up in front of the class and give the book report. Um, if I thought there was a teacher that would randomly pick kids to read or would go down the row and everybody gets a turn, I’d have my mother talk to them and once again explain my situation, um, so that I did not have to read in class because any time they started that my ears would get hot, I’d start getting nervous, I couldn’t sit still, I just start to sweat, and the only thing I could think about was counting down the time until I had to read. Um, I mean I’ve been in classes my freshman year of high school, and the science teacher was like you know stand up and introduce yourself to the class, well I stood up, I had to give a fake name.
INTERVIEWER: Really?

BENJAMIN: Yeah.

BENJAMIN: Wow.

INTERVIEWER: Um, because, well, ‘cause everybody back when I was a kid, they called me Bones, just because I was so thin and everything, and, uh, anyway, stood up and “my name is” and I couldn’t say Brian, and so I said Bones, “my name is Bones” XXX kind of looked at me, and some of the kids laughed “oh I guess that’s just your nickname”, and I was like “yeah”, sat back down and that was it. Um, I would uh, like if, we would be given assignments to where we break up into groups and then we’d have to meet back and then give the results to the teacher and the class. Um. I would only, I would try to position it so that our group sat closest to the teacher so that in case I had be the one to give the results…

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

BENJAMIN: …Because at times, the kids would be like, “I don’t want to do it, Brian do it,” I mean they’re like, “Ok, yeah, Brian do it” you know and so you didn’t have a lot of room to fight or there wasn’t much room for XXX so I would try to position myself closest to the teacher so that I would speak to her, but in case the rest of the class couldn’t hear, she would say, “Just in case you didn’t hear, he said…”

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

BENJAMIN: …blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah”. And so I was talking to the teacher roughly like I’m talking to you, and she would be the one that would um I guess give, basically give the report to the class, so that I didn’t have to speak in front of the entire class.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.
BENJAMIN: And so I mean I just had a ton of little uh systems and things like that, that I would always be thinking about or working on, so in terms of that my school life was very different from most kids.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

BENJAMIN: But just on the surface level it was very, very similar.

INTERVIEWER: Now that system that you just talked about, how um, I guess how do you say, how um, often did you utilize that system, did it get to the point where everything you did revolved around…

BENJAMIN: Right.

INTERVIEWER: …that, or was it pretty like, I guess when did you first start to develop this system, and how much of an influence did it have on your school experiences?

BENJAMIN: I probably first started, now looking back on things, I see the way I did things in the fourth grade, and the fifth grade, and then I remember my sixth grade teacher, and so I would say I guess the seeds were planted back in the fourth grade, and then as I got a little older and a lot more aware of things and was put in different situations because when you’re in the fourth grade you deal with most of the time it’s one teacher all day besides your PE teacher, as you start getting into 6th, 7th, 8th grade and high school, you’re dealing with one teacher an hour, and so it goes from one teacher a day to possible 8 to ten by the time it’s all said and done, and so um I would try to work the oral reading part, I mean first, second, third day of school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

BENJAMIN: I knew which teacher would like kids volunteering, I knew which teachers would read themselves, I knew which teachers would call on kids, and which teachers would go down the row. And based upon that, within two or three days, a phone call would be made to
whichever teachers or class I didn’t feel fully comfortable in. And so that takes care of the teacher for the entire year. And so from there it’s like I’m fine, you know, and then if I decide to say something out loud or participate, it’s when I fully feel confident, and it’s because I worked it. And so teacher-wise it would be done within the first three days of school and then um, and I saw teachers change the way they did things, in terms of reports, all of a sudden there would be three different options: you can give a report, you can do a project and film it, and we’ll play it in the VCR in front of the class, and you can do something by hand and turn in a paper, and so opposed to their being a “research this and then give a presentation on it” um all of a sudden there were a lot more options on ways to do the project and I think that a lot of it at times had to do with the phone call that my mom made to the teacher saying, “hey, this is the deal with Brian, he feels this way, he gets worked up that way, is there any way or would you mind not calling on him to read or not doing something unless he volunteers to do it himself.”

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting, I was just going to ask, is that, the fact that the teacher developed those options, were those options made to the entire class, and then was that a direct result of the phone calls that your parents made?

BENJAMIN: Um, yes, the options were made to the entire class, um, it wasn’t just me, and I don’t know it for a fact but I’m pretty sure in several classes that things were changed as a result of the phone call, and I think they were changed so that I wouldn’t be hung out to dry in front of everybody.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Ok.

BENJAMIN: Because if it was, ok you, twenty-nine students give a report, Brian just type a paper and turn it in, then it’s going to be almost as obvious as me trying to, you know, spit out
the first sentence of a paragraph in front of the class and so I think in a lot of instances it was the result of the phone call.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how would you describe your relationships with your teachers, elementary school, middle school, and high school, what were those relationships like?

BENJAMIN: Um [pause] I would say good, there were certain cases to where I could be a little bit rebellious, or just be a punk, you know just growing up, you know, and trying to make other kids laugh as opposed to giving respect to the teacher, and I mean just like everybody else I think, there were certain teachers that they liked and teachers that liked them, and certain teachers that they had better relationships with than others. Um, there were a couple of teachers at the private school that um I saw more of a motherly figure and felt like I got more sympathy from them as a result of the fact that I did stutter and I was fighting this thing and going through all these different emotions and everything, um but overall I would consider that a surface thing and so it’s pretty typical, um, yeah but with those ones to where I felt like more of a motherly type of figure, there was a little bit different bond that I would have with them as opposed to the football coach who teaches health class.

INTERVIEWER: Were there ever any negative experiences from teachers?

BENJAMIN: Um [pause] not as a result of my stuttering.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

BENJAMIN: Um, like if I was just trying to be rebellious and I brought something upon myself, um, but that’s a different story. As a result of my stutter, everyone was always very respectful of it, and seemed to have empathy towards it, so I never had any difficult experiences, or I never had a teacher say, “well I don’t think that’s right or I don’t think that’s fair, sorry but you got to go ahead and give the report” or this or that, I didn’t have to deal with that.
INTERVIEWER: And how do you think you were viewed by your teachers?

BENJAMIN: I would say a normal kid that everybody liked but there was just this one insecurity or one thing that I hadn’t learn to deal with yet, that I hadn’t learned to control, um, I always had a bunch of friends growing up and I would say that I was one of the more social kids, but I think they’d say, “hey, here’s this um” it isn’t a disease, I don’t know the right word for it, but here’s this thing that Brian has to deal with and it isn’t easy for him, it’s obviously very difficult and it’s a very sensitive issue and he just hasn’t learned to deal with it yet, and you know I don’t, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: How about your peer relationships, what were those like through school?

BENJAMIN: Um, most of them were, most of them were good. Um I was always the kid who stuttered, um, whenever we would be joking around with each other, kind of saying cut-downs back and forth, the, one way that they always got me was to do my [imitates stuttering] “uh-uh-uh-uh” and so I was always the guy who stuttered. And if we were kind of joking over a friend with each other, that’s the string that they pulled whenever they were XXX. If someone else stuttered just by accident or this of that, I would always say I had this, my trademark, you know that isn’t yours, you need to find something else, and so it was pretty open. Um, but I don’t remember in terms of like friends-wise that being a huge, huge deal. I mean it was obvious that I did, I mean it was blatantly obvious that I was the guy who stuttered but yet um I don’t think it had a huge, huge impact on friendships or getting invited to things, or things of that nature.

INTERVIEWER: And plus you’ve gone to school with the same group of kids until 11th grade, I mean me I was changing schools and you know middle school was different than high school, so totally different group of kids.
BENJAMIN: True, because by the time I got to age, whatever, 13, 14, 15, well chances are that I had been to school with these kids anywhere from well one year down to when I was in kindergarten and so the core group of people that I hung out with, by the time I got old enough to really start being aware of it, and for it to really start being something that I was very self-conscious about, my core group of friends I had been around for 10 years or so. And so they knew me already, they already accepted me, they already knew that I had this stutter, and it was just, you know, wasn’t a big deal. Wasn’t a big deal. Um, where it was difficult was trying to talk to girls or if there’s a conversation going on and you’ve got a great, witty comment that would fit in, perfect, which that still happens to this day, um, that was difficult. Because when you talk to a girl it’s like you want to display this or you want to say things a certain way, you want to use certain words. Well if you stutter that isn’t always a guarantee you’re going to be able to do that and so with girls and everything it was a bit more difficult. But in terms of just my close, close friends and my peers it was fine.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And something I forgot to ask you in the beginning was when did you first become aware that you were a person who stutters or that you stuttered? Was there a specific situation, event, that you recall.

BENJAMIN: Yep. [nods confidently] Yep. And it’s one of the most vivid memories that I’ve got as a kid because, um, there’s a kid at church and he was 13 and so our parents were friends and so of course we’d always do things with each other when our families would meet for dinner or baseball games or this or that, well, um, me and my friends at church, it’s like we always looked up to this guy, his name is [John Doe] and we always looked up to him, he was 13, and we were all about 5, and for my birthday I had got a nerf boomerang, it was orange, and we were outside church, and we were throwing it, and he was kind of leaning up against the car, we had
kind of walked over there, he goes, “hey,” he goes “what’s that?” and I went [imitates stuttering with tension and struggle] “n-n-n-nerf boomerang” and he went [imitates stuttering] “n-n-n-nerf”, and so he did that, and it’s like, I mean it just killed me, for one he would make fun of me in front of my friends, and two, the fact that it was the very first time that I had realized that I was different from everybody else.

INTERVIEWER: And how old were you approximately?

BENJAMIN: Five.

INTERVIEWER: Five years old.

BENJAMIN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

BENJAMIN: Yeah, so um, I don’t know when I just started to talk but that’s the very first time that I realized that my speech was different than everybody elses’.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

BENJAMIN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Everyone has their own story, their own vivid first memory of stuttering, so that’s what it was for you, wow.

BENJAMIN: Oh yeah. Yeah so.

INTERVIEWER: Now what was your academic performance like going through school?

BENJAMIN: Um [pause] it wasn’t that great, I was good enough to get by with B’s and C’s um, with an occasional A, without putting forth a lot of effort, and so um, it was just average. I would do what I had to do to pass or get by and uh…

INTERVIEWER: What would you attribute that to, why do you think your academic performance was what it was?
BENJAMIN: Um, probably, probably because I was more concerned about my social life, um, because I can remember as a kid always wanting to have a bunch of friends, or kind of be in a group, and I would say it was just the fact that I was more concerned about my social life and having fun with friends, and if I got a C on a test or if I got a A on a test, you know, I didn’t really care. Because I was never afraid of failing. But if I could go with my friends one night and get up and take a test and get a B or a C, um as opposed to going home and studying for a couple of hours and getting a B or an A um I would opt to go out and hang out with my friends, so I really didn’t put a lot of effort into academics until I was probably mid 20s. Just because I didn’t have a ton of interest in it. When I started to go to school it was more for because it was what I’m supposed to do and mom and dad would like it and this and that but I didn’t know what I wanted to do, and so I wasn’t very focused on things, and so um I mean I’m very, very focused now. This is my goal and my full-time job but as a kid you know if I could get by with a B or C, possibly an A, alright, that’s fine with me, that’s good enough for me, it wasn’t ever a lot of pressure on me to excel, to be that kid who had all A’s, um, I didn’t really get that pressure from my parents.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Did stuttering play a role at all in your academic performance?

BENJAMIN: [Pause] It played a role in the amount that I would participate.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

BENJAMIN: Because you know, you know there’s good days and bad days, and if I didn’t have to talk then I wouldn’t. If I could get “Justin” to read or to do this or to explain that, I’d do it. And so it definitely had an effect in the amount that I would participate. Because it seemed like when you were in class, it seemed more intense because when one person speaks everybody’s eyes are on them and everybody’s listening and when you’re in grade school, junior high, or high
school, you don’t know what one of those kids is going to say because they’re all so different, one may pop off and say something that makes the entire class laugh at you, I mean just embarrasses you so that you don’t ever want to show your face. And so that’s a risk that, at that time, I wasn’t willing to take, and so if there was a speaking rule, I was out.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Yeah, that [leads to] my next question. What was the classroom like for you going through school? You sort of already mentioned some things.

BENJAMIN: Classroom, once I got the teacher under control I felt a lot more relaxed, if there was ever an option to say something out loud or read out loud I didn’t do it. Um, but at the exact same time I would always be somewhat social or talking to my buddy that sat right next to me. You know we might talk about this or that or make a fast joke or something like that, but that was more one on one. If I ever had to do something in front of the class I didn’t ever do it. But like I said my biggest goal, my main goal at the beginning of each year was to take care of the teachers. Once I got those guys taken care of then I go in the classroom XXX, then I could be or at least feel more like a regular kid because I didn’t constantly have knots and butterflies and ears getting hot and sweaty palms.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting, I mean because as people who stutter we tend to I guess see XXX situations differently. And you said you tried to get the teachers under control, like what specific things did you pay attention to like the first day of class? I guess you earlier that you could pick out the teacher who was going to be this way or be that way, like what specific things did you look for in a teacher or a classroom, day one?

BENJAMIN: I would just watch them and the way they handled addressing the class. I would look at the way they went through the syllabus, that was huge.

INTERVIEWER: Really?
BENJAMIN: Yeah. Because if, because if they give out a syllabus, if they go through and read every single word in there, then that put me at ease because I felt like, ok, they’re going to do all the talking, they’re going to do all the reading, so don’t worry about it. If they would start to point and pick, or if they would go down the row, so the way they address the class, they way they went through the syllabus, and the way they would ask questions. Like if they would kind of ask a question and want you to think about it but not answer it, or if they would ask and be like, hey “John” what’s your opinion or this or that, if they would have us introduce ourselves, and “tell me a little bit about yourself” you know if they would do that or if they wouldn’t do that. Yeah, so I mean there are just tiny, tiny things that you could tell about the first day and the way they dealt with the class that would tend to resemble the way they taught class the rest of the year.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting.

BENJAMIN: And so if I got through the first day, and I felt good about it, then I would be ok. But if there was a teacher that did “this, this, or this”, and I’m, ok, I’m putting a checkmark by their name, putting a red flag up, and I’m going to watch them XXX too and if I’m still really uptight and nervous and uncomfortable then XXX there’s probably going to be the phone call made.

INTERVIEWER: And that was throughout school?

BENJAMIN: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

BENJAMIN: Oh yeah. Throughout until I went to public school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.
BENJAMIN: But part of that's because I started going back to therapy, I was only going to school from 7:30-10:30 each day, and it was a different environment, and so by that time I had learned to somewhat deal with things and handle things a little bit better but from, I guess the first memory I've got is fourth grade through eleventh grade, I was always watching, but one of the good things about it was is that I might have the same science teacher freshman and sophomore year, and so I doubled up on that, and so they knew, “ok if Brian’s in the class, this is the way I’m going to do it, we won’t ask him to do this” and so as you would double up on teachers, there became fewer and fewer XXX you to necessarily worry about.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. You said 7:30 to 10:30 each day, was that…?

BENJAMIN: That was my senior year.

INTERVIEWER: Oh senior, ok, I see, I gotcha.

BENJAMIN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So even though you went to school with the same group of students, I guess up until 11th grade, you were probably familiar with everyone, you still wanted to…

BENJAMIN: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: Even the teachers, if there was a teacher who you felt like you couldn’t be comfortable with, you would still have your parents call even though you kind of knew everyone in the class you felt…

BENJAMIN: True

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So why is that?

BENJAMIN: Because you might always be put in a class with, like if I was a sophomore, you know I might be put in a class with 2 or 3 very, very hot juniors or seniors

INTERVIEWER: Ok. I gotcha. Ok.
BENJAMIN: And there wasn’t any class that had the exact same group, and so because of that it’s like I don’t want to make a fool of myself in front of these girls. You know, I had no shot at them, I still didn’t want that to even be an issue, and so yeah I would always make sure that things like that were taken care of.

INTERVIEWER: Now how about your participation in extracurricular activities? What was that like?

BENJAMIN: Um, it was fine, I mean I always tried to participate in as many things as I could, if it was like a more social environment, for one, you’re dealing with a lot less people, you aren’t in as controlled of an environment, if you don’t want to talk or say something, you don’t have to, and it’s also a lot more relaxed and fun, which whenever you shift into that gear, you tend to speak a little more freely and your speech is better, and things of that nature, so it didn’t ever stop me from participating in any events outside of school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now did you ever have speech therapy in the schools?

BENJAMIN: I did. I had speech therapy for the first time that I can remember in the second grade um but at that time all I knew was that during reading hour or whatever I would go and I would talk with this lady who would help me say my “l’s” or who would help me say my “r’s” or my “s’s” and I would get a sucker and go back to class and so I didn’t know exactly, like, like I knew that I was doing something but I didn’t know exactly what it was. After that I don’t think I went back to therapy until I was probably 14 or 15 and I started seeing [names therapist] down at [names location] and I started out just going every Wednesday after school, I had that for two or three years, and that was high school.

INTERVIEWER: And how would you describe the severity of your stuttering through school?

BENJAMIN: Um…
INTERVIEWER: What I mean is, were you, would you say you were pretty mild, were you moderate, was it pretty severe, is it sort of like it is now, how would you describe…”

BENJAMIN: No it was, no it was, it was worse than it is now, and all I can say to answer that is that it got bad enough that I had went to my parents and said “I want to go back to therapy” so it had got to that point to where it’s like, man, it’s like, you know, I just, I can’t talk, you know, and, I mean so I guess it did have, I guess stuttering did have a impact on my school life very early in high school because I think by my sophomore year I was back in therapy and I went to therapy throughout high school and so that could probably be why it didn’t have as big of an effect on me as it might if somebody else who stuttered because I was constantly in therapy, I was getting my fix once a week and I’d be able to get through the next week, and then I’d go see her, and then I’d feel pretty confident and I’d be able to talk, and I’d go back, and so I started that rotation probably sophomore year of high school but [pause] actually, ask the question again ‘cause I started…

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I think you answered it, it was just how would you describe the severity of your stuttering.

BENJAMIN: Ok, yeah, I mean it got bad enough by the ninth grade that I went to my parents, like I said, and told them that I wanted them to find me a therapist, and then from then it declined.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how would you describe your personality through school, like I pulled someone from, well I guess you went to the same school up through the twelfth grade, what would people say that you were like?

BENJAMIN: Um, gosh, it could, it kind of would all depend on who you ask, I mean I was always taking people up on dares, I was always trying to make people laugh, I knew everybody
in school so I felt like I was pretty popular but just like kids at that age I could also be a jerk too,
I could call someone a pretty big jerk at times, I don’t know if they, that was me trying to get
back at some people for things XXX but I was always crazy, wanting to have fun, I questioned
authority a lot, I don’t know.
INTERVIEWER: ‘Cause I guess where I was going with that was I think, like for me
personally, like I’m a very sensitive, a very fragile person, I have very thin skin, so you know my
feelings could get hurt very easily, very shy.
BENJAMIN: Right.
INTERVIEWER: But I don’t know if I’m that way by nature I think stuttering sort of molded
me into being that way. I mean I’ve talked to someone who said “shy wasn’t who I was, it’s what
I became” so I think I sort of was kind of molded by that, so I was wondering for you, did
stuttering play a role in how you saw yourself or your personality?
BENJAMIN: It helped give me very, very thick skin.
INTERVIEWER: Thick skin. Yeah, I can see that.
BENJAMIN: I mean it, it really did. And I think if you ask anybody now or even back then, I
think that’s one of the common things that they would say is that I do have very thick, thick skin
because I guess just over time became callous to you know a lot of jokes or comments and things
of that nature so.
INTERVIEWER: I think that’s true, I think over the years I developed into that too.
BENJAMIN: Yeah I mean like I’ve always told people that like whenever we’re first working
with each other XXX I would say it gave me very thick skin.
INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now there are certain experiences in school that I think are very
observable, very visible, you know like reading aloud or giving a presentation in front of the
classroom, like if you were to pull someone off the street and ask them “what difficult situations
do you think a person who stutters would go through in school” someone who doesn’t stutter
could probably just figure out just by intuition, “I guess they would have trouble raising their
hand in class or reading aloud” so there are certain experiences that are observable. But then
there are other experiences that I call “backyard” experiences or “behind-the-scenes”
experiences, there are things that people wouldn’t know that you go through unless they were in
your shoes or unless you actually told them yourself, and, I can’t think of a situation off-hand,
but there are things that you know you experience and you know that it’s an issue, but no one
else, unless someone had like a video camera and they followed you around 24/7, and they
would say “oh, I wouldn’t even think that that would be an issue”. So I guess for you personally
in school, and for people who stutter in general, what do you think, I guess, what would the
“behind-the-scenes” experiences be, those experiences beneath the surface that only the person
who stutters would know that they would, unless you were in the person’s shoes, you would
know.

BENJAMIN: Right. I would say how it controls your entire life from the time you wake up until
the time you go to sleep. I was talking to a buddy about it, this was a couple of years ago, he’s
like “hey”, he’s like “I’d like to ask you a couple of things if that’s ok” and I was like “yeah,
sure, that’s fine”. And I told him imagine every single thing that you say or that want to say, it’s
like reading off a teleprompter inside your head…

INTERVIEWER: Wow, that’s powerful!

BENJAMIN: And it’s true, you guys who are fluent, you just speak and say this and put the
emphasis on this word or this syllable or this or that, I go every single thing that comes out of my
mouth or even doesn’t come out of my mouth it’s, it’s like, you know those little tickers at the
bottom of the TV…

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

BENJAMIN: …screen and it shows the stocks and everything, and it just goes across, I go that’s what’s going through my brain every time I talk and I’ll think or I’ll read three, four, five, six, seven words ahead and I’ll feel comfortable until I get to this one word and then for two or three seconds it’s a buildup until I get to that word and I’ve got to decide if I’m going to say that word or if I’m going to change the word, if I’m going to change the subject, if I’m going to just completely quit talking and try to get you to take over the conversation. And so the amount that it controls your life, the fact that I would jump in a car and drive 20, 25 minutes to a store to ask someone something face to face because I didn’t feel comfortable picking up the phone and making a 10 second call. And I told him, I mean who would ultimately take almost an hour to go to a store and then back home just to ask something you could have asked someone on the phone. I mean because I hate doing that, or you know I didn’t like the phone, I don’t feel comfortable on it, just the fact that at times I don’t like, let’s say I hate cheeseburgers, and I really, really, really want a hamburger but I can’t get hamburger out, I’ll order a cheeseburger and onion rings even if I’m dying for my favorite hamburger and fries because I can say cheeseburger and onion rings fluently but hamburger and fries I couldn’t and so for me just dealing with tiny things like that, I don’t think the average person understands or gets. I mean there are times when I would dumb down, like I’d be in a conversation, most of the time this was with older people that I might be wanting to impress, but I would dumb down so that I could get them to talk more about the subject so that I wouldn’t have to talk even though at times I may have felt like I knew more about it or I knew a interesting fact, I’d keep all that inside because I was afraid that I’d stutter and they’d look at me as nervous or dumb or something like that and so
I don’t think the average person understands how controlling it is over someone’s life.

INTERVIEWER: And those ideas you talked about, about dumbing down or like a mental teleprompter, did those things carry over for you in school also, or were those more separate?

BENJAMIN: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. I mean those things, they didn’t ever show up just in certain situations, I mean it was from the time I opened up my eyes and turned off the alarm until the time I layed my head down to go to bed, they were there in full effect.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how would you describe the school climate for people who stutter, I guess just reflecting back on your school experiences, and just knowing what you know about schools in general right now, how would you describe the school climate for people who stutter? So if you have this five year old who’s about to enter kindergarten, and go through 12 years of school…

BENJAMIN: Right.

INTERVIEWER: …what would you say would be the issues that they would have to face?

BENJAMIN: I would say one would be the lack of knowledge about it because not a lot of teachers seem to know what it was or how to deal with it or how to help the child, that’s one of the biggest things that I can remember is that the, one, the technology and the amount that we knew about it was very, very poor back then and so I mean, I was as far as I know, I mean I was, if not the only, definitely one of the only kids who stuttered at school and so it’s like you’ve got 700 or 800 kids and I didn’t know anyone else who did, and so that was very difficult because no one knew how to help me deal with the emotions when I was a kid or no one was able to say “hey, you know what, you might go through this or when you’re at lunch this might happen but let’s try to attack it from this angle as opposed to having all these false emotions built up inside you” and so I would say lack of knowledge about the subject was the biggest downfall back then,
I’m not saying that kids have got to wear a sign or a special outfit but I just think if teachers, if teachers could be a little more aware and just a little more knowledgeable about the subject, I’m not saying they’ve got to go and take a course on it and this and that but just get some of the basics down, I really do think that that would help because you get out there now who’s 5 or 6 and stutters and “Oh no, what’s wrong with me” and every teacher tries to help him a different way, well that’s just going to confuse the kid to death you know, and so I just think if teachers could be more aware of things to do to help, kind of understand what the kid might be going through and then also if children could go to an NSA group for kids, and like, I think it was back in April I went and talked in front of a group of kids with like 5 or 6 other adults who stuttered, and kind of told them, hey, when I was this age, you know, I went through this, this, and this, and this and this happened to me, and I felt this way but that isn’t the case you know, and so I think that made the kids feel better, and I think that helped give them more confidence and as far as the environment with the other kids, gosh, you know, I mean, some are nice, and some are crazy off the wall, some are calm, I mean you’ve got 30 kids in a class and you’ve got 30 different personalities and so you don’t ever know how they’re going to act and you can’t control that, but I highly recommend it, even if they don’t want to go to therapy or something like that, jus going and sitting in front of a group of adults and asking them things, just so that they know, ok, what I’m going through is ok, it’s common, I shouldn’t feel stupid or bad or dumb because I think that that, if they don’t, then that can really start to have an effect on their confidence and their emotions, which could in turn have a long-term effect on, you know ultimately their life, you know that could be an extreme case but it’s also very possible as well, and so I would try to encourage the kids to talk to the therapists, to go to kind of a group-type thing that, like we did at the [names place] downtown and you know ask other adults who stutter things, maybe get like a
mentor because I’ve thought about doing that as well, being a mentor to the kids because I think I’m still young enough that they like listen to me and take what I have to say seriously without them thinking, ok, I’ve got to go hang out with granddaddy, you know, and I think that that would really help them here [points to head] and then just getting the teachers to be somewhat more knowledgeable about it just so they got an idea of what’s going on.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah I think that teacher’s thing is huge, like if you had a group of teachers at your attention right now, what would you tell them.

BENJAMIN: Oh wow. What would I tell them?

INTERVIEWER: About, you know, just, reflecting on your school experiences, what things should they know or what things should they be aware of?

BENJAMIN: I would say for one that, even though the kid might not show it, he is very, very sensitive to the fact that he does stutter and at this age don’t call him out, because that is one of the biggest and worse things that I ever had to go through, it was XXX third grade and being called out and feeling like I have the weight of the teacher and the entire class just staring at me and if I was a teacher I might even pull them aside and maybe a parent-teacher conference, and just say hey you know I’m aware of this situation what are you comfortable with, what do you enjoy doing, what do you not, just so that they can get a better feel for that child because there could be a kid who stutters and he doesn’t care, he’s fine, he’s still going to talk, he’s still going to do his thing, but there could also be a kid who stutters like me whose very uptight and who does not want any attention drawn to them unless it’s done themselves and so, you know, I might do that, just talk to the parents and kids at once and just say what can I do to help make this a better environment for you and that’ll give them all of the answers they need.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.
BENJAMIN: Because I can’t say one specific thing for every single kid but if they did that I think you’d get input from the parents, you’d get input from the kids, and that’s probably the best advice that I’d give them.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Wow this is all such great information. Ok, I have three more questions for you. And the one is if you were writing an autobiography about your school experiences, so the K-12 school experiences of [says name], what do you think the title be, and then what would some of the themes be?

BENJAMIN: Ah, title.

INTERVIEWER: And you can take a moment to think, I know this is kind of a come-together question.

BENJAMIN: The title would probably be “My name is [says name with an emphasized part-word repetition on the first syllable of his first name]” so there’s a blatant stutter on [his name] as you read the book. What was the second part?

INTERVIEWER: And then what would some of the major themes be to your experience?

BENJAMIN: Major themes. [pause] Give me some examples of what, because right now my brain’s kind of [waves hand back and forth]

INTERVIEWER: Ok, so like, in my particular case, like I would say, cause I actually thought about this myself, my title would probably be Running Against The Wind because one thing about everything that I’ve gone through in school, it was always, I was always running against the current it seems like in every situation, and some of my themes would be like, one would be avoidance because I was always avoiding situations in whatever, whether it’s speaking, raising my hand in class, or volunteering for something, so avoidance would be a theme of mine. I guess for me another theme would probably be insecurity because I was very insecure about myself in
a variety of ways. So I guess just kind of things like, if you just had to like think about major hit-
points in your school experiences.

BENJAMIN: Oh sure, I would, I would definitely talk about avoidance and insecurities but I
would probably try to talk more about certain situations like dating…

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So dating is huge for you.

BENJAMIN: Yeah, like dating or in the classroom, sports, church, and I would probably divide
it up into those types of subjects, and just talk about detailed things that happened with each of
those because I was always very insecure and I would always avoid but, actually you know I
mean, you know, I might just start from the very first time that I realized I stuttered and just go
through the entire kindergarten through twelfth because I think that there’s a common avoidance,
I think there’s a common insecurity, there’s the emotion of being so pumped up and thrilled
when you are fluent and you’re on that two or three day kick and everything you say comes out
perfect and smooth, which is an everyday thing to others, but just how excited and how good you
felt and how much better that made your day to have a fluent day, I would definitely include that
because everybody always, ok, well he avoids, and he might be, might be insecure about the
situation, yet I don’t think people realize how when you’re that age, how good it feels and how
excited you are and how it can take a horrible day but because you were fluent, it was the best
day of your life, you know and I think I would bring out things like that because I’ve been in
situations to where it’s a horrible situation, or it’s a rainy day, you’ve got a flat tire, you’re
fighting with your girlfriend and everything but you know I was fluent and man that was the best
day of my life or I can be at one of the funnest parties of the year and everyone’s having a great
time but the only thing I want to do is go home because I’m so disfluent right now.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
BENJAMIN: I don’t think people realize that it can have that type of impact on you.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

BENJAMIN: So I would bring that up too.

INTERVIEWER: Now what do you think the school experiences are like for people who do not stutter?

BENJAMIN: I think that everyone sort of battles their own demons, I just think that they deal with different issues. You know, it could be an issue at home, it could be some other type of insecurity, so I think that from that aspect everybody’s got their own demons, everybody fights their own battles within, but everybody’s got different things that they deal with. But as far as day-to-day stuff, I think they might XXX school stuff, now I got to do this assignment, but I think they just go through with something they’ve got to do, I think they put as much stress upon themselves as people who stutter do. I mean when you stutter, I mean you fight it in class, you fight it in the hall, you’re thinking about this, it seems like you’re constantly thinking about your speech, and I mean every time it really does take a toll on you. Now there’s other things that go on, but your number one concern all day, or at least with me, was speech, speech, speech, put yourself in the right situation so that you can talk. I think that other kids, you know, they just go through a school day and if they’ve got to read, they read, if they don’t, well then they’ll do their assignment and they’ve got their friends, and, you know, I think it’s a lot less stressful.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. That reminds me of something else I forgot to ask you. Everyone has many issues in school, I mean, we go through a variety of issues in our lives, and where do you think stuttering was in the mix for you, like was it at the beginning, in the forefront, sort of on the backburner, sort of in the middle, when you think about all of the different things that were going on in your life going through school, and all of the many issues and challenges that you’ve
probably had to face, where would you rank stuttering in there?

BENJAMIN: Number one.

INTERVIEWER: Number one, really.

BENJAMIN: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

BENJAMIN: It has always been the biggest thorn in my side. There have been things that have briefly taken place, but speech has always been the biggest battle that I’ve had to fight. Yeah, it’s definitely, definitely, number one on the list.

INTERVIEWER: Now I’ve talked to some people who say that school is difficult for anyone, so you know school is just a tough place.

BENJAMIN: True.

INTERVIEWER: School’s difficult for people who stutter, school’s difficult for any child, so you know why should we I guess be concerned about the school experiences of people who stutter, so I guess how would you respond to a position like that, I mean could stuttering be it’s own animal, so to speak, with its own unique issues and challenges that maybe can’t be, in such a way that it can’t really be compared to other groups or could we say that well yeah school is difficult for people who stutter, school is difficult for any person, so stuttering issues are no different from any other issues that people experience in school?

BENJAMIN: That’s a good question. I think that [pause], or at least from what I’ve seen, that a lot of, that stuttering seems to be one of the few issues that someone can’t control. If you make fun of my shirt or my haircut or say my mom wears moon boots or something like [that], those are all mean, cruel things to say but yet it’s probably by someone who isn’t your friend, and you can change your shirt if you want to or you can somewhat control at least some of the issues that
I’ve seen others being picked on about. For one, stuttering you can’t control, and two, speech, other than writing, is pretty much the only way, the only thing that deals with communication, and so if you’re in school, if you’re depressed or angry or this or that, those are all kind of inner demons, or if someone makes fun of you because of this and that, it all seems to be things you can control, but stuttering you can’t control and it’s one of the few things, I should say, that actually deals with how you communicate with others. Because if you can’t talk, if you can’t get a point across, if you can’t do this and that, then you know you just sit there, because it isn’t like you’re going to write something down on a piece of paper and then hold it up real quick, and so that’s why I think that stuttering, or any type of speech impediment, I should say, can kind of be put into a different group.

INTERVIEWER:  Wow. Lots of light bulbs and goose bumps just went off as you were talking. Because I was thinking let’s say that, I was trying to think of an illustration as you were talking, cause I think that’s so true, let’s say that one of the side streets out here, they’re doing construction on it, well people can just take another route, but, I’m not too familiar with all the main Dallas highways, but if you’re doing construction on a major Dallas highway, that’s like a main highway, a main way to get from point A to point B, so if that highway is damaged, it’s going to really disrupt people’s commutes a lot more than the side streets. So that just occurred to me when you were talking. And so speech is like the main medium of communication.

BENJAMIN:  Yeah, yeah. And cause like kids you know if they can talk and they can do this and do that and they can make this point, and they can say this and that, um, you know they can still talk to parents, teachers, friends, and then get their point across and this and that, but it’s like if you’ve got a speech impediment, it’s like I can’t communicate, I can’t get the point across that I want, I can’t do this, I can’t [pause] socialize XXX, and so that’s why I really do think it can be
put into a different category. Which, I wouldn’t solely say stuttering, I’d throw in a group with all speech impediments.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, well those are all the questions that I had to ask you but is there anything else that you think is important to maybe your experience or to the school experiences of people who stutter in general that maybe didn’t come up in the interview but you feel like is important to say or do you think you’ve sort of covered everything. I guess this is sort of open to any topic or issue that maybe you feel like you want to discuss that didn’t come up in the interview.

BENJAMIN: Um, [pause]. No. No, I mean I feel really good about the things you asked, and I mean I might have gone in an indirect way to answer them and everything but I mean I think you covered a lot of good points.

[Small talk about the transcription and member checking process]

INTERVIEWER: Do you think, so stuttering, how would you say, so where you are right now, does stuttering play a role in where you’re standing right now?

BENJAMIN: Um…

INTERVIEWER: ‘Cause you’re going to go into a career of speech path and…

BENJAMIN: Yes. Um I’ve become a lot more comfortable with it because back in high school most of my therapy was to become fluent to become that fluent speaker, now we’re attacking it more from a mental angle, so that all of these false thoughts that I’ve built over the last 24 years I guess since I first realized that I stuttered, now I’m realizing that they are false. At times, I voluntary stuttered in front of people and did it to the extent that they realize it is a stutter, just to see that people aren’t going to look at me different, people aren’t going to think odd, bad things about me and everything so now it’s, I mean I still got basic techniques and everything that I’ll always carry in my bag. Now we’re trying to deal more with more of the being comfortable with
it and realizing that I’m probably never going to be a fluent speaker but that’s ok. I can still say what I want when I want to who I want and how I want. And so that’s been the biggest change in therapy from when I took it 13 years ago I guess.

BENJAMIN: Ok. Well I guess we’re done.
INTERVIEW WITH “KENNETH”

Date: July 26, 2006

Place: Dallas, TX

INTERVIEWER: Well to start out I’d like to again just say thank you for taking time out of your day and your schedule to do this interview, like I said in the email I think our stories are so just important, so I just thank you again for agreeing to do this interview. I have questions that I’m going to ask but it’s really going to be more of an informal conversation rather than like a “I ask, you answer, I ask, you answer”. So that’s kind of what it will be for the next hour, so I’m just going to kind of leave my questions over here to the side, and if I get done then I’ll kind of refer to it then. But I guess to start off with I was wondering if you could just tell me a little bit about the background of the schools that you went to, like just general demographic information like the size of the school, the location, like rural, suburban, urban, just general demographic information about your elementary schools, your middle schools, and your high school.

KENNETH: Ok. Well I moved a lot as a kid. Um, I’ll start to give you a quick background. I lived until I was 8 years old in New Orleans, then I moved to a suburb of Kansas City, lived there for 2 or 3 years, then moved to a suburb of Milwaukee, then moved to a suburb of Detroit, then moved back to, this time it was a suburb of New Orleans. Um, and then for my, I lived there for my freshman and sophomore year of high school, and then moved to Dallas, and um the junior and senior year of high school in Dallas. So it was um, for elementary school, all the schools were larger suburban schools, um I never lived in a small town, for middle school it was in a suburb of Detroit, and a large middle school, I don’t know how many kids but again it was a large suburb kind of part of the big city. And then for my two high schools, again both of them
were large, the high school I graduated from here in Irving was, gosh I’m trying to remember, it was at least a thousand kids in the school, and so it was [names school]. And so that’s the basics.

INTERVIEWER: So what has your experience been like in school? I guess if you could just walk through, starting with kindergarten and up through twelfth grade. What has your school experience been like?

KENNETH: Um, you know, up through, let’ see, up through, in elementary school it was pretty tumultuous I guess you could say and that didn’t, not related to my stuttering really, it was my family situation, we had, um you know my parents divorced and when they were married it was always unstable, and my mom is a good friend but not a homemaker, and so um you know I got bad grades, and I got into a lot of fights at school, um stuttering was part of that but [there was] a bigger reason behind all the fights and, but in middle school my dad married my stepmom, and I um, she was a homemaker, and she made a home for us, she loved us, and you know my performance in school skyrocketed um, I started getting A’s, and I still got into at least one fight after that but much less, I wasn’t always in conflict with my classmates, and through high school I was never one of the social aristocrats in school, I was um mostly on the lower end of the social scale, but I had friends and enjoyed myself at least from middle school on through high school and I always thought especially in Dallas and Kansas City, Milwaukee, Detroit, I always thought the quality of the schools I went to was very high, great teachers, caring teachers, um highly skilled, New Orleans was so-so, I went to a private school in New Orleans for high school and for elementary, and it was, even though it was private, the education down there just isn’t the same.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. Now when did you first become aware that you were a person who stutters?
KENNETH: As early as I can remember. Um, as early as I can remember, I remember going to, a um, my parents set me up with a therapist that came to my house, I remember, and she would take me out on field trips, and um, it was, and my uncle is a person who stutters, um, he passed away a while ago. But um, so yeah as early as I can remember I’ve been aware.

INTERVIEWER: And you said that school was difficult for you for some reasons, what role did stuttering play, would you say, in your school experiences?

KENNETH: You know it played some role, I mean I did, kids did make fun of me for my stuttering, um, let me think back to this, [pause], I don’t remember, I do remember some, being made fun of some, but I really don’t remember being made of that much. I don’t remember it being a big issue. I think my, like I said I had behavior problems, but I don’t think it was, I think it was mostly related to home-related things.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

KENNETH: Yeah, so. And as far as stuttering hampering my obtaining an education [pause], you know I don’t ever remember that, I remember speaking in front of the class was anxiety ridden, but I don’t remember that being as really a big issue until college ‘cause I don’t remember them being, well no I take that back, in high school it was, but I don’t ever remember it, well, I definitely did pick my times to ask questions in front of the class, I might have been more of a motor mouth if it wasn’t for my stuttering, but if I really wanted to know something I don’t ever remember not raising my hand and stumbling along.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So that sort of leads to my next question, how would you describe your classroom participation, I guess, through school, elementary, middle, and high school?

KENNETH: Um, in elementary, and to some extent, middle school, I would say that it was limited as far as speaking in class, um, I just don’t remember there being as much of an
opportunity to even speak in class, and I don’t remember doing it very much. In high school, there was more opportunity, and I even remember a speech class in particular and um I remember liking the speech class and I remember actively participating in it, um. And like I said for my other classes if I really wanted to know the answer to a question I always raised my hand, but I did pick my moments, I was um, I just didn’t raise my hand at a whim.

INTERVIEWER: Now what was the severity of your stuttering like when you were going through school? How would you describe that?

KENNETH: I would describe it as moderate. Um, I definitely had big blocks, um there were times where I felt like I just couldn’t talk or if I could, usually I could finally get out what I wanted to say, there were never situations where I just had to give up and not say it, but there were certainly times where it was a big struggle to get things out, so moderate, and I think that’s true through high school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. What about your academic performance? How did you do academically in school?

KENNETH: Um, elementary school was bad. I had a lot of behavior problems. Poor grades, my grades were C’s and D’s through elementary school, and then in middle school through high school it was mostly A’s and a few B’s mixed in.

INTERVIEWER: So in elementary school, what would you attribute that too, the fact that you got B’s and C’s mostly?

KENNETH: C’s and D’s.

INTERVIEWER: Or C’s and D’s.

KENNETH: You know what, I think I would just attribute it to a tumultuous family life. And it wasn’t as if you know I had this horrible, I mean we had our issues, but you know I had a home
and I had clothes and I was fed and I was taken care of. I don’t know if, ‘cause I do remember I would swim in elementary school. Toward the end of elementary school especially I was definitely a social misfit, and XXX much of that was due to my stuttering and my, it’s just hard to tell what caused it, I definitely was, I’m definitely I think an introverted person regardless of my stuttering, and I, did my stuttering cultivate that introvertedness, probably. And did that, was that a role in me being a social misfit, probably a role but probably not the whole picture. And so, I would say stuttering was “a” factor but not a determining factor in my performance, probably a small factor, in the mix, but not a big part of it.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. How about participation in extracurricular activities in school?

KENNETH: I wouldn’t say it was a factor at all, my, I’ve always just focused on athletics, it was mostly swimming and I just remember swimming took up so much of my time, I didn’t want to do anything else. I don’t know that I had time to do anything else, and so, and you don’t have to talk when you’re swimming so, so I just did that and I don’t think stuttering played a role in me choosing swimming, I think my parents introduced me to a group of sports, they definitely wanted me to do something athletic, and I liked swimming and tennis.

INTERVIEWER: Now how about your relationships with teachers going through school, what were your teacher relationships like?

KENNETH: They were [pause] even in elementary school when I was a troublemaker I always thought with the exception of perhaps one teacher, and I’m not even sure about her, but I always thought that they cared about me and that they made an effort and I think maybe being a stutterer, a person who stutters, maybe even helped those relationships because I was someone special. And so they spent more time on me, and I was certainly someone special because of my behavior problems, but I always thought that the teachers were frustrated with me, but that they
cared about me and that their frustration came from caring and not from “we hate this kid, let’s kick him out”. And then my, I think through middle school and high school, I always had good relationships, mostly because I enjoyed class and I wanted to well and I was interested in the material.

INTERVIEWER: So it sounds like most of your teacher relationships were pretty positive…

KENNETH: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have any negative experiences with teachers regarding your speech in particular?

KENNETH: Regarding my speech [pause] I can’t remember any teacher ever insulting me because of my speech or calling me out in front of a class. I can’t remember anything but, I don’t even remember it with my main teachers, I don’t even remember discussing it with any of my teachers except for when I was sent to therapy and discussing it with the therapist of course at school but I don’t ever remember discussing it but I do remember thinking that they were sympathetic.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So then you had therapy, you said a therapist came to your house, and you also had therapy in the schools as well?

KENNETH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

KENNETH: And therapies outside of school as I got older going to their office, yeah I had a bunch of therapy.

INTERVIEWER: And what was that experience like going through therapy, I guess particularly in the schools, for you?
KENNETH: In the schools, I remember it being, you know I don’t remember any meaningful progress from it. I mean I remember that they were very nice and we talked about it and, but I don’t remember thinking “wow, I’m going to therapy and my speech is really improving”, I don’t ever remember that.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how about, I know you went to a lot of different schools, but your friendships or peer relationships, what were those like. I know since you’ve changed schools, I don’t know if you’ve ever had, you know you probably didn’t have a friend, any friends that followed you throughout your school career because you changed schools a lot, but what were your peer relationships like when you were in the schools that you were in?

KENNETH: In, let’s see here [pause], I guess in kindergarten, kindergarten I remember having good, solid peer relationships, I don’t remember being a social misfit at all, in fact I remember being one of the cool people. And then in elementary school, especially [pause] especially after I moved from New Orleans and Kansas City and through to Detroit, I remember usually being a social misfit and becoming more and more of a social misfit as time went on. And so I had, I had some friends, I remember having one, well I don’t even know if that started in elementary school. I don’t know that I remember any close friends in elementary school. In middle school I had, I started to have close friends as my home life improved and as my grades improved I remember having one very close friend and I remember through high school I was friends with cool people but I was not a cool person. And so that’s how I describe it. But I have good friends from my last school, from high school, I have two guys that I still am close with.

INTERVIEWER: Now that term you used, being a social misfit, was that would you say be due to behavior problems that you were exhibiting, just due to things that you were going through with your family or?
KENNETH: I think it was probably a combination, I mean if I was fluent, would I have made good friends despite all the behavior problems, maybe, I think that my behavior problems combined with speaking being a task, yeah, I think it all played a role in me being, not having a lot of friends.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

KENNETH: I mean combined that was just way too much for me to get past and have a healthy social life.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now would you describe, would you say, the school climate for people who stutter? So let’s say that you know you have a person whose five-years old they’re about to enter 12 years of schooling, what would you say, think about your own school experiences and just what you know about school, what you say would be the school climate for people who stutter? What issues and challenges do you think they would face?

KENNETH: You know from my experience I think they would be presented with teachers that care and want to help but that are not equipped to do the job. I don’t even know if, because they kind of, I remember, you know these therapists that the school have, it’s kind of a one fits all speech therapist for every problem, you know, and stuttering alone is such a big thing to get a handle on, and so I think you know especially in the schools I think it was a, kind of a cookie cutter approach, they knew these techniques that they had read in a book and if a person who stutters came to them, they did them, and if they worked they worked, but they didn’t know what else to do, there was no tailoring to this person who stutters. And I think that, I don’t know, I don’t think, my schools didn’t have that skill, didn’t have the resources, or at least didn’t have the staff, that could tailor a therapy program to a particular stutterer, and so, and I would be surprised if the schools today do.
INTERVIEWER: So if you had a group of teachers at your attention what would you probably tell them, what types of, I guess, suggestions, or I guess if you had to talk to them about the experience of what a person who stutters goes through in school or any type of advice, what would you probably tell school teachers if you had them at your attention?
KENNETH: I would tell them to be patient, give the person who stutters a little more time to say what they need to say, I would say to, and this I think is a hard concept, and a concept that the NSA has taught me and it’s a concept that I’m still learning, is to accept the person who stutters as a person who stutters, even if you care about them, even if you want to help them improve their fluency, to accept them as a person who stutters, and in fact, if you want them to improve their fluency, you got to take that first step, you got to accept them where they are.
INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I agree with that too.
KENNETH: And so be patient, be accepting, and don’t, don’t pressure them but don’t treat them differently, don’t leave them out of activities, speaking activities just because they’re a person who stutters, but at the same time don’t pressure them to, I guess encourage them to participate in all the same speaking activities that all the other kids do, encourage them to make that choice but don’t force them to it if they’re just scared to death and just don’t want to do it at that particular time I guess.
INTERVIEWER: Ok. And that’s a good issue that you bring up, I guess the idea of accommodations, like there’re some people who stutter in school who, you know, some people give presentations in front of the entire class, some people do it just to the teachers, some people do it on videotape, there are different ways that people who stutter are accommodated, what are your thoughts on different types of accommodations for people who stutter in school?
KENNETH: You know I think the accommodation has got to be tailored to each particular stutterer, I think in an ideal world the person who stutters is going to have to have the courage to step up, and even though they may sound horrible, is going to have the courage to step up and do all the same things that fluent speaking people do. But at the same time if they’re not ready to make that choice, if they’re not of their own free will ready to do those types of things, and you, like the analogy of throwing a kid in the water who doesn’t want to learn how to swim yet, there’s going to be, I think there’s going to be a lot of emotional damage there. So work with them, encourage them to make the choice to take all these risks and make courageous steps, but don’t force them, and if it’s a situation where a kid’s just not ready, then yeah, I think you should give them accommodation. I think if it means giving a speech just in front of the teacher, do that. And it’s a tough situation though because you don’t want to, I think while you’re giving that accommodation, you got to continue the encouragement to give up that accommodation. So that’s the way I would put it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that’s a good, ‘cause this is really not written about a lot, you know, accommodations. I was talking to a professor whose blind and we were talking about, because the issue of fairness came up, she’s like there’s a difference between just and fair. She’s like if you a five-year old, a 30 year old, and a 82 year old, and you want them to help you carry some things out of your house. Fair means everyone carries 30 pounds, that’s fair, but is it really appropriate for a 5 year old or an 82 year old, so fair isn’t really just.

KENNETH: Exactly.

INTERVIEWER: So it kind of alludes to what you just said, is tailoring it to the person but still being encouraging at the same time.
KENNETH: Yeah, so it’s hard and that puts a lot of subjectivity in the hands of the teachers but I don’t see any other way to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Now there are certain experiences that are visible, that are observable, like, if you were to ask any person off the street “what do you think a person who stutters would go through in school” they could probably tell you things like “well I would probably think that a person who stutters would have difficulty raising their hand or they may have difficulty doing an oral presentation in front of the classroom”, those are things that they could just name just by intuition, and those experiences are something that you can see. But there are other experiences that are more subtle, more hidden, there are things that people go through that no one else would even know that you would go through, like no one else would even know that it’s an issue for you, unless they were in your shoes or unless they told you specifically. So what do you think, I guess for you personally for people who stutter in general, what do you think those “behind-the-scenes” experiences are – issues and challenges and experiences that you’ve had to face in school, or that people who stutter may face in school, that people just may not know about, because they’re not in your shoes.

KENNETH: You know the thing that comes to mind, and it’s not, I think it’s something that applies to everything you do not just to school but I think what people don’t see is, and Dan Fredrickson, I’ve got to give him credit because he gave a presentation on this a few meetings back and it really hit me, is this, I think he articulated this emotional baggage that we carry around. These thoughts that roll around in our head like “My stuttering sounds horrible, I’m embarrassing my friends, I’ll never achieve anything, My stuttering will always hold me back, I suck at this, I can’t speak and so I’m never going to be good at this, I hate this” – all these thoughts, all these negative thoughts, they, when you get into a block, you have a frustrating
speaking situation, they just flood your mind like that [snaps fingers] and they just weigh on you without you even, sometimes not being aware of each individual thought, they just flood your head and they weigh you down, and I think that affects your interactions with people, I think it affects your concentration in class, I think it affects, I mean it just affects your attitude in general which carries over to, you know, all sorts of activities in school, how you’re paying attention to the teacher, whether you feel like walking up to somebody and striking up a conversation, I think it’s just that, it’s that behind-the-scenes baggage that therapists I think for a long time didn’t see, I think they’re beginning to see it, I think we didn’t see it ‘cause like I said it just floods you and you don’t think about it, but it’s there and it affects you.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that’s something that made me think there are certain times when I was in the classroom and you know the teacher would say that everyone, I was in one classroom where there was going to be an oral part at the end where the teacher wanted each of us to say something, but it was going to be at the end, so during the entire class I could not focus on the lecture or what she was saying and that affected me because you know no one, unless you stutter or unless you have a close friend who stutters, an instructor wouldn’t even think that that wouldn’t even be an issue, that the person wouldn’t be paying attention in class because they’re going through all this negative self-talk, you know, they’re just thinking about it and it’s weighing heavily on their mind, that their flooding themselves with negative self-talk and it’s affecting them through the entire lecture.

KENNETH: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So I mean it’s like you said there’s so much mental, there’s so much negative self-talk that you tell yourself that could affect you in the classroom, that’s interesting.
KENNETH: And it just floods, I mean it floods so much of your thought life, it takes over so much of your thought life, and that’s thought life that you can’t apply to the teacher in front of you, the book in front of you, the social opportunities in front of you, I mean it really is frustrating to think back and even to a certain extent currently how that can invade your thought life.

INTERVIEWER: Now was pretty typical of your school experiences, would you say, was the negative self-talk and not being able to I guess focus on the teacher or affecting your social relations, was that pretty typical of you would you say or some of the time maybe.

KENNETH: I would say not all the time, I think it would happen, sometimes it would kind of sneak up on me, I wouldn’t be thinking about it, well, let me think about this for a second [pause] I mean I always devoted a lot of my thought life to how I was going to say something and whether I was going to stutter, and things like that, so that wasn’t a constant but the flood of negative feelings and thoughts that just took over your whole head, that wasn’t a constant, it would come after a huge block, a huge embarrassing block, just a frustrating day, but it wasn’t there always.

INTERVIEWER: Now did you ever try to hide your stuttering or mask your stuttering or were there ever things you did in school to just, you know, mask it or hide it?

KENNETH: Yeah. You know, and it’s, I think of myself as a wanna be covert stutterer because I’m not, I’ve never been good enough to be completely covert stutterer, well especially when I was trying to be a covert stutterer, I was never even close to being, but I would still try, I think I was, I always wanted to be the guy that used to stutter, “I used to stutter but now listen to me, I’ve improved and I don’t stutter anymore” and I was constantly trying to be that. So yeah I would use different words, not say it at all, you know I was never, I don’t know that I’m smart
enough to switch the words like hear some people talk about, I mean they are so good at it, it
takes a lot of intelligence and a healthy vocabulary to do the things they do, so like I say I tried
but wasn’t always successful. But somewhere along the way, fairly early on, I think and I don’t
remember when, I got the idea in my head, some therapist put the idea in my head that don’t, if
you do that you’re going to make your stuttering worse, so have the courage to say the word.
And I don’t think I got that in elementary school, I might have gotten that in high school
sometime.

INTERVIEWER: Now school can be difficult and challenging for a variety of reasons, and
you’ve already mentioned some of those reasons with your family situation. So just thinking
about everything that you’ve had to go through in school, just different issues and challenges,
where would you rank stuttering in the mix, would it at the backburner, in the middle, at the
front, I guess where would you rank stuttering among all of the other issues that you’ve had to go
through in school?

KENNETH: Thinking back objectively I would rank it as [pause] objectively I would say it was
a moderate issue, I would rank it in the middle somewhere on my list of challenges, but
subjectively at the time I mean it was everything, it was the biggest problem, everything
revolved around my stuttering so while I was there I always thought of it as the biggest deal and
it definitely took up most of my thought life, but objectively looking back it really was in the
middle of the pack, it definitely wasn’t the biggest challenge I had.

INTERVIEWER: Now if you were writing an autobiography of your K-12 experiences, the K-
12 experiences of Chris, what do you think the title would be, and then what would some of the
themes be?

KENNETH: [Pause] One of the themes would be certainly all the time wasted because I did not
I did not address in any way during that time the emotional baggage that comes along with being a person who stutters. No therapist ever talked about it with me, at least not explicitly. And of course I could feel that emotional baggage but I never even thought about it, I just, I always was focused on the techniques, and it was all about the techniques, and the emotional side of it just wasn’t, it wasn’t part of therapy, and so, and then talking with teenagers now, like teenagers who’ve been, like that teenager last night [at the NSA support group meeting], and who had been to a conference…

INTERVIEWER: Wasn’t that great!

KENNETH: I’m just, man, I wish I had that! I wish I had that when I was his age, I wish, and you know I wish could take back some of that time, so that would be one of the themes, it would be absence of emotional therapy, and how it made the techniques close to useless, at least on a long-term basis. I think it would be, another [pause] so and this would be an autobiography just on anything, just about my life not necessarily focused on stuttering or would it be…

INTERVIEWER: Well this is particularly for your K-12 school experiences, but if you wanted to talk about that also, that’s also ok.

KENNETH: But K-12 experiences focused on my stuttering or just K-12 experiences period.

INTERVIEWER: I guess K-12 experiences period, so stuttering would be in there too.

KENNETH: So yeah, so that would definitely be a big chapter, a big theme. Another chapter and theme would my step-mom and what a difference making a home for me made in the classroom, the difference was stark. Another chapter would be athletics, swimming was a big part of my school experience, a great part of my school experience, so there would be a lot on that. Another chapter would be on how I wished, how I appreciated the academic and the aspect of learning for the fun of learning, I appreciated a little bit of that but for the most part I missed
that, and when I went back to law school I got that fully, I really had a lust for learning and appreciated learning for the sake of learning instead of a degree or a grade, and so I would have a chapter on that and how, how I approached learning as opposed to how I approach it now. And the title of the book [pause] the title of the book would be [pause]
INTERVIEWER: And if you can’t come up with one, that’s fine too
KENNETH: Yeah
INTERVIEWER: Yeah, ‘cause really the themes, yeah ‘cause it’s hard, ‘cause that’s like summing up your entire life, your entire school, I mean that’s kind of hard.
KENNETH: Something along the lines of “Slow Rocky Start, But Fruitful Ending”
INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how would you describe the school experiences of people who don’t stutter?
KENNETH: You know for the most part, that’s a hard question, I think that they obviously don’t have, well [pause] in many ways I would say that it would be similar ‘cause maybe they didn’t have the emotional baggage of being a person who stutters but I mean people have emotional baggage about all sorts of stuff, and I’m sure they had things that their, negative thoughts that flooded their head because of issues that they had blown out of proportion. And I don’t feel like my stuttering kept me from participating in or for the most part learning anything despite the distraction that stuttering could have anymore than anybody else ‘cause I think they’ve got distractions as well. Maybe they were thinking about things as the teacher was talking so I guess I would say similar but different, similar bottom lines but different details.
INTERVIEWER: I like that. So that kind of leads to the next question, if, there’s some people who I’ve talked to who say that school is difficult for anyone. School is difficult for any person who goes through school so why should, school experiences of people who stutter are really no
different than the school experiences of any person ‘cause school is just difficult for anyone. So I
guess how would you respond to that, do you think that school is difficult for everyone, and
people who stutters’ school experiences are really no different than anyone elses’ or can we
separate stuttering out as kind of its own little issue. Are there unique issues and unique
challenges that people who stutter face that maybe other people don’t face, or can we put
stuttering in the mix and say, well yeah, school is just difficult for anyone. So school is a
challenge for everyone. So how would you respond to that?
KENNETH: I think, yeah I think school is a challenge for everyone but no I don’t think you can
lump stuttering in with all the rest of the challenges and I think that it depends on the person who
stutters. I think that [pause] even though I was a moderate stutterer, somewhere along the way,
whether it was through my parents or whoever, I was encouraged to take risks and never let it get
in my way even if it was a struggle, never let it get in the way of the bottom line, but it very
easily could have been different especially if, you know if I was a severe stutterer or if I was a
moderate stutterer who was just filled with disabling fear, which can very easily happen and
happens for different reasons, it can have a huge effect on, it could have had a much bigger effect
on my school experience, so that’s the first point I would make is that it depends on the person
who stutters. The second thing I would say is that the good thing about stuttering is, it is, the
good and the bad thing is, it is an out-in-the-open problem and it’s something that we can
identify and it’s something that we can treat, and everybody else I think does have all sorts of
other different types of problems, but what’s tough about them is they’re hard, you don’t see
them, they’re hard to isolate, they’re harder to treat, and so ideally if we could address all these
different challenges, and we do, I mean I think schools address a lot of different challenges, but I
think we need to address all the challenges we can, and stuttering is definitely a discreet, identifiable, treatable challenge that we absolutely should address. That’s what I would say.

INTERVIEWER: I like that. Yeah I was talking to someone else who, they said something very similar to what you had said, you know, he had said that, well, if you think about it, speech is the main medium by which we communicate, so you know, and something that came to my mind, you know, it’s sort of like if you’re doing construction on the side streets, well people will be inconvenienced but if like “75” [major Dallas freeway] or some of the major streets, if there was construction on some of those streets, it would be a much bigger inconvenience ‘cause those are major thoroughfares or highways, so speech is like the main sort of medium by which people communicate. So if it’s impaired, that’s going to present itself as a challenge.

KENNETH: Yep

INTERVIEWER: So is there anything else that you think is central to your school experience, or to the school experiences of people who stutter, that maybe didn’t come up in the interview or wasn’t addressed here, anything, I guess before we close.

KENNETH: [Pause] Can’t think of anything that we didn’t address.

INTERVIEWER: I did want to ask you one more thing. You said that everyone had the same bottom line but different details, I guess what do you think those details are for people who stutter?

KENNETH: Well, and let me say this, that my bottom line, for me, my experience, my bottom line I think is similar to the average person who doesn’t stutter, but the details of our challenges are different, so the details of my challenges, I think, would be these negative thoughts about how my speech affects my performance in school, how people look at me, what they think of me, they’re going to think I’m stupid, all this blown up, out of proportion negative feelings that flood
your head, that’s a big challenge, you know, that’s one of the details of my challenges in school, another detail would be, just the objective difficulty sometimes of articulating what I wanted to say. And articulating it the way I wanted to say it. It definitely, objectively, it was, that was affected, I think generally I got across the substance that I wanted to get across, but I didn’t always get all the details, and I didn’t always get it the way I wanted to, so that’s a challenge. And, I mean those are the two big challenges, and that first one, that emotional side of it affects so much, I mean it’s a challenge that snowballs irrationally, I mean it doesn’t, it shouldn’t, you know these thoughts, these blown-up thoughts are not rational thoughts, but they’re there and they happen and it snowballs to affect a lot of different things.

INTERVIEWER: Now being an attorney, I’m sure you have to talk to people a lot and talk on the phone a lot, was there any relationship between stuttering and the choice that you decided to make for your career, was that an issue for you or is that something you deal with now.

KENNETH: You know it was, it’s definitely an issue, I mean communication, oral communication is a huge part of my job. But what’s maybe a little ironic is that I, I have a real passion for oral communication, for public speaking, for trial work, for, and so I had a passion for being a trial attorney, I wanted to be a trial attorney, I knew what it was all about, I knew that being a person who stutters, it was going to be a challenge, but I had just such a passion for it, there was no way that being a person who stutters was going to get in the way of it.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

KENNETH: I can tell even with this job, this is a great job, I have very understanding bosses, I’m really lucky to have this job, and the first conversation we had after she hired me, she sat me down and said “we know you’re a person who stutters” – obviously, ‘cause I mean I stutter a lot, especially on my internship – “and we don’t care. If you never, if your fluency remains where it
is now until the end of time, we’re fine, we hired you because of this, this, and this, and we’re excited to have you. But a big part of your job is oral communication, and so if there is therapy that you can obtain, and it’s possible for you to improve your fluency, I think it will serve you well.” And so right from the get-go, I mean that’s the first conversation we had, so it’s obviously is an issue but it’s never kept me from being a trial attorney or from getting the cases I wanted. I went, before I got this job, I did sit through a list of interviews and was rejected by all the firms. I was even rejected for this job at the first interview, I got if after doing a volunteer clerkship, and they could see what I can do. Did my stuttering have anything to do with those rejections? Honestly, I don’t know because it wasn’t a case where I was, I was, I had a solid resume, I had a good resume, and I was qualified for those jobs, but I was not the cream of the crop, and the firms I was interviewing with, including this place, they hired the cream of the crop, and I, you know I was kind of on the line, and so was it that I really had to impress them in the interview, or impress them in some other way and I just didn’t quite do it, or did the stuttering play a role in it, I don’t know, you know, I choose to believe that if it did play a role, it played a small role. But I really don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.
INTERVIEW WITH “DAVID”

Date: July 26, 2006
Place: Dallas, TX

INTERVIEWER: This is basically going to be a discussion about your school experiences so I have questions here but I’m going to lay them to the side, this really will just be an informal conversation between the two of us. So to start off with, I’m wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the schools that you went to. Just general background, demographic information about your elementary schools, your middle schools, and your high school, things like the size of the schools, the location, was it in a rural, urban, or suburban area, just general background information about the schools that you’ve gone to K-12.

DAVID: Ok. I believe all of my schools have been urban, urban schools, they’ve all been in smaller towns all the way through school. They’ve been smaller schools.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now I’m wondering if you could just talk at length about what your experience has been like in school, so if you start in kindergarten and just walk me up through the twelfth grade, and just talk about what your experiences in school have been like.

DAVID: Ok. I still remember kindergarten very vividly actually, I remember being in kindergarten and not really knowing why I talked differently than the rest of the kids did. So it was a bit awkward but I really, I wasn’t really ashamed of the way I talked and I was well liked so I wasn’t teased really at all, I mean almost none. And we moved a couple of times but each time I moved to a new school I get to run fast and that made me like a higher echelon I guess of the kids, I was more or less off limits to be teased or picked on a little bit because I was fast so it really wasn’t bad in school but as it got older, second, third, fourth grade, and it became more of an issue mostly to myself more than the other kids.
INTERVIEWER: Ok. And can you elaborate on that? What do you mean by it became more of an issue for yourself?

DAVID: I just became more withdrawn, I really didn’t like to talk, I didn’t want to read out loud, I didn’t want to raise my hand or answer questions, so I basically played dumb a lot to not direct attention to myself and most of the teachers were fairly understanding of my not wanting to talk but once in a while we’d go up and down the other rows to read out loud, there’s a couple of times I’d kind of look at her and like [shakes his head “no] and she’d jump me and go to the next person but every once in a while they’d say, No you have to read, and there was a couple of times where I just said, No. They said, well you have to read, and I said, Well, No. You know, No. I wouldn’t do it and they backed off, you know they couldn’t, I mean they really, they really didn’t want to start issues with me or anything.

INTERVIEWER: And what grade were you in, or how old were you when this happened, when you said “No.”

DAVID: Probably 2nd or 3rd grade I think, somewhere around there.

INTERVIEWER: Now when did you first become aware that you were a person who stutters?

DAVID: Before kindergarten. Well, I mean I knew that there was something different or wrong but I wasn’t sure how or what or why but I knew that there was something wrong with the way I talked.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now would you describe your academic performance through school, kindergarten through twelfth grade?

DAVID: It was very bad actually. It was bad, yeah. It was bad.

INTERVIEWER: Why so?
DAVID: I, I don’t know, I think I had ADD but back then it wasn’t a known thing like it is now, but I mean I learned fast but I didn’t want to go back and learn the same thing day after day after day, and in school that’s what you do, you do your, like a little kid you add and the next day you add some more and add some more, then you get stuff to take home and add, and I knew, and I was done with it.

INTERVIEWER: So it was more attentional issues?

DAVID: I think so. I think so.

INTERVIEWER: Now did stuttering play a role in your academic performance, in your opinion?

DAVID: Yeah, I think it did too because I didn’t want to get involved with anything at all and uh, and you know by not getting involved was to be one of those bad students, you know, who didn’t get, you know, so I sat in the back and we’d would goof off mostly during my time in school. But it was really I never think it was in the 7th or 8th grade that they took a bunch of us who weren’t doing well in math and they stuck us in this separate class and they had, it’s a card file with a whole bunch of cards and each day you’re supposed to get one of those cards and do that [imitates picking up a card] each day they had all kinds of different types of math, and it didn’t matter what you got you just had to get one each day, XXX I liked that, and I still made a B or A instead of making a F because I got to do what I want to do and learn as fast as I was wanting to do them, so you know I was doing two a day or three a day, so I knew I wasn’t dumb but I just didn’t want to get involved in school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And what do you mean by not getting involved in school? Like what specifically?
DAVID: Like participate in, you know, discussions or, you know, anything like that. I was basically was wanting to be in the back of the room and not be seen or heard.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

DAVID: That’s where I spent most of my school years.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. ‘Cause that sort of led to my next question about how you would describe your classroom participation going all the way through school?

DAVID: Yeah. Virtually nonexistent early. You know, like most stutterers when there’s all talk going on and you’re sitting there and you’re wanting to say something, we can wait and wait until we know the words will come out so I used to blurt out stuff, and of course half the time they’d say “I’m sorry could you repeat that” and you’re thinking, No way, No I can’t, so I got in trouble a lot for that, you know, for not raising my hand, ‘cause if you wait and raise your hand, they call on you, now you have to talk right then but as long as I wasn’t expected to talk I could sit there and wait until the words would come out and I would just say them. So it makes it easier.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. Now how about your extracurricular activities? Um, how were extracurricular activities for you?

DAVID: We lived out in the country so there was really no one around really. So I really didn’t do much in sports even though I was fast, even though, you know, my parents didn’t want to take us back to town, you know, back and forth each day so I really didn’t get involved much at all.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now what were your relationships like, first with your teachers, and then with your peers, if you had to describe K-12, your teacher relationships first and then your peer relationships. What were those like?
DAVID: Uh, Teachers were more or less good, I mean they knew that it was difficult for me to talk, to talk in class, and they usually didn’t push me, not much at all, I had some who just didn’t care, they just let me be quiet but I had some who were very nice and they praised you a lot, which I don’t like that, I don’t like being praised really at all.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. What do you mean by raised [interviewer misunderstood]?

DAVID: Praised. Praised, you know for doing a good job on something.

INTERVIEWER: Praised, ok, I gotcha

DAVID: And I really don’t like still.

INTERVIEWER: And why is that?

DAVID: I guess I don’t deserve it I guess.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

DAVID: I mean I, I feed off of negative energies more than positive, you know, the more people who are against me, the more resolved I am, the resilient I am, I like being the one under attack, you know, alone, being attacked by world, I feel like that’s my safe place for some reason but I don’t need to be you know told you did a good job, I just don’t really need it really. And a lot times if you do something really good, everyone comes and XXX a lot of times their trying to be nice, you know, they’re trying to help you out, you know, make you feel good, but for me it’s more embarrassing than anything else.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now how about your peers, your peer relationships?

DAVID: I was well-liked in school, I mean after about the 5th grade or 6th grade our schools broke up in groups, you know we had the jocks, the preps, the stomps, the XXX, we had all those little groups, and I was allowed to bounce around between them all, but I had no real tight friendships, though, really. I mean I was well-liked but not actually one of any group really.
INTERVIEWER: Ok. And how would you describe the school climate for people who stutter? So if you had this five-year old who stutters, who’s just about to enter kindergarten and go through twelve years of school, how would you describe the school climate, just based on your own experience and knowing what you know about schools, what issues and challenges would they face going through school?

DAVID: Um, like I said I was lucky in school and I had that ability you know, to like be, you know way out of it, but most kids you know don’t have that, and they’re you know brutalized in school.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And why do you say that?

DAVID: Um, I mean like in school there, there was kids in school who had really nothing wrong with them but they just got you know singled out to be abused you know. The other kids were just horrible to them. I don’t know why or whether they done wrong they weren’t as odd as me, or as you know, or as, they fit in more than I did but they were just I mean, I mean now I look back and I admire them for not falling apart. XXX They were picked on daily for walking down the halls and it was just you know very bad on them.

INTERVIEWER: Now there are some experiences that are visible, experiences that are observable, so if you were to ask a person on the street, What do you think a person who stutters goes through in school, they would probably say things like reading aloud in class, maybe raising their hand in class, there are certain things that they can probably figure out by intuition and experiences that are observable, and you can see. But there are other experiences that are more hidden and more subtle, and people wouldn’t even know that you go through these things unless they were in your shoes or unless you told them. So what do you think those “behind-the-scenes” experiences are for people who stutter, those experiences that are hidden and subtle and not
really “out there”. People wouldn’t know that they go through that unless they were in your shoes. I guess for you personally, for people who stutter in general

DAVID: I think the lack of being accepted you know is very painful for kids, you know the social environment, their self-esteem gets very low, a lot of them are angry so they turn to violence you know to make kids leave them alone or...

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

DAVID: …Things like that, or as you get older, drugs or illegal activities and stuff. And I don’t think that most people realize the emotional damage that kids have done to them.

INTERVIEWER: So if you had a group of school teachers at your attention right now, what would you tell them about the experience of people who stutter and maybe suggestions to them? What do you think school teachers need to know about the school experience of people who stutter based on your own experience?

DAVID: I think they need to talk, you know I mean there’s not one answer, say you know you treat kids who stutter like this, you know you treat this one like this, and this one like this, and this one like this, and for me I think the best thing they can do is talk to each student alone and not just the ones who stutter, the kids who are overweight or real thin or if there’s like a minority like a small group of Blacks and Hispanics or Whites and talk to them, and find out what each student needs. You know, some kids need to be told you know to quit feeling sorry for yourself, and stand up for yourself, and get off your butt, and some need more easy on, and take them along real easily, and try to get them more social and more involved, and work on their self-esteem, but each one might need a completely different thing.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. You talked about emotions and self-esteem. What was that like for you personally in school?
DAVID: Mine was absolute zero from the time I was, it got bad maybe about 9 or 10 or 11 years old, my self esteem and self worth was at zero. And I’m not sure why because I was liked at school, I wasn’t teased, I had a great mom and dad, my sisters and my brother always looked out for me, they didn’t tease me ever, you know. I was a kid but still I wound up with no self-esteem at all.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. And you said you don’t why or what you would attribute that too?

DAVID: Not really I mean there’s kids I know who had life worse than me, had less friends, they weren’t liked at all, or they had one or two small group of friends and they seemed to have good self-esteem and confidence and I just didn’t get that.

INTERVIEWER: Now many people go through many issues in school. School can be difficult for a lot of reasons. So I guess in your personal experience of going through school K-12, where would you rank stuttering in the mix in comparison to all the other issues that may have been going on in your life. Was stuttering at the forefront, was it on the backburner, was it in the middle.

DAVID: It was at the very top, and the next one was far back.

INTERVIEWER: So stuttering was at the top, you said?

DAVID: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: It was at the top?

DAVID: Yeah. I dwelt on that daily, you know, hourly.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

DAVID: And it ate me up, I mean it ate me alive for years and years and years.
INTERVIEWER: And what were some of the consequences of that? I guess particularly school-related. You said stuttering was at the forefront, you thought about it hourly, it ate you alive.

Were there any consequences for you in school because of that?

DAVID: Yeah, like I didn’t learn as much as I should have, I didn’t get involved in clubs or groups or socialize much in school.

INTERVIEWER: Really. Ok.

DAVID: And I remember when I was like in the 11th or 12th grade, and everyone one of the kids had a college book, where you know if you wanted a degree you had to have three math classes, three English, two of this, I remember looking at the list and I saw speech class. Speech, that was a mandatory class, I saw that and I was like [pretends to close a book], That’s it. I’m done. You know, I mean that erased you know all the XXX from my mind completely right there. It was done. No college. I lost out on a lot. I did.

INTERVIEWER: So if you were writing an autobiography about your school experiences from K-12, so if there was going to be a book about the school experiences K-12 of Don, what would the title of that be, and then what would some of the themes be?

DAVID: Title?

INTERVIEWER: Or if you can’t even think of a title, what would some of the major hit-points, what would some of the major themes be, in your school experience story?

DAVID: I think I’d probably hit on the educational aspect, the self-esteem, the social, and the effects that all three of those have on your outcome.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And what do you mean specifically about the educational impact?
DAVID: Like I said I didn’t want to get involved in the class at all, I didn’t want to participate, I didn’t want to be put in a situation where I had to talk more in school, so I didn’t take no classes like that.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now what do you think the school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter?

DAVID: Uh, much the same. A lot times, like I said the kids who have no real obvious issues, their normal size, height, weight, you know they fit in with the demographic of the school, so there’s nothing that puts them on the outside of the mainstream, but they’ve had horrible school experiences. I’ve talked to adults and they just said they hated school, it was just a horrible experience, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. That’s a good lead in to my next question because I’ve talked to people who say that school is difficult for anyone.

DAVID: Yeah. Yeah. It is.

INTERVIEWER: School can be challenging for anyone. So, some people say, well for people who stutter, their school experiences…

DAVID: Multiplied

INTERVIEWER: …is just the same as anyone else’s. So do you think that’s true, or do you think we can separate stuttering out as say well there are some unique themes…

DAVID: A lot worse.

INTERVIEWER: …Unique issues and concerns…

DAVID: I think it’s worse

INTERVIEWER: …that people who stutter [face], or can we just lump stuttering in with everyone else’s experience. What are your thoughts on that?
DAVID: I don’t think so. I don’t think you can lump it in with the quote normal kid…

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And why is that?

DAVID: I mean ‘cause we have the same issues as them and one more big giant one. And that’s the same thing with getting super thin or short or fat or whatever, they’ve got the normal issues of school and they’ve got their extra burdens to take as well. So they’ve got a double load of crap to drag around.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now did you ever have speech therapy in the schools?

DAVID: Off and on in school.

INTERVIEWER: And what were those experiences like for you?

DAVID: I don’t think they knew what it was or what, or how to make it stop, therapy was just a very rudimentary, and they were just learning basically on us on things that they were doing. ‘Cause I’m 41 right now, so I started out in therapy when I was a little kid in ‘69 or ‘70, sometime around there, and back then there really wasn’t real therapy. Even now you know you’ve got therapists who studied accents, who studied injuries, and all kinds of speech issues but not stuttering. And when they’ve got a job at a school they have to learn on you. They really didn’t know. So it really wasn’t much help at all.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

DAVID: And you would go once a week or once every two weeks or something. So that’s not enough time to learn anything either way.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. We’re actually doing pretty good on time too. I wanted to make sure I hit all the major things. Did you ever try to hide your stuttering in school?
DAVID: By not talking is the way I hid mine. Because mines is bad enough to where you really can’t hide it. So there really was no option to hide it really. So for me the best way I had to deal with it was clam up and not talk.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now what was your personality like going through school. If I was to pull someone from each of your schools and asked them what kind of person was Don, what would they probably tell me? What was your personality like in school?

DAVID: About 4 or 5 years after school, after high school, after I got of high school, I was at this store and the girl working there was a girl that I went to high school with who I recognized. We talked a little bit, she goes, “I remember in school you were such a nice happy kid, you were always smiling” and I was just, I mean it made me mad.

INTERVIEWER: And why? Why?

DAVID: Because she didn’t know how much pain that I had gone through and it just made me mad to think that, for her to think “oh, you were such a happy kid” but she was a real nice girl even back then and I didn’t get mad at her, but inside I was like [imitated an upset demeanor] “I was not happy!”, you know, I mean I was just angry inside, [but said to the girl] “oh, whatever, thanks”.

INTERVIEWER: So do you think stuttering played a role in how, in your personality development?

DAVID: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, definitely. I mean it dominated my whole life until I was, about 3 or 4 years ago. After I got involved with the NSA, that was like the rays of hope that I had ever. So I mean this group has helped me out immensely. Immensely.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Well I think I went through all of my questions, I’m sorry we had to fly. They close in 15 minutes but I think we’re ok. But I was going to ask you, is there anything
that’s important to your school experience, or to the school experiences of people who stutter, that we didn’t mention in this conversation? I guess if, is there any issues where, you know like this study could not go on unless this issue was there. Is there anything else that maybe we didn’t cover that you think is really important to the school experiences of people who stutter, or to your school experience in particular, that we didn’t mention.

DAVID: I think on my, one of the things that really hurt me was that I was overlooked as being smart.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

DAVID: Because I remember, I think it was the second grade, and this one kid in class, he was supposed to be like the real smart kid in the class, I remember they gave him a different math sheet because he was smarter than everybody else. So I remember sitting by him, he was doing a, I think all of us was doing adding and subtracting, and he had some simple multiplying, and he’s sitting there, and I’m looking and I’m thinking, so he’s sitting there thinking and looking, and I knew them before he did, and I’m thinking “why am I not being drawn in and being taught at a faster rate” because I knew his work and he was supposed to be real smart, I think a lot of times that teachers assume that you’re dumb, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. ‘Cause that’s part of my next question, how do you think you were viewed by other people, teachers or peers, and that’s one thing that you said.

DAVID: I think so, I think they overlooked what I had in my head but wouldn’t come out. Because I flunked the 7th grade. I flunked he 7th grade and in high school, you know back when I was in school you had to have two math classes to graduate high school, so I took the easiest one which was Math I, and I flunked that so I had to take it again in the 10th the grade, and then I made a D. And I Math II and I flunked it too, but my teacher felt sorry for me so she gave me a
D, so that way there wouldn’t be a senior in Math II. But after high school I worked jobs where I used trigonometry at work. I mean I’m not dumb by any means.

INTERVIEWER: Oh gosh no.

DAVID: I mean I had it for like a long time, but I don’t know where it is now, but at my high school graduation, it wasn’t a diploma but it was like a chart, I’m looking at the very bottom, it said, you know, there was like 180 students in school and I ranked 179. I was second to last in my class.

INTERVIEWER: And what would you attribute that to? You said you flunked the 7th grade, you failed other classes, and you were 179, what would you attribute that to? What do you think was…

DAVID: I think not being interested and not wanting to talk and get involved I think.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So do you think stuttering played a role, was stuttering the main reason, did it play a role but there were other issues, as far as you failing and you graduating next-to-last, was stuttering the main reason, was it “a” reason among many reasons.

DAVID: I think it was a contributing issue. I think that I blamed everything on that because that’s easier [interruption from loudspeaker in library].

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So you said it was a contributing factor.

DAVID: Yeah. But you know you don’t want to accept the fact that there’s more wrong with you. So you blame it all on that one thing. And I done that a lot. But now, but I mean I, I don’t know why I didn’t do more in school. Now, ‘cause in like the last 5 years I’ve gotten this thing to where I have to learn constantly. You know if I’m talking to someone at work and they’re not saying anything of value then I don’t want to talk to them. I mean why sit there and talk about movies and your favorite band, people at work that’s all they talk about, talk about something
that’s going on in the world, this world is going nuts and I ask them about what they think about Israel and Lebanon, and what they think about Venezuela, and they look at me like, “who cares about that?” But I think now that I’ve gotten older, you know I’ve tried to like buy my self, my self-image. I’ve always had to buy nicer cars than everyone else had to have. Because I wanted to have something that shows everyone that, look, see I am worth something, you know, I’ve got this, you know…

INTERVIEWER:  Wow. So the fact that you felt like you were overlooked or weren’t smart enough had consequences for you later in life.

DAVID:  Yeah. Which actually helped me in a way. I mean I turned to work, I turned to work and that’s been my escape from stuttering. So I’m a workaholic basically.

INTERVIEWER:  I guess we’ve got to wrap up in a little bit, but what do you think would be the take-home message for everyone regarding your school experiences, so when you reflect on your school experiences from K-12, what are some of the major things that, I guess this question is kind of weird, but what would you want people to know the most about your school experiences?

DAVID:  I think that teachers need to get involved with especially the troubled students. ‘Cause a lot of times every student that won’t listen or doesn’t want to get involved or doesn’t want to talk or they act up, that’s the symptom of a deeper issue.

INTERVIEWER:  Ok.

DAVID:  And I mean kids are lost by the thousands in school. You know, they have the brain, they have the ability to do so much more but they’re being pushed aside because it’s easier to just push them aside. I think, like for parents, I think have to be more involved and more educated as well ‘cause like my dad and mom didn’t know what to do, and they had no resources
then. The family doctor said just ignore, don’t talk about it, don’t react to it, and it should go away by itself. And I heard that usually it does. But what about me. Mine didn’t.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Thank you so much.
INTERVIEW WITH “ALAN”

Date: July 27, 2006

Place: Dallas, TX

INTERVIEWER: This is going to be kind of an informal conversation that we’re going to have just about your school experiences. So I have my questions right here but I’m not going to ask them just question by question informal conversation, I’m just going to do an informal conversation so things will just come up as they come up. But the first question I have is, I was wondering if you could give me just some general background, demographic information about the schools that you went to, so your elementary school, middle school, high school, things like was it public or private, the size of the school, was it urban, suburban, or rural area, just general, demographic, background information about the schools you went to, K-12.

ALAN: Ok, yeah. They were all in Dallas and there were only two schools. Both of them were private schools. I was at a small school called [names school] from when I started, you know, whatever preschool, kindergarten, to second grade. And probably like 20 kids in a class I’m guessing, I’m not sure, it’s been so long, and I guess there were probably in a grade maybe like three classes. So I guess probably like 50 or 60 per grade, I’m just guessing, it’s been so long, then from there, left or, you know, changed schools to a different private school, it’s also in Dallas, or a Dallas suburb, it’s called Addison, called Greenhill, so I was there from third grade through twelfth grade. And you know I think when I started there, in my class there were maybe 60 kids and I think graduation from high school, twelfth grade, there were probably about 90 or so.
INTERVIEWER: Now what has your experience been like in school, so I guess if you can just walk me through from kindergarten through 12th grade, if you could just talk at length about what your school experience has been like?

ALAN: To be honest, to me it was never that bad. And I think that was for a number of reasons. I think it was because, well the biggest thing is that I was never conscious of my stuttering. I mean I was aware of it, but I was never aware of it in terms of like negative consequences. I mean like in college, for example, towards graduation, you’re job interviewing, and so you know you talk to your friends and you see their resumes and you know their GPA, you know their campus activities, and you know you’ve done more than them. And yet doing job interviews, they get second interviews and then I didn’t, so you know, it did not take a rocket scientists to figure out why. I mean like in high school, yeah, I mean you know I never had many dates but to me that was never a function of my stuttering, that was more a function of just ‘cause I was shy, I mean just the way I was. You could be a really cool guy in college but in high school it was because of a high school dynamic. And then I don’t think also, I can really never remember being teased, and I think it was, it may have been a part because of the private school, but I mean at the same time I think that there, like some people would say it’s a safer environment or a better environment than public school, at the same time though I think also you can argue that, ‘cause people know you better then whatever happens can be more personal, and so say in a bigger school, you know, there was some bully or some person that always picked on you, well perhaps in that environment it’s going to be easier to avoid that person. Well in a smaller school, private school, there’s probably a better chance that there’s that one bully, you’re going to see him everyday, and so in that sense, the private school thing to me was not really a factor. To me what was the biggest factor is that I was involved in lots of things, like [names
school], that school, like our big sport, the big sport was soccer. And, now, while I was not the start player by any stretch, for my last two years I was on varsity, I was a first or second sub so I was playing something, and so like the jocks would see me as someone that’s also an athlete and so they couldn’t pick on me for being like the non-athlete, you know, at the same time I did well in school so it’s not like I was dumb. So, I mean, to me it was not a problem because I knew people from all facets of school life, from athletics, from academics, from doing stuff around campus, and so in that sense there was not one group that said “Oh that Jeff is not involved in this and this and so therefore he’s weird”. I mean, looking back in hindsight, I’m sure that they all knew I stuttered but they also saw that I was playing sports or that I was doing well in school and so they probably at least to me never associated the stuttering with being worse at something or not involved in something.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

ALAN: Does that sense?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

ALAN: Ok.

INTERVIEWER: So stuttering, you wouldn’t say played a huge role in your choice of extracurricular activities or your academic performance or, would that be an accurate statement?

ALAN: Yeah, I think that’s a fair statement, I mean, like stuff happened, like I can remember, and I’ll probably remember this until the day I die, I think it was either in 7th or 8th grade, and so I was taking this Spanish class, and you know as part of the course, like every so often we would do these dialogues, and so what it was is you would pair off with somebody. And so what you’d do is memorize like four or five lines in a conversation, like you’re on the street and then you walk up to a shop and say “hello” back and forth and then say “do you carry this” and then they
say “no we don’t but this store does” and then you say “so where’s that store”. I mean just basic stuff but the whole idea is just to practice the Spanish. And so I guess the hard part was to memorize the lines, and so there probably like 4 or 5 lines a piece. Well like I said I did well in school and so I’d memorize my lines and so it was time for my partner and I to get up and to do our dialogue. And so my partner started, his line was first, and it was my turn and I could not seem to think, I mean I totally blocked, and so what happened is, I mean I just totally blocked, and so it’s probably like 20 or 30 seconds where I couldn’t say a word, and you know I guess our teacher knew I stuttered or whatever just said “let’s call it off, the two of you sit down and then we’ll do this later”. And so like after class, or at some point later, the teacher found me and said “Jeff, I’m assuming you knew the dialogue and because of your speech, you stuttered” and I was like “yes I do”. And so what we did, we came up with, like from now on if, if I didn’t want to be called upon, then like there was going to be some sort of hand signal, like what I would do is put my hands together or something [imitates gesture], you know, some nonverbal signal to the teacher, “don’t call on me”. And so for the rest of that semester, or whatever it was, the rest of that class, that’s what we did. But, I mean, to me it was embarrassing, what happened that day, but I mean it was just that day. The next day, at least to me, life went on. Now perhaps there people in that class that though, “oh, what’s wrong with Jeff” and other stuff like that, but to me, like I said, it was embarrassing for that five minutes and then it was like class went on, life went on, and that was it. I mean if that had happened, say, six months ago at my job, probably the carry-over at least to me would have been far more significant. But, like I said before, if it was a private school, then so be it, but it just seemed like, as far as I can tell, or at least from what I saw, there were no negative consequences to that happening. I mean my friend [names friend], the two of us, we’re still friends. The girls that were in that class that didn’t want to go out with
me before, they still didn’t. I mean, so was that a function of that problem in Spanish class, or was that a function of me not being the coolest guy, to have the coolest car or the coolest clothes, you just don’t know. But to me there was no difference, so.

INTERVIEWER: Now that kind of leads to my next question, what was your classroom participation like in general, would you say, so, I mean in that Spanish class you and the teacher had that nonverbal signal after that incident, was that pretty typical, I guess, of, I guess what was your classroom participation like, did you participate in class?

ALAN: Yeah, I mean it was pretty good. Let’s put it this way, I can remember better in college being nervous about participation than in high school. Does that make sense?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

ALAN: So, I mean, I can remember in high school, I mean I’m not a morning person. And so there were morning classes when I never spoke and it was because I was just so tired and not so much because of stuttering. So to me that was never a factor. I can remember back in high school, you know, there was quiz bowl.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I’ve heard of things like that.

ALAN: Yeah. And, I mean I loved to be a part of that. That’s all about, you know, you know the answer to the question so you buzz in, then you only have so long to answer the question. I mean I loved doing that, so.

INTERVIEWER: So why do you think you were more nervous in college than in high school?

ALAN: I think because, probably because people did not know me or because I became more, and for that reason, people might judge me for, you know, the one line I said during class and for not knowing me for a whole semester. And like I said, because you become aware of a one-time
interaction with someone and there are the negative consequences, or the non-positive consequences.

INTERVIEWER: I guess I can see that because, I guess from 3rd grade through 12th grade, you were pretty much with the same group of people…

ALAN: Correct

INTERVIEWER: …so you were familiar with each other. In college it’s a whole different set of people to get used to.

ALAN: Yeah and I mean it’s the like the job. I mean like I said, I guess the one thing I focus on the most is the job interview thing. And also, like for example, like in college you hang out with your friends, and of course, when you go out with friends you want to be cool. It’s the same in high school but the dynamics of cool change a little bit. And so, you know if you go out to a bar and you’re with the cool people and you’re not cool, then perhaps your friends, they’re not as cool anymore. And so you find the friends that you’re comfortable with and vice versa.

INTERVIEWER: Now what were your relationships like with your teachers, your classroom teachers over the years through school?

ALAN: During high school?

INTERVIEWER: Well during high school, middle school, and elementary school.

ALAN: They were all fine. I’m not sure just how word got from teacher to teacher, like from grade to grade about my stuttering, I mean I’m sure there were some that weren’t aware of it until I started talking, just one-one-one or in class or whatever. But to me it was never a problem.

INTERVIEWER: And how about your peer relationships, you sort of touched on that a little bit already.
ALAN: Yeah, XXX, like I said I was pretty involved in lots of things, I, you know I guess you could say I had a lot of acquaintances and some good friends. And to me it was never a problem, but at the same time you would hang out with your certain group of friends, and to me that was not at all stuttering related.

INTERVIEWER: Now did you ever have speech therapy in the schools?

ALAN: I didn’t in school probably until about 3rd or 4th grade. And what that was is, like at Greenhill, I started in 3rd grade, I can remember is for me speech therapy was during PE class, and like I said I played sports and so to me that was always upsetting. I mean, to leave PE class and to go and see the speech therapist, and so the thing I remember about speech therapy was two things really: was during PE class, and I can remember I’d go see her and it was pretty much just reading stuff aloud, but I mean beyond that I can remember, and at the very end she gave me candy. And that was pretty much all I remember, is just those two things, is during PE, like in the middle, during therapy just reading stuff, and at the very end, the candy part. And that’s really all I remember.

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe the severity of your stuttering throughout school? What was that like?

ALAN: At some point, probably after college, I asked my mom, or my parents, and they were like “Jeff, it was the same during grade school, during middle school, and during high school than it was during college or after college”. I mean it’s, during the last few years, since really I joined the NSA, it’s become a lot more, the fluency has become a lot more consistent. Before the NSA, there were periods like this where it was pretty fluent, but there were also other periods that it was very disfluent, I mean, just couldn’t get a word out. And that was my speech starting in college and after college, it was fluent for a time, a day, a few days, or a couple of weeks, and
then all of a sudden, the next day disfluent, for a day, or a few days, or a couple of weeks, and so you know it was like this [makes an up-down hand gesture]. And the last four or five years, since the NSA, the fluency has been a lot more consistent. There are some bad days or bad times, for a day or two, and then I’ll calm down, I’ll get some rest, and then the fluency returns, and the fluency is generally pretty good, like for a long time. And then perhaps I’ll have some disfluency. But, I mean it’s bad but not terrible. And then it’s back to being pretty stable again. But, like I said, from what I understand, the level of disfluency before the NSA was always about the same.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now when did you first become aware that you were a person who stutters, or that you stuttered? Was there a specific event or situation?

ALAN: Well just like I was saying, I was probably aware that I stuttered, like during Spanish class that time. But see to me there’s a difference between being aware of something, and associating negative consequences with that. And so I was probably aware of my stuttering if not before that time in Spanish, then at that point. Now the first time that I was probably aware of negative consequences from stuttering was probably during college.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Ok. Yeah because you really didn’t have any negative experiences in school, your teachers and peers, you had good relationships with them, so when you were with a different group of people in college was when you started to attach the consequences with it, and job interviews also.

ALAN: Yeah, and job interviewing was really the time that it became apparent. I mean, you know, perhaps before like you’re a freshman and you’re meeting people, yeah perhaps at that point you’re kind of aware of it, you know some bad consequences, but really the time, like probably, like for summer jobs during my junior, or my sophomore and junior years, at that point
I noticed it. Or it became obvious that there could be some negative consequences. At the same
time though, like I think, I have to remember, my first year at [names school] first month or two
there, there’s someone that teased me from what I can recall, and like a teacher noticed it and so
stopped it. But again to me you’re teased because you stutter or because you’re a poor athlete or
because you’re too short or too fat or I mean the point is that there are so many reasons during
grade school, during middle school, during high school to be teased or bullied that to me it never
dawned on me that stuttering was something that wouldn’t go away. Or that the teasing because
of the stuttering wouldn’t go away.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. That makes sense.

ALAN: Does that make sense?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Now my next question, I think I know the answer to it already but
where, school can be difficult for a lot of reasons, people go through all kinds of issues in their
lives, so where for you personally would stuttering be in the mix, would it be at the forefront, on
the backburner, sort of in the middle, I guess when you consider…

ALAN: What, like for grade school, for middle school, for high school?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Like where would you rank order stuttering, I guess, stuttering in there?

ALAN: You mean…

INTERVIEWER: I guess like in relation to other issues that may have been going on in your
life, other challenges, other struggles at all, if they were there.

ALAN: Pretty low.

INTERVIEWER: I thought you would say that.

ALAN: Correct. Yeah, I’ll be the first to admit that I was pretty clueless before college just
about kind of the world beyond my life, that was probably, well not probably, that was certainly
due in part to my parents, to my upbringing, but it was also just because, as dumb as this sounds, ‘cause I was pretty, at least looking back now, I was probably pretty naïve about things, and just to kind of go on from that thought, this is what I’ve told people before like to parents with kids that stutter or to speech therapists is tell them that the longer that the child is not aware that stuttering is a problem, the better off they are, you know just for that reason because, granted, the worries of most kids kind of pale in comparison as the worries of most adults, I mean generally, you know, the kids themselves are not aware of that because to them, wearing the wrong shirt to school, that’s a terrible thing, going to school and not having whatever, your hair done the right way, that’s just a terrible thing. I mean that’s bad for them but in comparison to the problems you face as an adult, like say problems at work, the high school problems will generally pale in comparison, and so with that in mind, the more time or the longer it takes before someone realizes that stuttering could be a big problem, the better off they are.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. I would agree with that too.

ALAN: Ok.

INTERVIEWER: Now how would you describe the school climate for a person who stutters? So let’s say you have this five-year old who’s about to enter kindergarten and go through 12 years of schooling, what issues, concerns, challenges, do you think they’re going to face in school. So I guess just based on your experience in school, and just what you know about schools in general, how would you describe what the school climate would be like for a person who stutters?

ALAN: Well, just like I said, I think it’s going to be, like I said, you’ll be teased because you’re short, because you’re tall, because you’re fat, because you’re thin. Because you’re not an athlete, you know, for whatever reason, and so it’s going to happen. So what I would do, this is what
happened to me is that, I was involved in stuff and people will stop teasing because they know you better, and the way that they know you better is because you do the same stuff that they do, because you’re on the math team, because you’re in the Spanish group, because you play soccer, because you write for the school newspaper, you know, that was stuff I did, and so obviously that’s going to be a diverse group of people, you know, the jocks to the brains to the creative types, and so they knew me and they kind of realized “hey, you know what, Jeff’s like us”. And so in that sense, like I was kind of saying before, to me, I don’t pull out people that stutter from normal classes because they’re normal, you know, just let them play football or just let them do all the normal art classes or be in the band or whatever. Did that answer your question?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah that did. Now this one may not be relevant, I guess, to your personal school experiences but I guess maybe, how would you respond in relation to people who stutter in general but there are certain experiences that are visible, certain experiences that you can observe, like if I were to pull someone off the street and say “what do you think a person who stutters, what do you think would be a challenging situation for them in school” someone may be able to say “well I think they may have trouble raising their hand in class, maybe they’ll have trouble with an oral presentation” people can just, you know, they will be able to come up with those types of situations that are very visible. But there are certain things that people go through that are more subtle and more hidden and the person wouldn’t even know that you were going through it unless they were in your shoes or unless you told them. So what do you think would be, I sort of call those experiences the “backyard experiences”, only the person knows...

ALAN: Correct

INTERVIEWER: …that they’re going through it because they’re in those shoes. No one else would even think “that” would be an issue for you. So what do you think would be the
“backyard” or the “behind-the-scenes” experiences for people who stutter, in the classroom or in school?

ALAN: You mean, it…

INTERVIEWER: ‘Cause I want to know if…

ALAN: Well, see, I mean, yeah, I can see, see the thing is though that to me, to have those, or to really understand those, I guess first you’ve got to have what you perceive as direct bad consequences for that happening. And to me, like in Spanish class, as far as I know the teacher did not give me an F that day. I mean it happened, it was embarrassing, you like I said for that 5 minutes, but there was no bad consequence that I could directly associate with that, and so therefore, long-term I didn’t take anything bad from that. So, I’m trying to think…

INTERVIEWER: I know it’s difficult because you didn’t probably experience those, I mean you’re experience was a little bit different, it was more on the positive end, so it may hard for you to pull out some of those.

ALAN: Yeah it might be, but also, and once again, ‘cause I went to UT, and I mean obviously UT is kind of the opposite, just this big state school, I mean it’s changing some now, but you’re just a number, and that was pretty much the total opposite of Greenhill, you know it’s this small school and everyone knows you. But I found there was kind of the same thing, I mean, you get involved and you do stuff and you do your best to meet your teachers, or the TAs, and again if they know you, they’re going to understand “well you know what, Jeff stutters, so maybe he’s more hesitant to raise his hand in class in front of 300 people. But after class he’ll stop by to ask questions and he really does care about his school work and what’s going on” so again at least to me you can minimize the bad consequences by doing other stuff to compensate for things you don’t want to do. And perhaps I’m just totally crazy but to me like I’ve learned, so much of life
is just like what the saying goes “showing up”. I mean as people see you then, and like I said “showing up can mean so many things”, but I mean at UT, like first or second year it can be so easy to walk into class like your first year, not say a word, then walk out and then next the class day just come again, and so you never say a word in class, you never go to office hours, and they’re to think, ok, he’s just a number. So if you go by during office hours, you know, just ask questions, make a difference, does that make sense?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah that makes sense. Now if you were writing an autobiography of your school experiences, K-12, what do you think the title would be, and what would some of the major themes be to your school experience?

ALAN: [Pause]

INTERVIEWER: That’s kind of a come-together…

ALAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And if you can’t think of a title, at least what would some of the major themes be?

ALAN: I mean it’s, you know, like I said being involved in a lot of stuff, [pause] I think it really was important, perhaps, I mean to me, as far as I can remember, no one ever told me that there would be or could be bad consequences from stuttering or from being fat, I mean, from not being normal, whatever being abnormal meant, and you know perhaps that’s because I was naïve, because no one told me, but that’s probably a theme. Just not being afraid to do something or try something because of stuttering. What else? I think it’s probably those two things.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now what do you think the school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter?
ALAN: To be honest, they’re probably similar. I mean, you know, in the sense of there are things that the other students worried about that I never thought of, but to them was a huge deal. I can remember, probably senior year, and so we’re in a class and we’re discussing, I mean the class was called, I think, Human Relations. And it was kind of the catch-all for sex ed. But it was also about friends and relationships and interacting with others on a non-sexual basis. I remember one day we’re discussing what you wear and how you dress, and there was one girl in there and she was wearing all blue like blue pants, blue shoes, like a blue blouse, and then also like some glasses with blue frames. And so the teacher says “Jennifer, I didn’t know you wore glasses.” And her response was, and so she didn’t really respond, and so the teacher kind of said “You don’t really wear glasses, do you?” and she kind of said, “Well, no, I don’t”. And so the teacher said, “But you’re wearing some today” and she said “Well, yes I am” and the teacher said, “Well let me guess: You’re wearing them ‘cause you’re wearing a blue outfit today, so you just happen to have these glasses that have blue frames. And so therefore they match the outfit.” And she was like, “Yes that’s right”. And so at the point, it was probably in my sophomore year, that my vision started to worsen. And so at that point I probably, like sophomore, junior year, had started to wear contacts and/or glasses. And so that was new to me. And so the whole idea of, you know, the whole hassle of wearing contacts or glasses, so I was aware of that by that point. And so the whole idea of voluntarily wearing glasses because they match your outfit; to me it was so crazy and so ludicrous, but to her was a huge deal. You know, it was like, I got to do this, I’m thinking, you know this is something that is just so far out of my realm of thinking. And so, just thinking now, probably to her, that was the first thing she thought about was, you know, my shoes, my pants, my shirt, my blouse, you know, my glasses. Well to her stuttering was something that was just so out of her realm of thinking. And so once again probably for
anything, for any kid, there are all of these things that they thought about that I never did. And to be honest, that’s the case now. I mean I’m Jewish and to me I never think about that. That’s not true, I mean I do but I don’t. For example, you’re Black. I mean, so again, ‘cause you probably think about that, probably, I mean I’m sure, more often than I do as someone that’s White. But I mean again, the point being that everyone has some burden they carry. And so in that sense being someone that stutters is no different, but it’s just how visible is that burden, and just how do you act with that burden in life.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Yeah, that leads perfectly into my next question, and I think again I know how you will respond. But I’ve talked to people who say well school is difficult for anyone, you know everyone has their own demons, school is challenging for anybody…

ALAN: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: …You know school is just a tough place to be sometimes. So can, can we, do you think, can we just say that school is just difficult for everyone, everyone’s going to have their challenges, or for certain groups do you think there may be more unique challenges, more unique concerns that maybe other people don’t experience. Could we…

ALAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: …pull stuttering out and talk about it as its own little experience, or…

ALAN: I mean that’s probably a fair statement in the sense of you know there are some problems that are worse than others, I would say. But at the same time I think it’s possible, you know, like I said, just talk with teachers, just tell them that you stutter like I did in college, just do what you can to minimize the bad effects. Like, for example, if, you know if the cool people are the jocks, then if you play sports as well or if you do stuff with the jocks, then they’ll see you
as cool as well. So yes there are some problems that are worse than others. But at the same time there are some simple things that can be done to minimize those problems.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now what is your present occupation?

ALAN: Finance accounting.

INTERVIEWER: The only reason why I ask that was I was going to ask you do you think that stuttering played a role in your choice of jobs, your choice of careers.

ALAN: Probably like in college initially to some extent but not anymore.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, I think I’ve run through everything that I had on here, but I was going to ask you is there anything else that we didn’t discuss that you think is important to your experience or the school experiences of people who stutter in general that didn’t come up in the interview?

ALAN: No, probably not because I realize that my point of view could be different from other stutterers.

INTERVIEWER: Right, each person has their own truth, their own experience.

ALAN: Correct. Correct. But I mean, to me, like I said really before college, it, at least to me, was not a problem, and so therefore the baggage I have from stuttering really does not come from before college. You know it was during college and really towards the end of college, and also once I was working.
INTERVIEW WITH “PATRICIA”

Date: August 4, 2006

Place: Houston, TX

INTERVIEWER: Well I have questions here that I want to ask, but it’s not going to be the traditional like job, you know ask-answer, ask-answer, it’s just going to be an informal chit-chat, an informal conversation for the next hour or so. So I guess to start off with I was wondering if you could give me just some background, demographic information about the schools that you went to K-12 like size of the school, location of the school, urban, rural, suburban, just, you know, general background, demographic information.

PATRICIA: Ok. Um well basically as a child my dad was transferred a great deal, so we moved, I think I had gone to 8 or 9 nine different schools by the time I was 15 or 16. So basically I never stayed in one school more than 3 years. So, I’m trying to remember, I was born in Boston and then we moved to Rhode Island, and um of course I was still young then, but my first memory of well um now that I’m thinking um my first memory of school was I went to a private kindergarten in Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia and of course like I said my memory back then wasn’t all the great, but then from there I entered a Catholic school, a suburban middle class Catholic school in Baltimore, Maryland, I believe. And I was there probably 1st through 3rd grade in a Catholic school, and my memories of the Catholic school were that the nuns were very, very strict, and I was very, very shy, pitifully shy and I was just one of many, many, many students, I remember that the classroom had like 40 or 50 students in there, it was a really big, big classroom and then of course back in those days, this was probably in the late 50s that I was in this Catholic school, and my memories of that school 1st through 3rd was crying, a lot of crying and I can think back that I was never happy about going to school. I was somewhat anxious and
fearful and I remember the school people having to call up my mom and asking her to come and pick me up from school as I think back maybe my stuttering was part of that anxiousness, I don’t know, I just don’t know, but I know that 1st through 3rd grade was not a joyful time. Then from there I moved to Connecticut with my family and I was in a public school system. And I was probably there 4th grade through probably um 6th grade maybe, or 7th grade, I’m not even sure, but um and I had a, I think I had, yes, I did have a certified teacher, a certified public school teacher um but again I’m not real clear about what was going on but I do remember being teased a lot, being teased by my peers, I do remember that, and not really knowing why I was teased but I knew that I just didn’t fit, fit in with the other students there, and I seemed to be um more comfortable with the “not-so-bright” kids or the “not-so-in” kind of group, I was always on the outskirts of this group and I would always associate and play and interact with the um children who just didn’t have the right kind of clothes on, they were the poor kids in the school, and that’s where I felt a little more safe and comfortable. I sort of felt like I was a protector over them because they too were also being teased. You know kids can be very, very cruel.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Oh, I know. I understand.

PATRICIA: Right, right. Ok, so should I keep on talking about the schools or…?

INTERVIEWER: Sure, sure, whatever you…

PATRICIA: Should I be talking about the schools and how my stuttering came up during the schools, or do you just want an overview of the different schools ‘cause there’s so many.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you can go either way, I guess if you want to just talk about your experiences as you go up through 12th grade, that’s fine.

PATRICIA: Ok.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that’s great.
PATRICIA: Ok. As they relate to stuttering?

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

PATRICIA: Um, I can remember having to do a book report, a oral one, and getting very, very anxious about it because I knew that I would have to get up in front of the class and speak. And I can remember practicing at home and doing a wonderful job, I mean being very fluent and very thorough and then the first time I got up in front of the class to give this book report I guess I started off really good and then I just fell apart, just fell apart, again, I think I was crying, and I was directed to go back to my seat, but you know nothing was ever talked about, nothing was ever said, it was like oh just go and sit down or something but I don’t ever remember any parent-teacher conferences about why I was so sensitive or why I was crying, I mean I don’t, I don’t ever remember my parents, you know, sitting down with me and saying, you know, we just got a call from your teacher, and she’s wondering why you’re crying a lot but…

INTERVIEWER: And what grade was this in?

PATRICIA: This was 4th grade.

INTERVIEWER: 4th grade, ok.

PATRICIA: Yeah, this was in 4th grade. And I was, I was put in, I was put in the lowest reading group because back then they had you know the high reading group and the low, and I was in the low reading group, but I was really good reader, silent reader, and I would be able to comprehend well but as soon as they heard me orally read, they assumed that mentally I was not very sharp. So I can remember um having to be placed with the lower-functioning kids and thinking oh, I guess I’m a little slow. And that was never the case. That was never the case but those teachers were basing my oral reading skills on how bright I was and of course I stuttered, I had a articulation problem too and they never could figure out what the problem was and so um
but that was the time that I became aware of um children teasing me, feeling different, feeling
different, and thinking that well I guess I am different because I’m in the lowest reading group,
so I must be a little slow. So from there I went on, my family moved again and I think I spent
middle school and junior high school in Chicago, Illinois. I was in a suburban school then, well I
was always in a suburban school, but a bigger suburban school and I basically got lost in that big,
big school. I just tried very hard to blend in with everyone there, and um so and I was very, very
shy so my pre-teen years and my teen years were um difficult partly because I was shy and partly
because of my stuttering. But see I was always more comfortable and my speech was more fluent
when I wasn’t put on the spot. So when I was socially around my friends in a very calm, relaxed
setting, fluency really wasn’t a issue. But when there were demands in the classroom put upon
me, or when the attention of everybody else was directed towards me I would just freeze up and
stutter, I mean really, really bad stuttering. And um, and that was very, very difficult because
when I was with my family and my family’s friends, and you know aunts and uncles and
cousins, I was basically fluent. Because the setting was somewhat relaxed and calm and I could
get away with you know talking freely without any severe blocks but whenever there was
pressure put upon me in the school setting I had more disfluencies and that could take the form
of any kind of oral presentation, oh, I mean I would try my best to get out of it, I would be either
sick on the day that they would assign me to go up and share it, you know, with the class, um, I
would, these are all my avoidances, I really avoided a lot of what I should have. I just avoided a
lot. And, what other tricks of the trade, if um, oh, if I was called upon to read, which I hated that,
I think that’s the worst part of it all, you know I couldn’t concentrate on what the subject was
because I was so anxious. I was so anxious about, Oh God am I going to stutter when they call
upon me to read this you know section of this text and my mind would be a thousand miles away
from the classroom, away from what the teacher was talking about, so I think that my grades suffered a lot during my junior high and high school years.

INTERVIEWER: In what ways?

PATRICIA: I just um, I was just so anxious all of the time, I was in a fight or flight kind of mode, and um to the point where that anxiousness interfered with everything. It interfered with my eating, and I know that sounds funny but when you’re anxious your stomach is nervous and when your nervous you try to eat and you just can’t eat or you can eat but you just want to throw up, you know, because your stomach just can’t handle it so I can remember frequently before I would go to school, and this was in high school, mainly, um that I would try to eat breakfast, and I couldn’t even eat it but I would try and then I would get physically ill after I ate my breakfast and I didn’t share this with my mother. And what I did, see these are more tricks, these are more avoidance, tactics that I used, but I used to go upstairs to the second floor bathroom and just keep flushing the toilet so that nobody could hear me getting sick, and then that kind of physical behavior um lasted with me a long, long time because as a young adult and as an adult whenever I had a speaking situation coming up I would get physically ill, physically ill I can think back, you know, many, many times before I went out for my student teaching, I’m a former special ed teacher of 26 years, and before I’d go out for my student teaching practice, I would be physically ill. And that, and only in the last 20 years of my life have I stopped doing that.

INTERVIEWER: Really, wow. So stuttering really had long-term consequences for you later on in life.

PATRICIA: Yes. Oh yes. Oh yes, oh yes. Yeah. Yeah. Um, and I think as I got older you know I pushed stuttering off to the side and I wasn’t as anxious about and I accepted stuttering as a part
of me. But oh yeah, I can remember hanging on to the toilet bowl numerous times because that’s how the anxiousness took its form.

INTERVIEWER: So how do you think, what kept you going? Because you said your parents didn’t know, what about your peers and classroom teachers, I’m sure, did they…

PATRICIA: Well

INTERVIEWER: …Did you share that with anyone?

PATRICIA: Oh no. No. No. I can still, today, I know that my mother who is 80 still doesn’t know that I went through this.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. Wow.

PATRICIA: Yeah. It was almost like I was traumatized. I was traumatized by the anxiousness over the fear of whether or not I would stutter.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

PATRICIA: You know. And that anxiousness is something that had stayed with me for a long time. Long after, you know, it should have disappeared. Long after I was an adult, long after I was teaching school, long after you know I was confident but there’s still that part of you it’s like that memory, it’s like that traumatizing memory.

INTERVIEWER: So what do you think kept you from going to a close friend, or a teacher, or your parents during those times to talk about what you were going through?

PATRICIA: Excellent question. Um, shame, um I, and of course with my parents, they never talked about it. You know they never talked about my stuttering and um but I could tell by their nonverbal behavior that when I did stutter that stuttering was not good, that stuttering was a negative thing, I could tell by their heads down, you know, or they’d be looking off, or they would be giving me the word that I couldn’t say and so they were speaking for me. And I was a
very sensitive child and I just knew that I didn’t see my parents doing that for my sister, and I
didn’t see my parents, you know, doing that for other kids, so I just felt, I felt very alone, I felt
handicapped and I tried to fit in as best as I could with my peers but um I really, I really didn’t
feel safe and comfortable to speak to the teachers. And plus the teachers really didn’t pursue it,
the teachers, you know, they, they “oh yeah there’s a problem here but let’s just go on to the next
student” you know so I just don’t think that um, I just didn’t feel comfortable talking to anybody,
I didn’t feel safe.
INTERVIEWER: Ok. And this is something that you touched on already, but going through
school K-12 what was the classroom like through your eyes. I guess how would you describe
your classroom participation.
PATRICIA: Oh, I was not the one who had my hand up all the time, even if I knew what the
answer was, I would uh, um [Mmm], I would be probably sitting in the back, I would probably
act like I didn’t know what the heck was going on for fear that if I did know what was going on
that I’d be asked upon to, you know, share something and um just that, that scary feeling of “oh
my God” they’re going to ask me to talk, I mean talking, talking was an effort, talking was
painful talking was, talking was a chance of me showing them that I was different…
INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Ok. I get that, yeah.
PATRICIA: …That I was uniquely made different from the other kids so, um, shame. Just
shame and um, I can also think back to just um, just having physical feelings of tightness here
[points to chest area], just, you know, muscle tightness, when you’re in that flight or flight kind
of situation, and when you’re in it all day long, you know, somebody’s going to ask me a
question, somebody’s going to ask me to do this or that, you sort of build a wall around you and
you’re very, very rigid and tense and you’re just not relaxed enough to take a deep breath and
just get some air in, so I was, I was, physically I was very, very thin. Very, very thin. And um I felt very self-conscious about that too. So um classroom participation was “Oh God, I don’t want to do this” and if there’s a way out I would find it. And that could be, that could mean too that I remember during high school I would even skip a class if I knew there were, there was a chance that I would need to talk a lot in a particular class, I would go to the women’s room and spend that hour in the bathroom.

INTERVIEWER: And what would you tell your teacher?

PATRICIA: You know what, I don’t think they even knew I was not there.

INTERVIEWER: Really? Wow.

PATRICIA: Yeah. Yeah. I don’t know. Either I was sick or, um, I don’t know what I told them. I don’t even know if they knew I wasn’t there. I was always that kind of person who didn’t want to be seen or heard from so I was hoping that they wouldn’t even notice that I was gone.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Wow.

PATRICIA: But that is so strange because now, well, even then, I was a social person. I mean deep, deep down, I loved people. And I loved to talk but because of the stuttering it had just changed me into this shy introverted person. And only in the last 15-20 years has my real personality come out.

INTERVIEWER: Wow!

PATRICIA: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So you felt like stuttering sort of molded you over the years…

PATRICIA: What?

INTERVIEWER: I mean stuttering sort of like um…

PATRICIA: Oh yeah. Shaped…
INTERVIEWER: Shaped your personality.

PATRICIA: Oh yes. Oh yes, definitely. Oh, definitely, yeah. Talking was not fun. There was so much shame around talking and um, and feeling like I was not good enough, um, I was trying to be fluent in a fluent world. And um, and that, that was very, very hard. But you know had I had the support system back then, had I had parents who were willing to sit down and talk this out. You know, I think that the stuttering sometimes was just because nobody came to me and talked to me and said “you know Paula, um, you know, it’s ok to stutter, you, you know, if you don’t want to be called upon at this time, that is fine, just let me know when you’re ready to answer something and I will call upon you.” You know, if somebody had taken the pressure off of me. My school days would have been so much better. My social life at the school would have been so much more fun. Um I don’t think that I would have had such butterflies in my stomach if I had known that I wasn’t going to be put on the spot.

INTERVIEWER: That leads into my next question about your relationships with your teachers, what were those experiences like, your teacher relationships over the years?

PATRICIA: College too, or just basically K-12?

INTERVIEWER: I guess K-12, and if you want to talk about college, you can talk about college.

PATRICIA: Um, [pause] I [pause] I sort of looked up to my teachers but I never truly felt comfortable with my teachers. I don’t know, maybe because like I said I was shy. And um I, I really did not grow close to any of my teachers, I did like to please them, I wanted them to like me but I was always the girl that didn’t cause any problems, I was, I was always you know quiet and I did, for the most part, everything that they said. And so you know I was one of those students that you wouldn’t have to bother with. I just wanted to blend in, I just wanted to be
blended in with the other students and not be heard from. So you know, students like that, teachers really, really like, you know, because they don’t have to take the time out to address them, to talk to them, to direct them, to monitor them because you know they don’t cause any problems.

INTERVIEWER: Now how do you think you were viewed by your teachers, did they um know um probably just as a person who’s shy, or a person who just does well, or did they, did the stuttering, do you think that affected the way your teachers viewed you?

PATRICIA: You know, I don’t know what they really thought about me. These are excellent questions. But I am going to be honest. I think I was so wrapped up in my own stuttering fears that I couldn’t even see clearly on how I interacted with my teacher, and how they interacted like with me. Because I just, I just um, [pause] I really don’t have any memories of that. I don’t know if that is normal or not but um. I was pretty, I got, you know, B’s and C’s and occasionally A’s but um I was never singled out by the teachers, I felt never close to them. [pause] Um, although I did like my 4th grade, was he 4th grade or 6th grade teacher, a male, and he sort of bonded a little bit or tried to work to get to know me better. And he knew that I was interested on becoming a basketball player for the basketball team, and he knew that I wasn’t all that good so he made me the manager of the basketball team, so that’s one memory that I can think of where the teacher had made an effort to get to know me but um.

INTERVIEWER: So you were involved in extracurricular activities?

PATRICIA: Yeah, I was. I was. But there again, you know, I was shy and very, very thin but I was very good when it came to running and jumping and doing gross motor skills. Because of my speech I wasn’t good at communicating but I was very quick at playing dodge ball and
kick ball and all those games that the kids used to play in their, you know, early, early years.

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Now you had mentioned that you were teased when you were in school, I’m wondering what were your peer relationships like, did you have close friends that you could talk to throughout school or were you pretty isolated, um how would you describe your peer relationships through school?

PATRICIA: I was never in the “in crowd” um I was more comfortable being around peers that nobody else liked.

INTERVIEWER: Right, you had mentioned that. Yeah.

PATRICIA: I would um just feel attracted to them, and actually there was this mothering kind of image that I wanted to take care of the kids because I knew or that I had seen them being teased too and I wanted to protect them, which is a silly thing now that I think about it but I felt strong if I was able to protect them from the other kids.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

PATRICIA: I know that sounds strange.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have therapy in the schools? Speech therapy?

PATRICIA: On and off. On and off. But my whole problem was that when I was in a clinical setting, I was pretty much fluent. I was pretty much fluent. And um, and they would often, they would often um talk to my mom, I mean this was I guess in middle school, I don’t know why this was, but they would often say, “Well Paula doesn’t have a stuttering problem. Paula has a hesitation problem.”

INTERVIEWER: Oh no.
PATRICIA: So my mother would always say “Oh, Paula doesn’t stutter. Paula just hesitates. Well the reason why I hesitated was because I had block after block after block and I couldn’t get on to the next sound so I would say “ah-ah-ah” and then say the word that I couldn’t, you know, say. So they didn’t know back in those days that that was, you know, stuttering, they just said, oh that’s a hesitation problem, which is stupid now that I think about it. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting, a hesitation problem.

PATRICIA: A hesitation problem. And even to this day my mom who is 80 years old says, “Oh Paula, Paula never had a stuttering problem, she just had a hesitation problem”. So I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: Now school can be challenging for a lot of reasons, people go through many issues in their lives when they’re going through school, so when you think about all the things that you’ve gone through in your life, just any issue or struggle, where would you rank stuttering in the mix, would it be in the forefront, at the backburner, in the middle, where do you think you would rank-order stuttering compared to all the other issues that you were going through during school?

PATRICIA: [Pause] Stuttering was a big one.

INTERVIEWER: A big one.

PATRICIA: Being thin was also a big one and being shy was also very big, but I think the shyness and the stuttering interfaced, so I think…

INTERVIEWER: They worked together.

PATRICIA: Yeah I think they were connected and actually because of the stuttering I went into special ed which is my career that I chose, for 26 years I taught special ed children, I taught nonverbal, I taught mostly, which is very, very interesting. I taught nonverbal children, and, but I always felt very comfortable around those kinds of students, I felt like I could protect them from
the society, I felt like I could protect them from peers that may want to tease them, see so there’s that same thing that keeps coming up again. I wanted to protect them, I felt comfortable with them. Um, and uh, and I also thought about teaching deaf children too, that was one other career goal because I really got into signing, Total Communication, and my first job I taught at a state school for severely institutionalized mentally handicapped adults, and they were older than I was, my first job, and a lot of them could not speak very, very XXX, very, very clearly so I was taught to sign and I taught them to sign too so a large part of my first 5 years teaching, I was signing a lot as I spoke to these kids and I was teaching them on how to sign back and um and I really got good at doing that. So, um, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So having worked in the schools for 26 years, and then when you reflect back on your own school experience, how would you describe the school climate for a person who stutters? So if you have this five-year old who stutters and they’re about to go through 12 years of schooling, what do you think the issues and challenges would be, I guess when you reflect back on your school experience and then having worked in the schools.

PATRICIA: Ok, that’s an excellent question. The biggest thing that comes up is the teasing. Teasing. Teasing and the bullying. I think that is a big, big part of it. That’s something that I hope that the school would address. Also just knowing that school is a safe place. Knowing that there are people there that you can talk to. People there that you feel comfortable with. Talking to a guidance counselor, talking to a social worker, you know, just having somebody besides your parents who are available to talk to. Because I just felt so alone during my school days, I felt so different. And maybe educating teachers in learning how to identify children who have a speech difficulty and then training them on how to deal with this child in their classroom.
INTERVIEWER: This is so interesting because every time I come up with a new question, you always seem to answer it. This is so great!

PATRICIA: Do I?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Because I was going to say if you had teachers, all the teachers, at your attention right now, what do you think you would tell them, what do you think they would need to know about the issues and challenges of people who stutter, what should a classroom teacher know, do you think?

PATRICIA: Um, oh my, oh my. It is so hard because teachers have so much to think about.

INTERVIEWER: They have a lot to deal with, they do, they really do.

PATRICIA: They’ve got so many duties. I think just to have them know who in the school is trained and capable of in giving them the support to help this student and um and just be there for the staff if the staff have questions. Um, Because I don’t think [pause] back in the sixties and seventies I don’t think there were, well maybe there were guidance counselors, I don’t even know if we had a speech pathologist staffed in the local schools when I was going to school. Yeah. Um. I don’t know, I think sometimes these teachers you have to connect with these teachers and you have to find their time and their schedules to talk to them. It’s just very, very hard. It’s hard um as a special ed teacher just to talk to the regular ed teachers about modifications, accommodations, paperwork, you know they were, they just didn’t have the time to follow through with all this but if you can give the regular ed teacher some guidelines, some guidelines that they could easily follow when they interact with this child who has the stuttering problem in their classroom. And if they can’t follow through, you know, or if they don’t have any knowledge, you know, find another teacher in that school who’s possibly teaching on the same grade level and transfer that child out. You know, sometimes I think that, that you have to
pair the student up with the teacher, and the teacher and the student need to be paired together, if
there is one teacher at that school who is emotionally and mentally aware of a learning issue or a
stuttering issue, you know, put that child in that teacher’s class. That’s, because I just, see I was a
good special ed teacher because I could identify with the struggles that my handicap students
were going through.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you have that shared experience. Yeah.

PATRICIA: And I just had a call today from the school nurse where I taught for a long, long
time, and she said, “Paula, I just want you to know” she said “you were the best special ed
teacher that I have ever seen” and I said “oh thank you” and she said “you were so patient, you
were so loving” and I said “well that’s how I had wanted my teachers to be with me” I wanted
them to be patient, I wanted them to understand me, I wanted them to take out the time out of
their busy teaching schedule to take some interest in me, you know, and maybe if my teachers
had taken that interest in me as a person, like really get to know me, then I think I would have
felt more comfortable in opening up and you know saying you know I’m really having a lot of
anxiousness right now about you asking me to speak in class you know I wish that I could have
gone up to those teachers back then and say, You know, I really would feel more comfortable in
your classroom if you wouldn’t call on me to read at this point, you know, I will let you know.
Yeah. I think, I think what all of this is, is that I felt powerless. I felt powerless as a child in the
public school.

INTERVIEWER: And why did you feel powerless? I love that [expression].

PATRICIA: I didn’t, I could not control anything. I didn’t have the abilities to speak up for
myself. I didn’t, but, you know, but um maybe that is normal. You know, maybe as a kid, you
know, kids are shy, I don’t know, but I felt like I was a victim. I was a victim and that I was
thrown into this system, and I had to make it through. And lots of times I didn’t want to paddle, I wanted to jump overboard because, yeah, there was just a lot of suffering.

INTERVIEWER: This is so interesting, so how would you describe this system then. So you have a person who stutters and then this system that you talk about, and you said you felt powerless, what about the system made you feel powerless?

PATRICIA: [Pause]

INTERVIEWER: Or um…

PATRICIA: Yeah, I guess I know what you’re…

INTERVIEWER: Why is the system difficult for a person who stutters? And you sort of mentioned some of these things already.

PATRICIA: Yeah. Yeah [Pause] The system doesn’t address the unique individuality of each of their students. Ok. Um, the system has one way of doing things, one mode of teaching style, one mode of discipline style, one mode, and it seems to cover most of the general population, except for, you know, a few kids here and there that might be emotionally different, that might be physically different, and if you stutter, you know, like we were saying tonight, it’s not a observable handicap. You know, so physically I looked like everybody else in that classroom, I had two eyes and a nose and you know a mouth and ears but I did not have the motor skills, the oral-motor skills that everybody else had. And I was expected to be on the same level as everybody else. And I, and I couldn’t change it. I didn’t have the power to change it.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. This is so great. Now there are certain experiences that are visible, that are observable, things like, you know, if you were to pull someone off the street and ask them what do you think a person who stutters goes through in school, they could probably tell you
something like reading aloud in class or raising their hand in class, things that they could
probably figure out just through intuition.

PATRICIA: Right

INTERVIEWER: But then there are certain experiences that I call “backyard experiences”
“behind-the-scenes” experiences, things that no one would know that you were going through
unless they were in your shoes.

PATRICIA: Gotcha.

INTERVIEWER: So what do you think the backyard experiences, the behind-the-scenes
experiences, are for people who stutter? I guess people who stutter in general, and then for you
personally going through school, those things that no one would even know would be an issue
for you in the classroom or in school unless they were in your shoes.

PATRICIA: Ok. Um, a lot of physiology, a lot of um central nervous system kind of feelings,
sweaty palms, I mean I had sweaty palms all the time when I in school, you know, I had sweaty
palms, my heart would be racing a lot, a lot of fear of what’s going to happen next, so I guess
that’s anticipatory fear of what may or may not happen next, you know, am I going to be put on
the spot, am I [going to be] asked to read, am I, you know all of that. Um, what other, oh, just a
lot of um mind chatter. A lot of mind chatter. Now I don’t know if other stutterers go through
this but like [pretends to think deeply] “Alright. Um alright now, now let, now let me see” you
know things like saying [pretends to self talk] “ok now um, now I think it’s going to be a good
day, um, I think this is going to be a good day but what if this happens, you know, what if I get
 teased today, or um what if the boy who’s sitting next to me starts picking on me, you know,
what am I going to do.” But see I did not have any coping skills. I did not have any coping skills
because nobody would, nobody knew that I was feeling these fears and so I didn’t know how to
cope. And um so just a lot of mind chattering um what else. [Pause]. Crying. I know when I was a little, little girl I was crying a lot and I didn’t know why I was crying. So there was some real emotional issues with that [Pause] Not having a boyfriend when the other girls my age had boyfriends, just being very, very shy. Feeling like I wasn’t good enough. INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now if you were writing an autobiography of your school experiences, so the K-12 school experiences of Paula, what would the title be and then what would some of the themes be? PATRICIA: The title? [Pause] INTERVIEWER: And I know that’s hard, that’s like summing up your whole school experience in a word or two. But if you can’t think of a title, at least what would some of the major themes, or the major hit-points of your school experiences, be? PATRICIA: All of them based upon my stuttering or just in general? Well stuttering was part of all of that. Um, ok. [Pause] Not being true to who I was, not being me, not loving me, just trying to be a fluent person, trying to put on an act, putting on an act like I was a fluent person, trying to be good enough so that people would really, really like me, feeling that I was not a lovable person because I was different, shame, the shame, fear, a lot of fear, anxiousness, a lot of tricks, a lot of problem solving. When you’re a stutterer and you’re dealing with those kind of fears you try to avoid them at most costs. So you become good at tricks or avoidance kinds of things. Yeah I was spending all of my energy not on learning but on how to get out of these difficult situations that may arise during the school day, which makes no sense now that I think about it but yeah. Just, yeah, energy and time on, you know, and had somebody sat down with me or had I had counseling back then, you know, I don’t think I would have spent all that much energy on hiding who I really was. I was, I was hiding out. Hiding out.

PATRICIA: Yeah. Yeah. Hiding out. You know, not being true to myself, and not speaking up and out and not loving myself, I mean I used to hate the way that my voice sounded, you know, so just the sound of my voice because it just, it was just so hard to talk that, that I didn’t even like the sound of my voice. So I think I hated myself back then.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Wow.

PATRICIA: Does that…

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah, Oh yeah, I understand that completely. What do you think the school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter?

PATRICIA: I bet they’re very calm and relaxed when they go to school. I bet, well no, I shouldn’t say that but they can devote all their energies towards learning, not to be deviated in trying to protect oneself. Does that make sense?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

PATRICIA: I think um [Pause] I’m just trying to remember all the other kids. They all seemed happier. They seemed more assertive than I was. Yeah, I was not assertive. They seemed, oh yeah, I think I would have really liked school.

INTERVIEWER: Because this leads into a question that arose after a discussion that I had with someone, so what if someone plays devil’s advocate or what if someone says, well so what: school is difficult for people who stutter, but school is difficult for anyone, you know, school is just a tough place to be. So any child who goes through school is going to have some difficulty, some challenges, school is just a very challenging place sometimes, so everyone has a difficult school experience here and there. So I guess how would you respond to a position like that?
PATRICIA: [Shakes head ‘no’] Um, school should be, the first thing that comes to mind is school should be a safe place. And when I say safe, school should be a safe place where a child, whether they stutter or whether they don’t stutter, they should feel calm and relaxed, they shouldn’t be put into certain situations where they physically can’t do what is being asked of them, you know.

INTERVIEWER: So I guess, do you think we can say that um people who stutter, do you think people who stutter, of course they have difficulty in school like everyone I’m sure has difficulties in school, do you think we can put everyone together and say school is difficult for anyone, or do you think stuttering has its own unique issues and challenges…

PATRICIA: No, stuttering has its very unique challenges. I don’t know because I am talking from a brain of a stutterer.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think those would be?

PATRICIA: Stuttering not only affects how one speaks, but it affects the mind of a stutterer, it affects the soul of a person, I mean stuttering, [pause] stuttering is, well, these are excellent, excellent questions but um [pause] I think that stuttering and all of that can really leave permanent scars. Does that make sense? I think because of the shame that I felt, I think because of the state of constant fear that I felt, I think that I have carried that through most of my life. And had I been in a more relaxed setting, had I not felt so shameful, had I, had I been not teased as much, I don’t know, I just think that um, that, I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: And this is the last question that I have. And it really struck me when talked about that system and about feeling powerless and everything, that really was like, wow, ‘cause I’ve never thought about it like that before, if you have a person who stutters and then a person
who doesn’t stutter, both of them about to enter school, how would you describe the playing field?

PATRICIA: To a person who stutters and they’re about to go to school or?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. If you have two people, one person stutters and then one person who doesn’t stutter, both are about to go through 12 years of school, how would you describe the playing field? Is that…?

PATRICIA: Yeah. I got what you’re saying, I do. I think the person who stutters has to overcome more challenges that he or she might have to face and that they really need to dig down deep and um you know, they really need to speak up for themselves, and seek, do what is right for them. Um. I think, I think being a stutterer, now I don’t know if a male stutterer is different from a female stutterer, and I was very shy.

INTERVIEWER: There are a lot of factors that go into it.

PATRICIA: Yeah but I would, I would recommend that they don’t play those games that I had once played as a stutterer, those tricks. And that they get the help that they need. And that they speak up for themselves and that they believe in themselves and that, yeah, you know stuttering is a pain but that you know that they can accomplish a lot but see I don’t know, it’s all based on my school days. But I found it to be very challenging. I did.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. This was such a powerful interview. I’m so glad I got to talk to you. Is there anything about your school experience that didn’t come up in the conversation, or anything about the school experiences of people who stutter in general that you think maybe was there but maybe didn’t come up in the interview? I guess this is kind of like an open-ended sort of part where is there anything else that, um, that didn’t come up but you think needs to be addressed about maybe school experiences in general, about your experience in particular?
PATRICIA: Um.

INTERVIEWER: I really like XXX because I think that out of all the interviews that I’ve done, you know, no one’s really talked a lot about the system, I guess you being in school, you know, you having been a special education teacher for 26 years, you probably, you know, you’re more, you’re in the school environment, but that system about feeling powerless and about the system, you know, not meeting individual needs, I thought was really big, you know.

PATRICIA: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

PATRICIA: Yeah, yeah. Um. I guess I’m getting a little tired but, no, let me just try to think if there’s anything else [pause]. I tell you though when I did um go off to college and I did um know that I wanted to be a special ed teacher, I loved going to college classes and I did very well, once I got into special ed I just seemed to get my confidence, it seemed to come up, and I did really, really well and like my junior and senior year of college I really liked it, I really learned a lot and I really, really liked it, but I really didn’t feel accepted and truly, truly me until I found the NSA, the National Stuttering Association, and I think if there had been a support group for children within the school system, if there had been um some attention brought to stuttering, like stuttering awareness day, if there was more, if there was more attention given to stuttering by the school, if the school could just you know celebrate or make peers and teachers more aware of the differences in kids, you know, so.

INTERVIEWER: You would have had a better experience, you think?

PATRICIA: Yeah. Yeah. I would of.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much.
INTERVIEW WITH “JONATHAN”

Date: September 17, 2006
Place: Fremont, OH

INTERVIEWER: Well I guess we can get started. As you know, this project is looking at the school experiences of people who stutter, and it really originated from my own personal experiences of being a person who stuttered going through school, so I was really wanting to know more about what other people who stutter experienced when they were in school, so I have a list of questions here but really it’s just going to be an informal conversation that we’ll have, so, I guess to start off with, I have a very general question, I’m wondering if you could just walk me through K-12 grade and just describe at length from what you can remember about what school has been like for you. What have your school experiences been like?

JONATHAN: Well as far as the stuttering is concerned I think that the biggest thing I remember from school was avoiding oral book reports.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

JONATHAN: Cause you know I mean it just seemed like, of course from what I understand now, it seems like stuttering is kind of an emotional problem when you’re under stress or when you’re excited or whatever, you tend to try to talk faster which your mouth doesn’t keep up with your brain. So I would always try to avoid them. I mean there was a few times I did them but you know I just kind of blocked out almost. Cause most time I was pretty successful in avoiding having to give them really, and I think, probably if people knew me at that time I was probably more quiet because you know, of course kids make of you and that kind of stuff so you try not to talk anymore than you had to. Um, you know, that’s about all I can, I mean as far as anything specific, I can remember. I wasn’t made fun of per se because I was kind of a big kid so I mean
obviously I had a little bit of an advantage there so you know I didn’t get picked on too much but just you know that self-awareness thing, self-consciousness, thing was I think kind of big for me so I always tried to keep my mouth closed as much as I could.

INTERVIEWER: So you said you tried to avoid, in what ways would you try to avoid?

JONATHAN: Well whenever, I mean I’m sure I can’t remember anything specific, but I’m sure there was times I probably either feigned illness when I was supposed to give it and to give it you know since I got behind if there was option to write one, I usually wrote it. Of course, as you got into some of the older years the teacher usually gave you an option, you either give an oral book report or written, and of course I would always choose the written one, you know, so that’s kind of how I avoided that. And I didn’t really try to, like I say, I didn’t really try to be outstanding when it came to conversation so I didn’t try to go out for anything that would put me in that kind of position as you the grades went on. You know, I guess this falls in the play, when I got into high school, of course at the time I was taking college prep, I thought I would like to be a doctor, my sister was a nurse, you know, keeping up with the sister, so I thought well you know I should take a language, well I took Latin.

INTERVIEWER: So did I!

JONATHAN: Yeah, see it was, you didn’t have to speak it really.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah!

JONATHAN: I mean it wasn’t a conversational thing, so I thought, you know, it’ll help to satisfy that requirement, I won’t have to get up and converse with people. Now it was a whole different language. It was hard enough trying to speak English under that kind of pressure, and then a different language under that kind of pressure. And I would have to say probably that has stuck with me even until now because you know how the Society’s [Watchtower Organization
Society] encouraging people to, you know if they can, to pursue another language, well in my mind I think that’s great but it my mind there’s this block that says “well but you won’t be able to do that”. So, and that’s probably pretty subconscious. I’ve never really thought about it or talked about it or anything till right now but it kind of made sense that that’s probably what motivates it, to me anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So the fact that you chose not to pursue another language, would you say that that’s specifically rooted in your experiences with stuttering?

JONATHAN: Oh yeah. Yeah, sure. Yeah. I think if I was pretty conversational I probably would have cause, you know to me that was, that was kind of interesting things and I’m kind of glad I took Latin because now words are interesting to me, so I like words you know I mean I, you know doing the Bible study, I like looking at the Greek words and the Hebrew words, and trying to see the connections and all that kind of stuff. But still, like I say, just that idea of now having to try to converse, that self consciousness thing is there, you know and its, and I think its, of course I’m 49, how old are you?

INTERVIEWER: I’m 30.

JONATHAN: Thirty. Ok. So you know after so many years you don’t even realize that you’ve kind of conditioned yourself now to avoid, you know, those kinds of things.

INTERVIEWER: It’s just something you just kind of do automatically and . . .

JONATHAN: You don’t even think about it. My wife was starting to take some Sign, you know she was learning Sign Language, and I thought you know I could probably do that because you don’t have to talk and if you mess up it’s somehow in my brain it’s not the same thing. You know if I make a sign for something and it’s not the right one, ok, well I made the wrong sign.
INTERVIEWER: Now you touched on this earlier but I’m wondering if you could tell me what the classroom was like for you going through school, what was the classroom like through your eyes?

JONATHAN: Um, well you know, I’m kind of at a disadvantage because just in the last five years or so I came to appreciate that I had ADD or what was the proponents of ADD. I was researching it for my son and come to find out that I had all the earmarkings of ADD. And when I think back to school I think that’s probably the most vivid thing that hits in my mind, it’s like I couldn’t focus on school, I mean it’s like the teacher would be talking, I’d be looking at people or you know, like every little thing would distract me. And it’s like if we had to do math in our head or something it’s like you know these numbers are just floating all over the place and I can’t get them to, close enough together to make any sense, so you know it’s like that was hard. And I think it probably had something to do with the stuttering too because when your mind is doing all that it’s hard to formulate the words cause you’re like saying ok I’m going to say this sentence but instead of this word I have a choice of six words, which one do I want to take, and I can’t figure out by the time I got to say the word now it’s like “d-d-d-d-d-d” ok I’ll take that one. You know that’s how I look at it. It’s like it was really hard to really speak up very much in class, so I, as I remember, I didn’t really say a whole lot anymore than I really had to. I do remember like um, of course as we got older we would kid around, but I had some friends who were kind of class clown types, you know, and I remember there were certain times, I remember for a while um I like Bill Cosby, and so we used to get Bill Cosby albums, you know, and I listen to those, and I almost memorized them, and so I’d come to school and sometimes I’d go through
the Bill Cosby routine with my buddies, you know, and that was fun, we’d all laugh and stuff like that, so I kind of remember that, but see I kind of had memorized it, the words were already there, so it wasn’t such a big thing. And I didn’t mind reading aloud in class though either because all the words were right there.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, that’s interesting.

JONATHAN: So I didn’t mind doing that, I actually kind of liked that. And even to this day, one of my favorite privileges is reading the Watchtower and reading at book study. You know, I like reading out loud now.

INTERVIEWER: And usually people who stutter, that’s usually the most feared situation is having to read out loud in class.

JONATHAN: Really.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, but it was different for you it sounds like?

JONATHAN: Yeah I mean, there’s, you know, I mean as long as I knew what the words were, I mean of course if I, you know if you were reading something a little more technical, I wasn’t really prepared or up on it, then of course I wouldn’t volunteer if I was called on. I remember, certain memories of reading out loud in class, that’s a pretty strong memory.

INTERVIEWER: Now what was your academic performance like going through school?

JONATHAN: I was a C student. I got, you know math I didn’t do very well in, except for geometry. And everything else, I mean the stuff I liked I usually got A’s in science, but my overall, I think my added up grade point average was like 2.73 as I finished high school, so like I say if it didn’t really catch my interest, I just, you know, so I was an average student.

INTERVIEWER: So would you say, was there any relationship between stuttering and your academic performance, or maybe the ADD.
JONATHAN: I think it had more to do with the ADD, yeah, cause like I say the other thing I didn’t like to do, you know, they used to call you up to the board and you either write something or XXX. I was very self conscious when it came to that kind of stuff. And I think a lot of it had to do with my dad, my dad was very critical, pretty hard to please, very impatient, and, he was pretty strict disciplinarian type person, so it’s like, I think ,you know, like I say I’m using all of this in hindsight now as I, I took some psychology and I’ve read a number of things, you know, just like you trying to understand a little bit better, trying to make some sense of it, whatever, and so, you know I think that had a little bit to do with that whole idea of being self-conscious and not wanting to mess up and not wanting to do or say something wrong.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now what were your social relationships like in school, would you say, was there a relationship there between. I guess, um, friendships.

JONATHAN: I, um, I made friends pretty well. I played sports, played sports in high school. Played football, ran track, mostly. You know I had friends and, pretty close group of friends, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: How about your relationships with your teachers going through school, what were those relationships like?

JONATHAN: Let’s see. Nothing really stands out I mean as far as [pause]. I probably just did what I needed to do to get by in the class. I don’t really remember too many real close relationships with teachers that stands out, you know, I probably just did what I had to do.

INTERVIEWER: So were there, did you ever have any negative experiences with a classroom teacher with regards to your speech?

JONATHAN: Um, I would say no.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.
JONATHAN: Like I say, nothing that stands out. If it did, it was probably so minor, you know, one of the advantages of ADD, you tend to forget stuff, so a lot of stuff you tend to forget. So, I would probably say no though cause usually if it was something that was traumatic I probably would have remembered. I do remember one, probably either sophomore or freshman year, there was one social studies teacher that was kind of, I didn’t like him very much and, I can’t remember what the situation was but I do remember him saying, him using the expression “well how dense are you” you know, and that’s the only negative thing I ever really had at school. And like I say don’t remember exactly what the whole situation was, but I didn’t like him very much. So maybe I wasn’t trying very hard, I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: Now I probably should have started with this question, what was the background of the schools you went to, the background and demographic information, like your elementary school, middle school, and high school, like I guess the size of the school, location, like was it a rural or urban area.

JONATHAN: Rural area. It was a small town. Small town area. It was a pretty small type school. I think we had probably a hundred, we must have had about 170 I think graduate, something like that, so it was probably on today’s standards pretty small.

INTERVIEWER: And that was pretty typical throughout your K through, all the way up to twelfth grade?

JONATHAN: Yeah. Well I started in Fremont, which was a large school, so by the time I was in the second grade our dad moved to Sandusky, ‘cause he worked at Ford, and then we went to XXX, which was that small school, so I went all the way through that.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So school can be challenging for a variety of reasons. So I guess if you just think about everything that, any issues that maybe you had to deal with going through
school, where would stuttering probably be in the mix. Would it be at the forefront, or in the back, in the middle? I guess where would you rank-order stuttering with regard to your school experiences and other issues that maybe you had to deal with?

JONATHAN: It’s uh, I would say, I guess at the time I didn’t think it was at the forefront, but probably it was more at the forefront than I thought, you know, because like I said it did motivate that idea of oral book reports, any time I might had to stand up or talk in front of people, you know, that I definitely avoided. And it was hard to communicate sometimes because like I said there was times that certain words and certain parts of the sentence would come out harder. You know, even as I got older the word “congregation”, if I had it in a certain part of the sentence, like at the beginning, I couldn’t hardly get that word out, I had to really stop and [imitates stuttering] and get it out, so there was times that that was a little hard. And when, you know, whenever there was stressful moments it seemed like it got worse. And I remember there were certain kids that would make light fun of it, you know, and even some of my friends they’d, you know, kid me about it but it was, you just would expect that ‘cause they’re my friends and so you know, just one of those things that you do as friends. So yeah I’d probably, I wouldn’t maybe rank it at the forefront but I’d rank it somewhere towards the upper middle.

INTERVIEWER: So you mentioned kids used to tease you a little bit. What were your peer relationships like going through school?

JONATHAN: Uh, let’s see, I remember for a long time I wouldn’t, I really didn’t get that close to many people in the elementary that I can remember. Seemed like I had one friend. As I’m thinking back the one friend I had he was kind of strange, kind of weird, you know, I mean he was a little out there, but it was like we seemed to get along ok because we must have allowed for each other’s inconsistencies or something, but then as I got into high school, like I say, I
played sports, and that connected you more with people, and, you know, I was pretty good too, so it’s like, I got, I kind of got elevated socially which probably helped out to some degree because now you’re the football star and so if you’re a star that’s not such a big deal. So that I can probably see was kind of something I would notice because of the social status. But grade school, you’re just a kid, you want everything else everybody else does, and there’s not much distinction.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Now did you ever, how would you rate your stuttering going through school, was it mild, moderate, severe.

JONATHAN: I would say it was mild. Probably. It was probably circumstantially severe, you know. You know, depending on what the situation was then it kind of elevated a little bit but that’s, I think that just kind of happened with my stress level, you know, that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: And did you ever have speech therapy when you were in the schools?

JONATHAN: Um, I had speech therapy, they were, they helped, they were trying to help me pronounce “s” ’cause I remember that’s the one thing they used to pull me out of class, I’d go down and I’d [imitates a sound] you know do one of those kind of things, you know, you try to [imitates sound again] you know pronounce your “s” and stuff. XXX. So that’s the only therapy I remember, I don’t know if it was actually connected with stuttering or not, you know, as the kid I didn’t realize, I just knew I wasn’t doing “s” very well, so they helped with that.

INTERVIEWER: So were you, was this a private therapy, were you pulled out of the classroom to go?

JONATHAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: You were pulled out.
JONATHAN: Yeah, you go down to the counselor, and there was a room with a table, you know, and work on certain sounds.

INTERVIEWER: And how did you find that? Was it helpful, was it not helpful? Or what were your impressions of speech therapy?

JONATHAN: At first it was a little embarrassing ‘cause you know you’re pulled out, but then it was kind of cool, you know, if you got pulled out, you know, as you went, and I just, you know, I didn’t think that much of it, and it must have helped to some extent ‘cause you know I don’t seem to have much problem. So you know like I say I guess, as I think back, I didn’t really think that much of it, I just thought it was something that you do. Because there were certain other kids that got pulled out for you know various you know counseling too, and I just thought well he’s trying to keep me up with everyone else. Because I knew I had a little problem. You probably did too.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah.

JONATHAN: You knew you don’t sound like everybody else.

INTERVIEWER: Oh I knew, which is actually a good question: When did you first become aware that you were a person who stutters? Was there a specific moment or experience that you recall?

JONATHAN: No, I can’t remember. The ADD is probably, I can’t really remember that, you know, probably it just became more pronounced, I would say probably as you got up a little more towards the middle grades because you got to start doing more stuff in the classroom, you know, and so I’m not exactly sure.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, like you were saying, I did know my speech was different from an early, early age, I think when I was probably about 4 or 5 years old, I knew early, ‘cause I think
my grandmother made a comment, something like “Derek, stop stuttering” or something and I had never heard that word but I knew that it referred to my speech, so I knew my speech was different early, early on, so, and it was I would probably say moderate to severe too.

JONATHAN: Ok.

INTERVIEWER: So yours sounded like it was mild.

JONATHAN: I would say, yeah, moderate, mild to moderate if that’s the way you’re gauging it, that’s probably the way I would say it. Because you know there times that you know I couldn’t probably, I would probably think and say that just about every day I stuttered, somewhere, you know, during different parts of the say so it wasn’t something that just came about because of a stressful situation, it was something that just, and you don’t think that much of it ‘cause you just thought, well that’s the way I talk, you this way, I talk this way, if you had an accent, well I stutter, I just draw certain words out longer.

INTERVIEWER: So, in school there are certain experiences that are noticeable, observable, like for example, if you were to pull someone off the street and say what do you think a person who stutters, what challenges do you think they would experience in school, some people would probably say, well reading aloud in class or giving book reports, those are experiences that are very visible, but then there are other experiences that people have that are more subtle and more hidden and someone else wouldn’t even know that you had experienced that unless they were in your shoes. So I’m wondering what, so, like for example, um, I was in class one day and, you know, it was someone’s birthday, so, there was a girl, she pulled out a card, and she wanted everyone to sign the card, so she would never had thought that there would be a Jehovah’s Witness in the classroom, so I just got up and used the bathroom and then by the time I came
back the card was already passed around. But no one in the class would even know that that was an issue for me unless they were in my shoes.

JONATHAN: Right, ok.

INTERVIEWER: So I’m wondering for people who stutter, either for you personally, or maybe your thoughts for people who stutter in general, what do you think, I guess, the subtle, the hidden, the behind-the-scenes experiences would be. Things that people who stutter would go through in school…

JONATHAN: Talking to girls.

INTERVIEWER: …that maybe no one else would even know would be an issue.

JONATHAN: Talking to girls.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

JONATHAN: “Cause that’s an emotional thing, you know, a high strong emotional situation as an adolescent and I mean I got along, I think I got along ok with like say under certain circumstances that would be a hard thing to do. You know, ‘cause I do it one-on-one, you know, with a girl, and you’re like, and especially if you start to have feelings for her, you start liking her or something, so that was usually a little tough. You know, but I don’t know if that would qualify with what you’re asking.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and you take a moment to think, I guess it’s kind of hard.

JONATHAN: Yeah, I’m trying to think. But your example was good.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, ‘cause those are things that no one else would even know, like, I’ve even like, um, I was in a class um about, the topic of the class was classroom learning, so um the professor was saying how when she was a classroom teacher she um had her students make um things like Christmas ornaments or whatever, but then she said it never occurred to her to think
about would there be someone in my classroom who didn’t celebrate Christmas and what do you do, you know, on the spot like that. So that’s an issue that wouldn’t have even come into her mind unless she was either a Jehovah’s Witness or unless she had a close friend. So I guess experiences that people who stutter have that no one else would even know.

JONATHAN: I don’t know if this actually has to do with the stuttering or not but I was just thinking of two situations as you were talking. The one, I think one had to do with asking questions in class because if you’re trying to ask a question, you’re trying to formulate what you’re trying to ask, just like you were trying to ask that question, you know, and so as you’re trying to formulate a question, you’re mind is doing all kinds of things to try to pull in the question you’re trying to ask and so you get a round about in your brain trying to ask that question and then of course then now the whole class plus the teacher is looking to you to figure out why you had your hand up, so I think that was probably would qualify to, with what you’re asking. Because there were times in class I didn’t quite understand, especially math class, I didn’t quite understand what he was talking about, and he’d say, well does anyone have any questions. And I was hoping somebody else would ask because, you know, I didn’t really want to ask, you know, probably because you didn’t want to feel stupid but I think some of it was because I didn’t know what I was going to actually ask. How I was going to ask it. And maybe the ADD had a little bit to do with that too, formulating, you know, your words and when you’re trying to formulate words, your mouth is ready to speak them, your brain hasn’t quite got them all together yet, and I that’s where the problem comes in. So I would that would be one. And then um, [pause] when I used to have, you know, they used to have little competitions, little flash card type competitions, two people would get up and XXX on a team or something, and a little problem where the question is put up, and the first one to answer wins, well I didn’t do very
good with that either it seemed like. So I don’t know if that had anything to do with it either. But it was like I was always glad to sit down. You know I didn’t really care if I got to be the last one, like I said I don’t know if that had anything to do with it or not, but those would be two that I think in my mind would kind of be close to what you’re asking.

INTERVIEWER: Something that just popped into my mind, it’s not related to school, but sometimes people want to play board games or games like Taboo…

JONATHAN: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: …or games that are very time-pressured. Which for a person who stutters, I mean time-pressure is the worst thing, so, but no one in that room is going to even know that the time is going to be an issue but the person who stutters…

JONATHAN: Then that would qualify then, you know, here’s the question, which one of you is going to be first. I can’t even remember ever winning any of those. I might have gotten one around the first round because it was a real easy question or something but I don’t remember ever winning any of those, and even, you know, like now, as I got to be an adult, that would be one of those things, um, that I would try, I would avoid those kinds of things too, you know, those kind of Outburst, Taboo type games, you know, I’ll play Yuker or something, you don’t really have to say a whole lot. You know, or chess, or something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Now you mentioned that you were afraid to raise your hand in class, I would probably, I guess it would be due not being able to formulate thoughts and I guess the other part of it would be stuttering. Um, this may seem like a very simple, easy question on the surface, but I’m wondering like why, um, would you be afraid, like what would be the cost for you for, um, if you raised your hand and answered the question?

JONATHAN: The cost?
INTERVIEWER: Yeah, like why were you afraid to raise your hand and ask a question.

JONATHAN: Well it’s probably deals with an emotion, with a, you know, negative emotion, embarrassment, or just not, you know, like I said, you know, and I’ve thought a lot about this, or about that aspect of this, you know, dad was so hard to please, it’s like you did your best and he still pointed out something you didn’t get right. Instead of saying “well good job” you know, you get that, you know. And I think as time, you know, as a kid you don’t even think about it, you just, you know, accept it and deal with it, but then as you get older you realize that that probably had more of a negative effect than I thought. And so that idea of getting something wrong in class in front of all these people who aren’t afraid to laugh at you if you do make a mistake, well, you know, as a kid that’s kind of traumatic, so it’s definitely an emotional, it’s an emotional issue. Some kind of a negative emotional embarrassment and fear of failure, something like that.

INTERVIEWER: So the emotional cost was far greater than having to just raise your hand and just get your question answered.

JONATHAN: Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, that’s probably why I was a mediocre student. The stuff I liked and I really spent time with, I would read and I would, you know, there was period of time I really loved history, and I loved those 50 question history tests, I could get every one of them, ‘cause I would take the time to read and study it, you know, and, you know, just bring it into my head, well if I didn’t understand stuff, unless somebody else was asking, like when I took Latin, even when I took Latin, I got a D and then I flunked out of the second year, I got a D the first year, and flunked out the second year, ‘cause I was, I happened to be with all the very bright students, all the A students, well, nobody was asking any questions ‘cause they were able to get it, you know, and so here I was like whoa, nobody’s asking any questions. By that time pride was in the way.
INTERVIEWER: And pride, so, um, was that like a fear of being discovered? I guess what do you mean by pride getting in the way?

JONATHAN: Well I mean, you’re, I mean at that time you’re in high school, most of the kids, most of the kids in the Latin class were either the geeky, brainy kids, or all the girls. You know, so there was a lot of girls in the class, all of them cute, and so you didn’t want to look like an idiot either, you know, so at that time, ‘cause now the hormones start kicking in and the boy-girl thing becomes more important and so you try to keep up some kind of persona, you know, so that might have something to do that at that time too. And that idea of pride, well it’s like well if I can’t get it I just don’t want to do it. It probably had something to do with the second year, the first year I tried, I mean I did try, um, the first year and stuff but the second year it’s just like, and the teacher was really dry too, so, we used to tease her.

INTERVIEWER: Now you said earlier that, um, that issue probably had to do with you being a mediocre student, do you mean the issue of being a person who stutters, specifically? We were talking about raising your hand and asking questions.

JONATHAN: Yeah, that was, I think, a big part of it. As I think back, you know, because I, you know, and the reason I’m able to understand all of this, if you don’t mind this being on the tape…

INTERVIEWER: No.

JONATHAN: …um, since I came into the Truth, it’s like, you studied one-on-one, the person that studied with you has a real interest in you, they’re constantly encouraging you, and so I started to learn, you know, when it comes to the Bible and the Truth, I started to learn, and I like learning, well I’m older, I like learning, especially when it’s being encouraging, and that idea of going out in the door-to-door ministry was really traumatic, the idea of giving a talk was really
traumatic, but the Brother that studied with me, he must have had some good insight, because he said “listen, giving your first talk, all these people out here, they want you to give it, they want you” so he was pumping me with all that, and then says “well I tell you what you do”, he goes “instead of preparing you for the talk, why don’t you just volunteer. Just volunteer.” So that was, those first couple of things were pretty traumatic, and my first public talk I was sick all night. So that fear of being up in front of people was still around, I don’t think it had so much to do with the stuttering you know at that time, my first few public talks, I don’t know if I have any, um, I might have some on tape, but you know that first one, it’s like I was up all night sick, and I didn’t think I was going to be able give it, well I was so tired that when the time came to get up and give it, I was tired all the nervousness was just, you know, I just got up and gave it, and I got through it. So that, being in the Truth is actually the thing I think that really helped me in, you know, and then I pioneered for a while and now like especially my wife and people that know me well will say well it’s like you never shut up, you know, and so I tease them, I say well it’s because I didn’t say very much when I was a kid I’m trying to catch up. And so with the Truth it’s like I have no problem raising my hand, I mean I, sometimes I think, well don’t raise your hand this time because you raised it the last five times, you know, XXX so it’s really changed the whole concept of why the importance of it has changed.

INTERVIEWER: This is so interesting to me because when I give bible readings, I mean my goodness, and see this is another thing, like when people prepare, I’m sure everyone has anxiety about being up there on the platform…

JONATHAN: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: …but for me, my gosh, I can’t tell you much goes into giving just a bible reading. Once I have my first um, you know the bible highlights, I gave my first bible highlights
comments um about two or three months ago and it felt like giving a talk. I mean and even like at
the meetings, my hand rarely goes in the air, but me I think it has roots in my early experiences
of being in school and I’ve talked to other people who say that you know those early experiences
have had long-lasting consequences. So that’s what you’re talking about, I guess, um, I guess if
you could elaborate on that. Do you think that stuttering, being a person who stutters, maybe
going through school, has that resulted in any long-term consequences for you?

JONATHAN: I think ordinarily yeah, I think ordinarily it would. I know the thing that’s really
helped me is being in the Truth. Because it gives you practice talking to people, it gives you
practice, you know, when you look at the school book…

INTERVIEWER: That’s a good book, the “b.e.” book?

JONATHAN: Yeah. We just had that part about dealing with anxiety when you’re giving [a
talk]. Wonderful information. And just the whole idea, of course we get Jehovah’s spirit, which
helps, but like you say then you’re whole frame of mind focuses, you know, we’re trained to not
focus on ourselves, we’re not doing this for us, we’re doing this for Jehovah, so I think mentally
I was able to say, well that takes pressure off of me. And the thing I like about the public
ministry is the fact that I’m not the one responsible for this information, Jehovah is. The pressure
is off me, you know, even though I still get anxious, and there’s times if I’m not really prepared
when I go to the door, it’s like [imitates stuttering] what am I going to say, you know, you’ll still
going through all that, but I know the Truth has probably helped me, if I wasn’t in the Truth, I
really, I kind of shudder to think what I would be like. I’d probably be very quiet, I’d probably
be very evasive. Now that I’m, you know, people that know me now, and that have known me
since I’ve been in the Truth, they don’t believe me when I say I used to be really quiet. But it’s
the truth, and so you get through it because of all that training. Does that answer your question?
INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah. Definitely. You’ve answered my question. Now how would you describe the school climate for people who stutter? Um, I guess if you had this five year-old person who stutters whose about to go through 12 years of school, what do you think the issues and challenges would be for that person? I guess just knowing intuitively what you know about schools today, what do you think the school climate would be like for a person who stutters going through school?

JONATHAN: Probably be worse.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

JONATHAN: I think it would be worse nowadays.

INTERVIEWER: Worse. Ok, why would you say worse?

JONATHAN: Because I just think the school systems just try to, it’s just like they’re doing their job. I do some volunteer, not volunteer, but I do some substitute education work to the school system mostly with the elementary level. And it’s just like, you know as I’m looking I’m thinking man it’s just like they’re not really focusing on the education, it’s like they’re there doing a job. You know what I mean? It’s like when you do something that you’re passionate about, you put yourself into it, you know, and if there’s challenges, you really try to look for creative ways to get around them, it seems like these people are just doing their jobs, which it’s hard to blame them because the system has really gotten to that point but I feel for the kids because some of them do have emotional problems, they come from broken families, they come from all these things, and I just think it’s, it would be very difficult unless you had some very compassionate teachers who XXX kids that stutter, it would be very difficult. You know, that’s my opinion. It seems like when I was going to school, which was quite a few years ago, it seemed like the teachers were more passionate about what they were doing as a whole, you
know, you got some of those that are in the dark and maybe it’s just my observation but it just seems like more are just there doing their job. Very rarely doing you find a passionate teacher that might have helped that student, you know, and I don’t know if they really do have anything in place as far as speech therapy…

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, they should, all public schools have access, yeah.

JONATHAN: …ok, yeah, ‘cause I’m not on that level, I’m there as just an aide type thing but I think it would be harder. That’s my opinion.

INTERVIEWER: So um when you reflect back on your school experience in particular um, I guess if you had a set of classroom teachers at your attention what do you think they need to know about a person who stutters going through school, I guess what would be the “do’s”, the “don’ts”, what do you think they should probably know about the experiences of people who stutter?

JONATHAN: Um, hmm. Probably, well I mean it seems like some of the teachers that gave you the option, oral book report or written, it seems like they might have had some understanding because it seems like, and this might be just me, I’ve never thought about it until right now, but it seems like I was always able to do the written one. But some weren’t. And I just thought well, you know, maybe they were just giving me that concession ‘cause they knew I had, they could hear I had this problem when put under pressure, so maybe just out of compassion let me do the written one. So I think, you know, and maybe it was unfair saying that some of are them are there just doing their jobs ‘cause they have a harder job to do because of things taken away from the school and all that kind of stuff. But you know I think if they’re alert to the challenge that this child, an idea with the elementary school and the ones that are very withdrawn, do have a hard time coming out, you know they have a hard time, you really got to try to figure out what
can help bring these kids out. You know I think if they have a stuttering problem, they do have to be more empathetic with it, you know maybe develop alternatives, or you know reports and stuff like that, not put so much effort on the oral part of the learning. But it’s still, I mean they still have to do that too, you still got to communicate verbally in society, you know, so they probably have to challenge and maybe let the kids become aware that even though they have a problem it can be overcome. It’s not something they’re saddled with for the rest of their life.

INTERVIEWER: Really interesting because um a lot of people have different views on this, but you said that you were allowed to do the written report, and there are some people who stutter, you know, who are, um, maybe they give the report in front of the teacher and that’s it, or maybe they give the report after school, or there’s some type of accommodation, what are your thoughts on accommodations in the classroom, I guess, for people who stutter?

JONATHAN: Well it seems like, it seems, you know this is what I’ve noticed with just being XXX, it seems like they’re using a lot of peer group studies in the classroom instead of all 25 kids facing the board, everybody looking at her, they got this group over here, 4 or 5 kids over here, and this group over here, and they’re working on this little project, and these are working on, it just seems like that would probably be a, you know, a good way to think about it because if the one child does have a problem stuttering, he doesn’t need to be around kids that are going to make fun of him, that just aggravates the situation, he needs to be around more encouraging type kids, kids who aren’t afraid to be a little vocal, and he could probably learn through that, just not to be afraid to speak up.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting. So I guess as a teacher you really have to know your students and know your classroom and really know your students on an individual level, ‘cause like you said, you know, why put a person through a traumatic experience if they’re going to be
made fun of, but if it’s a supportive environment then you know that could be very encouraging so it’s really like a subjective call on the teacher.

JONATHAN: Yeah, well, just like you’re saying, you know, I mean if a child is, you know, only has one arm, and they’re in your classroom, and you say ok now it’s time to do push-ups, you know, for gym class, are you going to make that child do push-ups. That would be silly. Well that’s pretty obvious, but the stuttering problem isn’t as obvious maybe as that but I think teachers that are alert to it and you know it seems like counselors, and I do have to give credit with the school that my son was at, the elementary school he was at, the principal was excellent, and she just, it’s like she raised the bar, and so the teachers I think were on a very high level as far as dealing with challenges in the classroom, so there are schools that do have very excellent teachers and are looking for ways to help out with whatever, ‘cause she helped me with [John’s] ADD trying to figure out what the school system had available to help with that. See now my son has no problem stuttering.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Your son stutters?

JONATHAN: No, he has no problem.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, ok, I got you.

JONATHAN: He has ADD.

INTERVIEWER: I got you.

JONATHAN: So I can’t even say that ADD has a direct relationship, it probably does to some extent, like I say I think the emotional part of it, ‘cause it just seemed like if I was able to relax and really take time to think about what I was going to say then I could, I was ok. I might try to be a little more deliberate in the delivery and then talk a little slower. But if I was anxious or excited then it’s like it would be harder, harder to come out. And even being in the Truth giving
talks I know my first talks I would have a rough time saying certain things and certain things I was even catching self consciously re-slurring through certain parts of the talk having a hard time getting one word out and not saying this word, don’t put “congregation” in my talk, you know, say something else, group of people or whatever, you know, and so but as time went on and I realized that, and I became relaxed and learned how to breathe properly and stuff, it seemed like it got better and better, you know, and even now, it’s like I don’t consider myself having a stuttered problem, I don’t remind myself I do, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever try to your stuttering through school or to try to do things to make people think that you didn’t stutter? Like any tricks or strategies.

JONATHAN: Not that I can think of or remember. No.

INTERVIEWER: Earlier when you said about doing the push-ups and the guy with no arms, you know, you were telling about giving an example. This is always interesting to because it seems like people seem to be, in my opinion, seem to be more sensitive to other disabilities versus others, like if we were to see someone in a wheelchair or see someone with a walking stick or see someone, I don’t know, who has Parkinson’s disease, we’re very sympathetic, we would help that person to walk down the aisle, we would do anything that we can to help them out, but with stuttering it seems people still, they’ll rush you, they’ll finish your sentences, they’ll laugh, they’ll mock, and even in the research it shows that teachers sometimes have negative perceptions and stereotypes about people who stutter, so I guess why do you think that phenomenon exists, like it seems to me, but maybe it may not be true, that stuttering, if you look at the “disability scale” so to speak, we have disabilities that people are very sensitive to, they’re not going to, you know we wouldn’t um like mock the speech of a hearing impaired person, we
wouldn’t imitate the tremors of someone with Parkinson’s, but it seems to be ok for people to mock the speech of people who stutter.

JONATHAN: It probably wouldn’t show up on the disability chart.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah!

JONATHAN: It would be way down on the bottom of the…

INTERVIEWER: And so what are your thoughts on that, why is that, why do you think that exists?

JONATHAN: Just unawareness. You know, just insensitivity toward you know, we live in such a culture, in a culture that judges by appearance, and so if it’s not readily seen, then, and the thing that’s really bringing out more to the fore is the mental illness issue, that, it’s, you know, if you’re going, I think if I was going to classify stuttering, it’s not a mental illness, it could be maybe probably be classified as an emotional illness, just judging from my own experience. And so if I, you know, I can’t tell if you’re anxious, I can’t tell if you’re sad if you can put on the good front, there’s people that smile all the time, there always smiling, but they’re the most depressed people you ever want to meet, so it’s not readily apparent stuttering, and as you’re lining people up in a room, and you’re told, ok, now pick out the people in a wheelchair, ok, one, two, three. Pick out the people that stutter, you don’t know until they stutter. And when they do start usually it tends to be comical because they’re struggling to, you know, it’s like the slapstick comedy, what makes slapstick comedy so funny, well it’s an experience that, you know if somebody got smacked in the face with a pie, well what makes that funny, well if you got smacked in the face with a pie you wouldn’t like it at all, you know, stuttering I think falls in that category, you don’t really, it’s not apparent and when it happens you’re more drawn to the plight
that the person has, and so you view it as funny then. Which just makes that cycle now to the person who stutters, now they’re traumatized against them.

INTERVIEWER: That, ‘cause you said we live in a culture that judges by appearance, well obviously we someone in a wheelchair, we’re going to be very sensitive right away, and warm and caring and nurturing, people who stutter, you don’t know right away. But even when that person starts to talk and you see that they’re struggling and having a hard time people tend to go to the comical side not to the caring, nurturing, “I understand you” or “I really want to help” side, and maybe it’s the awareness that you mentioned earlier.

JONATHAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting to me.

JONATHAN: You know people that are empathetic usually are quick to pick up on other people’s problems. You know, people that deal with mental illness are quick to pick up on if a person has certain signs. And a lot of its just, you know, people being ignorant. You’ve probably been told that, well, you know Bobby is just ignorant, he just doesn’t understand, well that’s basically true, he doesn’t, and if he had the same problem, he’d be XXX either. So empathy I think has a lot to do with it.

INTERVIEWER: I think a lot of people just don’t know about stuttering, you know, ‘cause it is, it has a neurological basis, you know, it’s neurological in origin, and then other things like being nervous and anxious add to it, but people don’t know that, I guess people, you know, it’s obvious that someone in a wheelchair or someone who has cerebral palsy, there’s a physical basis, so, they get more credit so to speak, whereas people don’t know if, people think that stuttering is something that we can control, which we can to an extent, but it’s also…
JONATHAN: Right because just listening to you, it doesn’t register in my mind that you’re stuttering because you might say a word two or three time, it’s like you’re trying to correct your thought, in my mind you’re just trying to correct your thought. And I know I, as I’m talking to certain people, especially the ones that are used to you, like my son, there’s times when, if I’m, I can’t even think of a good example, but I’ll want to say something and it’ll [imitates stuttering] you know teasing me, well, ok we laugh and that’s no big deal but it just shows that he picks up on the fact that you didn’t say just one word, you said it three times or five times. And so, but see, he doesn’t do that all the time, and he doesn’t do it, and I can’t even think if he does it anymore because he realizes that’s just a part of me. So you have to become used to it, that situation. And I think, you know, maybe we did hide it when we were in school, we didn’t like to get up in front of the class, so people weren’t aware of it, we did a good job hiding it because we didn’t speak unless we had to. And so we didn’t maybe give the people enough chance to get used to it, you know, as kids. And as kids, they make fun of other things ‘cause they’re more curious and stuff. As adults, I tend to give people a lot of, you know when Sister [XXX] was commenting I felt so bad for her ‘cause I just knew that she was getting it out, she was trying to get it out there. And now you listen to her, she’s no where near that place where she used to be.  

INTERVIEWER: Well I have three more questions. The first thing is that some people may say well um going through school, school is a very challenging place, it can be challenging for anyone, you know, for a person who stutters, for a person who has a learning disability, for a person who’s hearing impaired, school can just be a tough place at times, so I guess in your opinion, do you think that stuttering, the experience of stuttering in school, is it really not all that different from any other experience that people may go through, or do you think, um, there may
be unique issues and challenges that maybe people who stutter experience but are not
experienced by anyone I guess, if I can phrase like that, so I guess what are your thoughts.
JONATHAN: Well because, you know, speech is the form of the communication as humans we
have, and it’s, you know, aside from the written word, you know, it’s how you know if the
person is catching on, I mean if you’re learning English and you’re not speaking, I don’t know if
you learned English or not, and so the speech part of it would be maybe more pronounced than
the other disabilities, maybe learning disability, you know, dyslexia, obviously that would be a
difficult one, with this the person is just slow at putting things together, well again they, it’s like
they shift gears they slow them down, and they’ll put them over in this group here, now it’s like
they have, ‘cause are the groups that I helped in an elementary school, and I can’t remember
what they call them, um, but it deals with the ones who are challenged. ADD is a big one
because it’s a slight, or just that emotional, there’s some real emotional issues, anger issues,
things like that, and so they kind of isolate them, but they still try to get them to keep up with the
groups that, you know, the XXX that they’re in, so, I’m trying get at your question. It just seems
like the speech part of it would be a little more pronounced because you’re expected to talk. You
know you’re not expected so much to fill out a test everyday, you know, but you actually have to
talk everyday, so it’s something you have to do everyday.
INTERVIEWER: That’s good, I’ve never thought about it like that before.
JONATHAN: Yeah. If I was going to say that there would be a big difference to me that would
be like the biggest difference. You know, if you go to a school and the kids not talking there’s
something wrong unless they’re mute. But then that would be a whole other issue. But if they’re
not talking there’s something wrong. And if they’re trying to talk, and if they’re having a hard
time, it’s like well you got to get them to, give them enough time to get it out. And that’s where I
really feel bad for the teachers ‘cause they’re under such a time constraint, there are such
constraints it’s like, I was in the classroom with children I was shadowing and it’s the like the
half hour, forty minute class it’s like, well it’s ten minutes worth of actual instruction, the rest of
it is trying to manage everything.

INTERVIEWER: It’s difficult. They have a lot on there plate.

JONATHAN: How can the kids learn like that, you know.

INTERVIEWER: This next one may require some thought. And that’s if you were writing an
autobiography about your K-12 school experiences, so the autobiography of [John Doe] K-12,
what do you think the title of that would be, and then what would some of the major themes be?

JONATHAN: The title?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and if you can’t think of a title, because I know that’s kind of hard to
synthesize your whole school experiences in one title, but at least what would some of the major
hit points, or the major themes be.

JONATHAN: K-12 experiences in school, let me think. [Pause]. In relation to stuttering, right,
or just in general?

INTERVIEWER: I guess in relation to stuttering. Well, take that back, in general because
stuttering would definitely be in there.

JONATHAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So about in general, the K-12 experiences, the title, and then the major
themes. Because stuttering is definitely a part of your school experience.

JONATHAN: The title would be something like “[John Doe] in School: He Does Good Work
but Just Not Much of It.” You know, I don’t know, the chapter titles or whatever.
INTERVIEWER: Yeah, like the major themes. The chapter titles I guess you could call them too.

JONATHAN: [Pause]. I don’t know, that’s an interesting one. [Pause]. “Introduction to School, You Mean I Have to Talk Here, Too?” – that would be one somewhere. Or “Time to Speak Up”, you know, [pause] “The Silence XXX” something like that. XXX

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, it takes a while to synthesize all that. And my last question is what do you think the school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter? What do you think their school experiences are like?

JONATHAN: Well, I probably, you know, probably to be fair, I would say that you know, there’s some similarities, I mean they have trauma too, you know, it just seems like kids, and I guess I’ll qualify the answer with the fact that with the structure of the family today, it just seems like, I think kids in general are having more difficulty in school, and maybe it relates more to what we went through than stuttering, but we might be able to empathize with it more because there’s just emotional things happening, uh, you know, parents that are divorced, living in multi-tiered families, you know, trying to understand all this extra stuff, you know, ‘cause I see it, that kids that have a difficult time in school, they need the nurturing, they need the accommodation, they need encouragement, they need to see that this learning can be fun, it can be something that you, that you can benefit from. I learned that as I came into the Truth you know. There’s a lot of emotional things happening. My parents almost got divorced, you know, I was looking, I was going to graduate in a time period where Vietnam was still on, I didn’t want any part of that, you know, so I mean a lot of that emotion was bound up with that. So kids, I think kids today they just in general have a difficult time. You know, some kids just love school, but I think those are the kids that have well-adjusted family lives, nurturing parents, or nurturing parent, you know,
and to see, Oh, that this is something that is going to benefit me, where as you’re stuttering, it’s like, Hey, aw man I gotta go to school again, I got to deal with all this again, it’s like you got all your defenses up all the time, ‘cause you’re looking for ways to not get involved, you know, whereas in school you have to get involved or you can’t get anything out of it, just like with the Truth you have to get involved to get anything out of it. Is that good?

INTERVIEWER:  Yeah, that’s good.

JONATHAN:  Ok.

INTERVIEWER:  So is there anything else that’s central to school that you think is important to mention that we didn’t mention, I’m done with all my questions, but is there anything that’s important to your school experiences that maybe didn’t come up that you think needs to be said, or did we capture everything about your school experiences?

JONATHAN:  Yeah, I mean like I say I thought about some stuff I ain’t thought about in a long time, I really made connections.

INTERVIEWER:  That happens in interviews, you know, things come up that you’ve never thought about before.

JONATHAN:  ‘Cause like I say I didn’t think about, I gave no thought to what kind of questions you would ask.

INTERVIEWER:  Ok.
FOCUS GROUP – 1

Date: September 16, 2006

Place: Southeast Michigan

INTERVIEWER: This is a group interview, so the beginning questions may seem like it’s individually based, like maybe one person will answer, and then the next person, and then the next person, but it’s really designed to be a group discussion, so just feel free to add as you need to. The first question will just be a very, very general question, I’m wondering if you can tell me what your experiences have been like in school, from elementary school up through high school, just in general, what has school been like for you as people who stutter?

CLAY: Well I’ll start I guess.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

CLAY: Um, from kindergarten through like the 10th grade was not too bad actually, I had tons of friends, I played sports, I did pretty well in the classroom, um, there was no teasing really, I had speech therapy from I’d say 3rd grade on, it didn’t do too much for me really back then and I just fit in with the kids, I guess.

JANET: And that was until 8th grade, you said?

CLAY: 10th grade. High school, and then we moved actually. So it a whole different set of kids, classes, teachers, and that got pretty tough actually for me. Because I stuttered, they put me back one grade in the new high school, actually.

INTERVIEWER: Was that specifically because you stuttered, like it didn’t have to do with academics or anything like that?
CLAY: No I don’t think so. It was my speech that did that actually. They figured I needed to get more, I don’t know why really but just to get more acclimated to the school, to the new school, and high school was tough for me.

INTERVIEWER: In what ways would you say it was tough for you?

CLAY: Tougher socially.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

CLAY: Well that’s what it was.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, that’s what it was.

CLAY: My friends from the whole district that I grew up with, and I think that the kids in the new high school thought I was pretty different from them actually because of my stuttering.

LIZA: School wasn’t really bad, I always had a lot of friends, there were those moments though that I still remember vividly being teased, I, they [members of the focus group] heard me say this a million times, but I still remember being in the lunch line and talking with somebody and this little boy turned around and said “you talk just like Porky Pig” and I just stood there, and I went home and I cried and cried and I never forgot that, so anytime that it was time to do a presentation or anything like that, I was always very scared. I got to the point by junior high that my mother would talk with the teachers beforehand so I could always do my presentations after class, and I didn’t have to do them in front of the class. High school was fine. Kids pick on you at that point but it’s usually behind your back, you know, that’s the thing that’s just being a teenager, and you’d hear about it, you know, I would, and you just got through it. College was good. Nervous at first doing speeches there. But I think college is a whole different level of people. Like, they’re there to learn. High school, you kind of got to be there, junior high, you got to be there, college you’re there because you want to be there and you know everyone else is
there because they want to be there, for the most part, so they’re a little more accepting of you.
I’m in school now again.

JANET: And you just had an incident.

LIZA: Hmm?

JANET: You just had an incident.

LIZA: I did. That’s a good XXX. I was in class last, a couple of months ago, and I was having a really tough moment where I just couldn’t speak, but, and I kept trying to talk and I kept [imitates blocking speech behavior] and I was blocking on every word. And the teacher would, or professor as they’re called there, was actually annoyed with us, she felt like the class hadn’t prepared but she really thought I hadn’t because I couldn’t talk so she, and she looked at me and said “you’re talking at the same time as you’re thinking, you’re obviously not prepared” and I, “no [imitates stuttering] I…” and you know I just kept getting hung up on every word, and she told me she was going to the next person, and she did, and right when he began to speak, I was like, “No, no, no, I’m not done” and then she had made me mad, so then my stuttering completely went away, and I could say anything I wanted at that point…

JANET: The adrenaline kicks in.

LIZA: Yeah and I was just like shaking, ‘cause I thought, how dare you tell me that, you know, you’re in a teaching world and you don’t even understand what’s going on, and you’re not even hearing the way I’m talking, you’re just thinking that I’m an idiot, so I told her, I said I have a speech impediment and there’s times that I can’t talk. And she told me that I did not have one. So then we went back and forth for a little while, and the class is like this [imitates a stiff body posture with clenched hands] like nobody’s moving, nobody’s even shuffling a paper or anything. Her and I kept just going, and later she apologized. But it was one of those moments
where I really wanted to run out of the classroom and just leave. But from then on out, her and I had a pretty good relationship, but she still didn’t believe me, that I stuttered, or she thought it wasn’t as bad as I think it is.

INTERVIEWER: So was that like the first time that you had ever had a moment like that? Like prior to that, had you ever stuttered before?

LIZA: In school, probably the most dramatic where I’ve ever, you know really pointed it out to the whole class, like in a moment of anger so…

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

LIZA: So I guess that’s really…

JANET: That would have been neat if you would have been able to do that back in 9th grade.

LIZA: Yeah, that would have been great.

JANET: Stick up for yourself and then maybe you would have had a good relationship.

LIZA: You can’t then, or at least I couldn’t, and I think maybe kids in the NSA now can more than we could or I could. Then, I would just cower down.

JANET: I think a lot of them can now

LIZA: Yeah.

JANET: The kids that we meet at the NSA, sorry to stop you…

LIZA: Yeah, no, no.

JANET: But she’s right, you can tell that these kids have a comeback, they’re ready to stand up for themselves, they’re educated about their stuttering, and they, a lot of them do presentations at the beginning of the year about stuttering to their class, and it kind of like breaks all the ice. And it’s an encouraged thing.
INTERVIEWER: Yeah. And this may seem like a simple question, but why did you feel like you couldn’t say anything? Like back then when you were in school, in 9th grade or whatever.

LIZA: Back then you’re ashamed of it. You’re different. Being pulled out of class, I was pulled out 1st through 8th grade, you felt different, you know, you felt like you were a special student. They tried to hold me back and my father insisted that they test me, and when they did, I tested just as high as everyone else, but they wanted to hold me back because of my speech because they thought I was just slow. I think the academic world has a lot to learn about kids and disorders and things.

INTERVIEWER: What year was that, that they wanted to hold you back?

LIZA: First grade.

INTERVIEWER: First grade.

LIZA: Yeah. They didn’t, so. But then you know you’re the only one that talks like you do, maybe there’s one other one, but he is kind of weird, or she is kind of weird, you know, so you’re just ashamed of yourself.

JANET: Let’s see. It was in first grade, I guess, my mom told me but I don’t remember it that the teacher had pointed out to her that I stuttered, and invited my parents for my show and tell where I was getting real caught up. I don’t really remember any sort of trauma or frustration then. My first remembrance is two years later when I got pulled out of class. And that was the first really times that I remember where I was like frustrated and ashamed and started to grow all those negative emotions that go with it back then. And I was frustrated, I mean obviously I was being pulled out for a reason ‘cause I couldn’t get my words out, and I was obviously frustrated by that and I remember back then too I was kind of, I didn’t have any way of getting the word out, and I just remember like struggling and making like a gurgling noise and then my mom and
I would sing when I came home from school to tell her things so that we could, I could tell her, you know, [pretends to sing] “I have homework today and can I go out to play” and she would sing to me so that it would be fine. But when I got pulled out, the speech and language pathologist back then at the Catholic school didn’t know much about stuttering, and I was in a group with kids that couldn’t say their “R’s” and “L’s” and we just went around and said words, and that’s really all I remember. It wasn’t, they didn’t tell me anything about what was going, it was just kind of this really awkward thing, and so every time I got pulled out, I was embarrassed and all that kind of stuff on top of the fact that it wasn’t even helping. So then we started going to [names place] to a speech and language pathologist there, and you’d think they were a little more trained, and I’m sure they were, I might have gotten a little bit of help from that but we, but I remember specifically I’d wear a sticker on my wrist that said don’t forget to signal, and the signal was if I started to stutter, they wanted me to clench my hand or they told me if I felt comfortable twirling my hair, then whenever I started to stutter, twirl my hair. In retrospect, that’s developing secondary characteristics that may help you in the immediate but you know hurt you in the end so, but I remember that I liked that atmosphere, that I didn’t have to get pulled out of class, and my mom would drop me off at the door of the hospital, and I’d get to go up all by myself, and I’d get little fuzzy stickers that said “I love my speech pathologist” and I like still remember those, so if I were ever an SLP now, I would give them out to my kids because I loved them. And then we moved to this house [where the focus interview was held] and I thought my parents hated me for that because I was going to have to get all new friends and tell everyone that I stuttered, or they’d have to find out that I stuttered, and all that kind of stuff, and I think I remember back then too my parents were more told not to make a big deal about it, don’t draw attention to it, and pretty much not to focus on it, and she might grow out of it was
still a deal, and this was five or six years after I started stuttering. No one’s grown out of anything after five or six years of stuttering as we know now. So I started at my new school, and, ‘cause my parents were told not to make a big deal about it, my teacher didn’t know that I stuttered, and on the first day of class she asked me what my name was, and I couldn’t say it, and said, what’s wrong with you, you don’t know your own name little girl, and I put my head down and started crying, and that was like my first day at my new school, hated it, but by lunch time I like had a boyfriend or something. And then we um, let’s see, so then I met the speech and language pathologist there, [names the person], and my work with him was good, I think he had a, he had a way better handle on stuttering than anyone I had worked with before, and he, we’ve talked even recently about it and I said you should have pushed me more, and you should of had me do this or that, and he tells me that I wasn’t ready for different things, and the one thing I remember what I did with him, was I did a karaoke routine in front of my class, I have no idea why or how or if they all thought “what the heck’s going on” but I did a lot of avoidance tricks, I didn’t talk about my stuttering really to anybody except him and I would have to write spelling stories every week that we would read out loud, and I, that class we had to read all the time out loud, and so I’d write my spelling stories very specifically around the sounds and letters that I couldn’t say, so I spent hours and hours on my spelling story every week. But I usually got through all those reading times somehow. And then it was 2 years later, we moved to junior high, I had a new speech and language pathologist and then like my mom was talking about a little while ago it seemed like every 2 years I would have a new therapist who didn’t specialize in stuttering, kind of knew about it, would have these old dusty books on their shelf, that they’d get off for me, and say “ok, let’s try this program” you know this is the David Daly program, I know he’s really good, but when you just open one of his books and start something that’s not as
effective, plus for the fact that I talked about my stuttering for a half hour a week when I went there, and that was it. So it was more like a venting thing, it was really nothing I could ever take out of that room, any technique that we practiced in there, I couldn’t apply it to the real world ever, I’d just go right back to whatever coping techniques I was doing anyway. And again that was really the only time I talked about my stuttering. Probably if anyone else brought it up, I would start crying or I’d get like really emotional about it. But like she [Liza] was saying, in high school, I mean I had a lot of friends, I was really involved, I was happy, but there were, people like talked about you behind your back, and every once in a while you’d hear about it, and I still remember a few instances where I heard that “Brandon” was making fun of me over at “Ernie’s” house about my stuttering and like, it was just like crushing, so I’m sure that, you know, those things happen and you just have to go on, but we did, I had a couple of speeches that I had to do, and my mom tried to get me to be able to do them after school, and I had a couple of teachers of mine that argued it, and said, nope, where, she has to do it in class or she gets an “E”, and there’s this one teacher where I told him that I wasn’t going to do it, so we just, he gave me an “E” on it. And there were a couple of other speeches that I did in character, [verbal signs of agreement from focus group members] that was my spin on it, that I acted like I was Catcher in the Rye character, XXX Caulfield, and just because I turned that character on, I was able to get through it and I got an A or whatever and I was impressed but that was pretty much, therapy for me was just in and out of this little room for a half an hour a week, and it never really came to much. And at the same point when I acted like I was very happy, and I was, there were moments where it was crushing and I’d cry all night and tell my parents that I’d cut off my left arm if I could just speak more fluently, I mean that’s all I wanted in life ‘cause I was constantly wasting my brain power on worrying about what to say, and then reading out loud was always good until 8th grade,
and I still remember I could read out loud, I had a mental thing where the words were already on
the paper, so it wasn’t a problem getting them out, but then all of a sudden that mentality broke
for some reason, then I couldn’t read out loud anymore, so it’s just weird how it went in phases,
and you thought you could do things then all of a sudden you couldn’t and, but I would say I was
moderate then, moderate-to-severe, whatever, but I hid a lot of it, and then I went to college, and
this was the first time of my life that I didn’t have that half hour a week to vent about my speech,
not really knowing how much that meant to me, it was like two years into college and I was like
at a breaking point with my own frustration of not being able to share it with anyone, so I started
going to a couple of people up there, and then I was at like a true breaking point and I met a
professor up at Michigan State, who teaches the fluency class, he stutters, I got introduced to him
from the clinic, speech clinic up at Michigan State where I worked with a couple of students, but
again just taught them everything they needed to know about stuttering and then they’d go, ok,
let’s figure out a way that we can help you maybe, you know, and it was just like a
brainstorming. So I met him, though, he told me like three things that helped me within two
days, and I went back to him, and I said you have to work with me, like you’re amazing, and he
said “I really don’t have time right now, and I’ve got this and that” so I left his classroom, I
remember I went down the hallway, I turned back around, I went back into his office, and I
started crying, I said “I don’t care what I have to do but you’re going to work with me”. And so
he said, “ok, meet me here tomorrow at noon”, sat me down in front of a video camera, and I
thought, ok, this is the normal thing, he’s going to see how horrible I am right now and how he
can like fix me in two weeks but he immediately turned the tape on for me and made me watch it
until I stopped crying. And then we started working on it together, and ever since then, it’s pretty
much been an uphill climb and graduated from school I found the NSA when I couldn’t find a job and the support of everyone, and, that’s it, that’s my therapy.

SERENA: I, let me gather my thoughts here, I had speech therapy in elementary school and then when it got to junior high school [cell phone starts ringing], anyway, so yeah, I had, I was in speech therapy in elementary school, and I didn’t mind being pulled out because I, you know, I don’t know, I liked school, but it was cool to kind of be pulled out, and there were four or five of us who went but again it was just, we just repeated words over and over again, and that’s all we did, and some, and it was always during a subject I hated, so I didn’t mind so much. When I went to junior high, and they started to pull me out, I told my mom, no, because I was embarrassed because it made you different. People started saying, well, where are you going, and you know I don’t remember what I’d say but…and that’s really when, I was really, I don’t even remember, I always, I was like mild to moderate, it just depended on the situation, and I wasn’t, I was a little bit more on the shyer side if I didn’t know you, and probably the first couple of years of elementary school and then that went away fast, but I never talked about it at home with my parents or friends, I never, I never talked about it with really anyone unless it was the SLP for those six years that I went. And, I mean to this day, me and my mom haven’t talked about it ever. But going back to school, I always found ways, I mean all of us count paragraphs when we read, when I read I would purposely go over a word, change words, the teacher usually didn’t say anything about it, or I’d cough or I’d have to go to the bathroom just when it was me, I mean I started hiding, avoiding, changing words, word substitutions, not remembering what I was going to say, being a wise ass, all of that kind of helped me, I mean every report card from first grade till high school said she talks too much, and she’s, I was always one of the class clowns, I don’t know if that was related to my speech or not but for someone who doesn’t like their speech and
who has a problem, you can never shut me up. But, and I think it was probably in high school when I did more presentations and I’d either skip class and just take an “E” or I would go up there again and I would just change words, or not remember, or jump from here to there, and sometimes I would do it really great, it’s like I got like in this mode like where you’re out like an out-of-body experience, like where you’re acting. And I, I’d spend hours doing tons of like, whatever, like say I heard about [pause] a war. I would draw or I’d copy pages and pages and put them on the board, and then point as I was reading, so like they wouldn’t be seeing me, they would be seeing the XXX on the wall, so if I have any problems they wouldn’t see it, and I think that’s where I developed the habit when I was up there and they [focus group members] may know, sometimes when I can’t get out my words, my eyes will go up, they’ll go look up, and that began in high school because I would pretend that, you know, I lost my train of thought, or something, I’d be like [pretends to look like she’s lost her train of thought] but it was just to get [words out], so it’s kind of stuck with me now when I can’t get a word out my eyes will just automatically go up, it drives me crazy. But I mean it was, I was never teased, my, except, by, except by mother’s son who’s also my brother, that’s only one but we tease each other about everything so that doesn’t count. But it did hurt, and again, I’ve never, I was very social, outgoing, had a lot of fun in high school when I decided to show up, and, so I never let it get in the way of anything but I never talked about it, I think I was 26 the first time I ever talked to anyone about it, and I tried my best to hide it by just avoiding and, I mean I changed my name, I would go, I would meet someone, and maybe I’ll never see them again, sometimes I’d do that once in a while, like at the mall, “will you hold this”, they ask for a name, I give them “Ann” I mean it, it’s just, it’s less embarrassing than not being able to say your name because you get those looks of “are you dumb” and those little laughs, and “are you sure you know your name?”
but I don’t know, I mean school, I wouldn’t go back, but had I known about the NSA and that is
was ok and known other people I think it really would have, I don’t know, I mean I can’t
imagine ‘cause it hasn’t, that’s not what it was like, but it probably would make me a little bit
more open, less ashamed, knowing it’s ok, ‘cause it was sort of a lot of work, not a lot of work
hiding but it was, I worry more than I did then because now, like in my job, I feel like I have to
prove myself more than I did in school, and I built up so much anxiety anticipating a situation or
a phone or a speech more so than the event itself and that just causes a lot of problems but I
mean the NSA’s really made me more open about having friends and people in my life who
understand has helped but, I don’t know, I just think if SLP’s were learned more of not only the
therapy side but the emotional side it would, you can’t have one without the other, I think that
would make a world of differences, not only how can we make you fluent but how can we make
you feel ok with your speech, so, that’s mine, I’m done.

STACEY:  You know, I started stuttering at a very early age and I always had speech therapy
XXX and I don’t remember too much what the therapy was and most of the kids and teachers
accepted my stuttering and the teachers really didn’t, really didn’t push me to talk too much in
school because they knew about it even though we really didn’t talk about it and I just remember
one or two times where kids teased me to my face, and I just blew them off because I figured
they are the ones with the problems not me. And then I took a break from the speech therapy in
college, and then after college my mom called one of the local hospitals for a good speech and
language pathologist who specialized in stuttering, ‘cause I guess my mom wanted me to talk
more fluently in the working world and she found one for me and the speech and language
pathologist and I worked together for I think about a year and a half on different techniques and
different situations and then when she felt I was ready, and I was very fluent for a long time, and
I worked really hard to be fluent and I tried really hard not to stutter and in the last 4 or 5 years my stuttering has slowly crept up on me in certain times and now I’m really, really cool and accepting of it, and most that I talk to don’t seem to mind me stuttering, just a brief moments of time, and I found their reaction to be good. Because I think they think, since I’m cool with my speech, they’re cool with it. And that’s it, I guess.

EARL:  When I was in elementary school, I don’t remember having that much trouble with my speech because I’m a covert stutterer, but I do remember, it was more like a lot of fun for me, but then I can remember that if a teacher called on me, I answered just as few words as possible. And then when I was in the 8th grade, one of the assignments was to give the Gettysburg Address, and I didn’t want to do it, but, so I kept on putting it off and putting it off, and finally near one of the last days of class, I managed, I think I remember I had to stay after class, and that’s when I gave my speech, you know. And then when I got to high school, I figured I had to kind of buckle down, ‘cause I was thinking like maybe, I guess I’m getting emotional here, but I have to keep on going here, in high school I can remember I had to buckle down ‘cause I was thinking, well, I’m going to have to go to college maybe, so I have to be serious about this, so I think that only made my stuttering a little bit worse, it made me more afraid to stutter is probably more accurate, so I can remember when, just like in grade school, when the teacher would call on me, I had a bunch of nuns actually, and just one or two XXX, and I would answer as few words as possible and I can remember, I was always pretty good with math and science, and I remember different instances like in high school, they had like a math quiz between like two teams, you know, and I was pretty good in math. But nobody would pick me for math lesson, I’d be the last one to be picked, you know, and that kind of hurt too, so when I used to go back and forth to school, ‘cause we had to walk back and forth, XXX, and I would come back just when the bell would
almost ring so I wouldn’t have to stay outside and talk too much, I just was very shy person. And I wouldn’t, if they asked me something in class, like I can remember the priest one day taught the class, it was a religion class, and somebody got hurt on the playground, or something like that, and they asked me, “Well [John Doe] probably knows what happened, what happened [John]?” and so I had to stand up, and I answered like, “Well um somebody fell down and got hurt” you know, “What else?” “Well, that’s all” so somebody else got up and explained the whole thing, I guess it was a fight or something, but anyway, I didn’t say too many words. In high school I started dating, I was in the 9th grade and I don’t know if it was because of my shyness or because of my stuttering [tears up] anyway, when I was in the 9th grade I wanted to call up a girl for a date, so I was down in the basement, I was down in the basement by myself and I betcha, I betcha [emotional pause] I probably, I was standing in front of that phone about half an hour. And then I picked up and I called the girl and I said “would you like to go out to the freshman dance” and she said “I’d like to [John] but I already got a date, otherwise I’d love to go out with you, maybe next time though”. So anyway, I hung up and that was it and then [says with sad, tearful emotion] I never asked a girl out, I don’t think, throughout all of high school. And I remember there was a lot of girls that wanted to take me out [laughter from the focus group]. I remember the high school prom, I think I was the only boy without a date because I never asked a girl. And I’m sitting there, there’s a lot of girls that want to go out with you, and I was just too shy, and I don’t know if it’s because I was shy or if it was just stuttering, I think it was more shy than anything else, but maybe there’s something in there about the stuttering too that makes me that way. But anyway, I had my own group of friends in high school like boys you know and I had three brothers, still got three brothers, and you know I hung around with them, we had a high school class reunion a couple of years ago and I remember being, I was a lot more open then
more so than I was in high school XXX. That was my high school experience and I went to
college and I don’t remember having too much trouble in college, I mean I didn’t talk that much,
I didn’t have a chance to make presentations or anything like that but that’s my high school and
elementary school experiences I guess.
INTERVIEWER: So what helped you during those times, did you have any support systems.
EARL: Well see I was such a covert stutterer, you could know me for years and not know that
I’m a stutterer.
INTERVIEWER: Right
EARL: I guess because, what helped me out I didn’t talk too much, you know, the only time I
got therapy when I was in the army actually, I was, I read a book when I was in the army about
being XXX I guess and I picked up on that and it really worked for me, I just, this stuff really
works. And it’s like XXX stuttering a little bit different, and it really helped out, I’d pick up a
phone and I could use a technique and I didn’t stutter, and it’s like, wow, this is great. So I mean
since then I’ve been more, I can deal with it a lot better but then meeting the NSA, being in the
NSA, I always look for something like that and finally I found it and you know, what do other
people do, and how do they feel, let them know how I feel, it’s really helped me out a lot. But
that’s my school experiences.
INTERVIEWER: Hearing you talk about those times, especially those emotional moments, and
all of you XXX
EARL: Well see I’m so emotional, I can break up, here, a little boy got hurt and I’ll start crying,
I mean I’m just so emotional, I don’t know, it’s just the way I am, I guess, I don’t know, I wish I
could control my emotions.
INTERVIEWER: No, that’s great.
SERENA: More guys should be like you.

LIZA: Can I say something that…

INTERVIEWER: Sure

LIZA: I heard you [points to Earl] say it and Serena say it about being shy, and I don’t know if it’s related but I was very shy throughout kindergarten to kind of 5th grade and then I just kind of XXX and I was really only shy at school but I mean I remember thinking getting on the bus in kindergarten and first grade and sitting down in a seat and the kids pushing me out of the seat. And I was so shy, and so I would just sit on the floor for a second and then I’d get up and I’d go find somewhere else to sit, and I did the same thing in school you know, kindergarten, there’s like that playtime, and I’d be playing with something and the kid would take it away from me and I would just let him and that was one thing that the teachers would tell my mom like at every conference, you’ve got to work with her on her assertiveness cause she lets people walk all over her, and I don’t know if that’s related our speech because we’re so ashamed of ourselves that we can’t talk, and, I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting because I find that to be true for myself too is that people have always tended to walk all over me, I’ve never been able to be that assertive, so is that pretty true for the rest of you?

LIZA: I mean it isn’t now. Now I’m probably too assertive. But when you’re little I think XXX.

EARL: I’ll stand up for certain principles, you know, I’ll, I get pretty into it, I can take people’s XXX off.

CLAY: Can I just talk about my college years also, I didn’t talk about those at all, I didn’t know that you wanted them, my college years.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I was mainly focusing on K-12…
CLAY: Well that’s what I thought.

SERENA: [jokingly says] Oh, so you’re saying we did it all wrong.

CLAY: No I kind of stopped at high school.

INTERVIEWER: Was there something about college that you wanted to say.

CLAY: For me, college was the worst place to be for me. Because I could take the courses back in the 60s back then. They were held in the huge halls and you didn’t have to talk at all. You could blend in with hundreds of kids in the classrooms. And I majored in history and I have my degree and I didn’t have to get up in front of a class for 4 of the years in college, actually. Four years, ok, and got a degree and didn’t have to talk at all in school. Four years in class.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting.

CLAY: That’s amazing that I did that. I picked the courses that you know had the huge classes.

INTERVIEWER: So that was your way of having to avoid…

CLAY: Absolutely, I avoided. Four years. And I have my college degree. For four years, I was pretty clever, I was pretty smart. Didn’t talk a whole lot.

INTERVIEWER: That sort of brings up another issue is that going through school, what, and we sort of talked about it already, but what was the classroom like for you going through school?

LIZA: Probably the worst was when we had to read around the room and began in front of the room everybody read a paragraph. You counted exactly when it was your turn to read.

SERENA: Or saying your name.

JANET: Yeah that was the worst.

LIZA: That was awful, I mean you were just shaking inside ‘cause you knew that you were going to have to read.

JANET: I would get up and go to the bathroom
LIZA: Yeah

JANET: Or like Serena said if I couldn’t start that first word [on] my paragraph, I’d skip down to another one, and then they’d be like “You’re at the wrong paragraph!” and I’d be like, “Oh” and then the teacher would be mad. And then I’d be like, I’d just pretend like I was dumb. That was the worst part.

STACEY: Yeah, I don’t believe I remember reading paragraphs in school. Because I think the teachers kind of knew, like I said before, that I stuttered and they really didn’t force me into reading, but I did have to take a, well I took a speech class in high school which I think I passed with an A or B because the teacher graded me on the speech, on the [written] speech part but not on my [physical] speech itself, and I had to take a speech class in college because I think it was a requirement, and the instructor graded me based on the speech that I wrote and presented and not on my [physical] speech itself, on the speech that I wrote and presented and not on my stuttering speech, which I thought was good of the teachers that they didn’t grade me less because of my talking. That was cool, I thought.

EARL: Sometimes the teacher might ask you something, and you might know the answer, but you won’t raise your hand. “Does anybody know that?” and you feel like, man, I know it, I was just too shy, I was afraid I was going to stutter, so I just didn’t raise my hand.

SERENA: See, in school and even now I’m very competitive, so even if I did know the answer what I hated is the times where I did raise my hand, and [the instructor would say] “I’m sorry could you say that again”, and that was like the hardest part, well that’s the hardest part anytime is repeating yourself, “I’m sorry, what did you say your name was?” It was always the hardest part.
JANET: I was thinking back to the classroom that a lot of kids have a lot of other things on their minds, or they’re ADD and this kind of thing, but I feel like I wasn’t even listening to like maybe 75 percent of what anyone was saying [Liza also nods in agreement] because I was thinking almost all the time about my speech and what would I do if they called, and what should I do if this, what if this, like replaying scenarios in my mind, when today if I were in school I would just be this sponge of information.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, ‘cause someone else that I talked to had brought that issue up, that it affected their learning, they couldn’t focus on what the teacher was saying because they were so worried about having to speak. Do you think that stuttering played a role in your academic performance at all?

LIZA: No.

STACEY: I think with me I did better in school because I thought I had to prove myself to be better than everybody else.

SERENA: You know it never did me but now after high school I took some time off because I didn’t want to go to school, and my parents didn’t have the money, and many reasons, well I finally went back four or five years ago, and I’m currently going, and I find now that I’m dealing with it and I’m talking about it and I have a lot of pressure at work. College is tough now and when someone was saying, when you [points to Janet] were saying how you spent most of your time not hearing what was being said but waiting ‘cause you know you had to talk. I took a business course last term and it was tough because it was all interactive, the first day you met the person on your right and then you introduced them, and it was horrible, I totally, her name is Sam but she cuts hair, and I couldn’t say beautician, so I was like “well she cuts hair”, and XXX. We had many presentations that we had to read out loud, every time we took a test we read out
loud. I would sit there in the classroom where it was, I could see it as you came in the school, and I could see what they were doing by what was on the board, every time we took an exam, the next test I had to come in a half hour XXX I had to sit there and wait because I wouldn’t want to be doing it out loud. And when she would be doing…

JANET: This is now?

SERENA: Now, yeah. She would be doing presentations and we’d have to do like a group presentation of course I’d offer to do all the written work, get everything out so that way, like the titles I knew I could say and everyone else would be doing theirs and I should have been paying attention to their content and I wasn’t. I was just like “are we next, are we next, are we next?” and I actually had, which is totally, I must have been out of control, but I had a couple of times where I had, a couple of people before me went, and a lot of them are just like 18, 19, they talk about partying the whole time, so they come and they were unorganized, but it actually put me at ease because I thought “well they sound unorganized” now I’m organized but maybe if I sound unorganized it won’t be so bad. And a couple of times, I think people thought, it was the first class I took in college to where I had to do anything like that, and I think they thought I was nervous because the couple of presentations after that they, a lot of them would tell me “oh, you did a great job” and I thought “well why are you telling me and not anyone else on my team”, I think they kind of, I don’t know if they thought I was nervous or could tell it was something with my speech, I don’t know, but it was really weird. But what happened to me, or what happened to you [points to Liza], my teacher, she just butted heads, she hated any of the hick girls. Her and I would butt heads and she would interrupt and she was all about you have to be on time, ‘cause when you’re out in the real world in business you have to be on time, you can’t get up in the middle of class and go to the bathroom. You can’t “blah blah blah” and I’m like “in meetings we
can get up and go if we need to go” and she’s arguing with me and I just can’t stand anyone who has a big power ego trip. So she started explaining and I said “yes, I understand” and I was giving her an answer and she kept interrupting me, and I said “excuse me, but in the business world, you do not interrupt” and all of a sudden I was going on and on, it was the same thing [points to Liza] and everyone in the class was like [pretends to sit very stiff and still], and after, I mean they thought I was going to tear her head off, but it was just, I was trying to make a point but I guess my point in sharing this is, even now I still don’t always hear what I need to hear because I’m so worried “what if I need to talk” and it’s actually XXX me now than it was in high school.

INTERVIEWER: Well that brings up another issue. What were your teacher relationships like going through school?

STACEY: I thought mine was pretty good. They didn’t seem to mind me leaving for speech therapy because again they knew of it and they didn’t mind and we always had a good working relationship too. So mine was quite positive.

JANET: I think by high school I tried to tell my teachers before we started class, or the week before school even, I would go and try to catch them and tell them that I stutter. But even, I don’t even think I knew why I was telling them, I just wanted them to know. Because then they’d always say “oh do you not want me to call on you, or do you not want me to make you read” or whatever, and I’d always say, “no, just treat me however you treat everyone else” but then I’d hate for them to call on me or make me read. But just having them know, but then interestingly enough I didn’t really want anyone else to know or talk about it, or I didn’t want them to say it, I just wanted them to know. I think they were a little bit freaked out there because they didn’t really know what to do about it. They’re like ok, great, you stutter, I don’t really know what that
means, I don’t really know what stuttering is, or what causes it, or how to help you, or anything, but you’re going to be sitting there, you know, so, but, and I remember even, sometimes I couldn’t get to my teachers ahead of time, and I’d have a prewritten note that I’d give them, like as soon as I’d walk into the classroom, so I’d make sure I knew where my classrooms were so I could get there before it started so I could give them that note so that they don’t make me introduce myself, but then they still would, so I don’t know, I did really well in school, but like I was just saying, I feel like I would have learned more, I did good, I got good grades and everything, but I feel like I didn’t learn like even half as much as I would have if I could have been not thinking about stuttering.

CLAY: Most of the teachers I had didn’t know what to do with me really. They weren’t sure to make me talk in class or not, so I don’t know, looking back, I think that most of them just were content just to let me sit in the class and not talk at all. You know, they didn’t know quite what, who is this, how do I handle him, they didn’t know anything way back then. It’s getting much better now though I think in schools for kids who stutter.

LIZA: I think my speech actually is one of the reasons why I tried harder once I was in college because I began to realize that in the work world it could hold me back so if I wasn’t as qualified or more qualified than everyone else, that it could hurt me, so I figured actually I tried harder so I would also develop good relationships with all of the teachers and I can honestly say in all my years of school, of college, that the lady last semester is the only time that I’ve ever had somebody that didn’t really see what was going on with me.

SERENA: And tell him what your job is now? What you majored in?

LIZA: My bachelor’s is in journalism, my first master’s is in public relations, and my master’s that I’m working on right now is in human resource management. So I actually majored in things
that were all about public speaking, everything was, but I also think going to smaller schools, colleges, helped because then the teachers learned and the professors learned that you stuttered and they were ok with it, where I think it would have probably been harder up at [names university] because of the larger classrooms.

JANET: The classes were only large for two years.

LIZA: Oh.

JANET: Then they get to smaller classrooms.

LIZA: Was it harder though like in those big lecture halls?

JANET: I guess it was harder just because there was 40,000 kids and you could really, easily just not go or try to hide or whatever, but once you get down, I mean the last two years are all classes XXX make you talk and the whole thing.

SERENA: So it’s easier when they’re larger then because you kind of get lost in the…

JANET: I mean it’s just a lecture, you just sit and listen, then you take a multiple choice test for two years.

INTERVIEWER: Well as far as teachers, I guess I would think being a teacher, like if you had never encountered a person who stutters, or never just had any background, it may be difficult to know exactly what to do in the classroom, so I guess if you had all teachers at your attention right now, what do you think they need to know about the experience of people who stutter in school, what are the “do’s”, what are the “don’ts”, what do you think teachers should know about people who stutter.

JANET: My mom’s a teacher. We’ve done a couple of presentations, and [Earl] and I did one for SLPs and there were some teachers and, I think all of us have done some presentations, so we’ve tried to capture the attention of people, and, but really it’s sort of hard just because I think
we can all admit that there are a lot of kids that have a lot of different challenges and problems and you can’t possibly know everything about everything, even though teachers think they do. But I mean all teachers should try to be sensitive and try to learn about their students if they’ve got, if they stutter, if they’re autistic, if they have ADD for real, I mean you should know some their coping skills, but for stuttering, that’s hard question, I’m not answering it so far.

SERENA: One of the biggest things is don’t interrupt, let them finish their sentences, and allow them to interact and do what everyone else has to do, I mean I know that sometimes its best to do presentations with just the teacher, but by allowing that to happen, that’s teaching them that it’s a bad thing and you don’t deserve everyone else to see you because it’s a negative thing. Treat them the way you do everyone, you know, don’t allow them any special privileges, I mean that’s my view, and I know some of you had them, so, and may be not your view.

JANET: Yeah I had that one teacher that wouldn’t let me do it after school, and I got an “E” or whatever, and I don’t think that was right necessarily for where I was at that point, but I just thought about my answer while she [Serena] was talking, that if I had all teachers’ attention, I would say that it’s important for anybody and everyone to have, know some different resources so maybe if it’s not the SLP at that school, maybe the teacher can have a quick meeting with the parent or the student and say, “you know I know you stutter, you told me that you did, you should look up the NSA and get support”, I don’t know.

SERENA: But also that, now you [Janet] got me thinking, now would it be, and I guess I can ask you, would it be the parent’s job to educate the teacher or should the teacher do a little bit of side work to educate themselves about this disorder, I mean is it the parent’s responsibility or the teacher’s responsibility, or whose role would it be?
JANET: Well, like what I was saying is that the teacher can’t possibly just know everything about everything, if a kid comes in and has a disease that you’ve never heard about, let’s just say, stuttering is not a disease, but, you know, you, I think it would the parent or that student’s job to go to the teacher and say, and educate them. But if they don’t know, it would be cool for the teacher to have different resources just on a bunch of different things and say, “here, check out NSA stuff.”

SERENA: Yeah, ‘cause as a parent I would want to educate the teacher to put my child more at ease, I wouldn’t depend on the teacher…

JANET: Yeah, but most parents or a lot of parents

SERENA: I know.

LIZA: I think it has to be both, you know the teachers have to be willing to maybe do a little more reading if a parent says my child has a lisp or they stutter or whatever it is, but the parents also need to educate when needed, it’s sort of like a partnership between the parent and teacher, but I think it is nice if, when a child reads out loud or whatever it is, that you do praise them, maybe not in front of the whole class, but before they leave “you did really well”, you know, encourage them that they’re doing well. So you can treat them the same. But you also want to give them a little…

SERENA: Extra.

LIZA: …extra, nice words that would help them.

JANET: And I think there’s a balance, I mean you have to have a balance between being sensitive and challenging. So there’s this balance there. You don’t want to be too sensitive and not make them do anything, but you don’t want to make them want to kill themselves.

LIZA: Right.
EARL: It might help if the teacher would ask the student with the problem “would you feel comfortable if I called on you” and like Janet said it’s like should I be sensitive or should I, because sometimes the student might be reluctant to get to challenging XXX. It’s a give and take between the teacher and student.

SERENA: Someone earlier said that they’re better, that teachers in schools are better educated now, I don’t think…

CLAY: I said that.

SERENA: Do you believe that now, why do you believe that?

CLAY: I do. Because of organizations like ours. Before we didn’t have any of that.

SERENA: Yeah, but there’s…

LIZA: Yeah but we did when I was little.

CLAY: We didn’t have any of that stuff back then.

SERENA: Well, we have NSA, but how many people actually know about NSA, that’s the problem. It’s not a known organization.

LIZA: But I don’t think it’s the teacher’s fault.

SERENA: No it’s not.

LIZA: Is it part of their curriculum in college, I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: I guess it’s getting better, we’re not quite there yet but we’re getting better.

JANET: We can back up to even one more level though, which is the crazier thing is that, speech and language pathologists that work in the schools that are supposed to be the speech specialists don’t know about stuttering. And I think it’s better obviously today than it was 20 years ago, and 20 years before that, but I guess what would be the greatest thing is if the teacher
could go to the SLP in their school and say “I’ve got a kid that stutters, what do you think I should do” and they’ve got the answers and they’ve got the resources.

SERENA: That doesn’t always happen.

JANET: But as of now I’ve been doing presentations for SLPs coming into, who are about to be SLPs and one’s who are right now, and they never heard of the NSA, they didn’t know there were support groups, they don’t understand why you’d even need to know other people that stutter, that is like the most mind-boggling thing to me so far is that I went to a speech pathologist for 15 years for a half hour a week out of my life, they didn’t know anything about stuttering except that one class that they had in college 10 years ago. So it’s hard to blame it on the teacher, the teacher should be able to go to their SLP resource in their school.

SERENA: Or they may not view it as different, as your average handicap, like you know, they don’t have a walker, they don’t have a limp, they’re not autistic or Down’s, so, there’s nothing, it’s not like a common, no one knows about it, ok, yeah they talk weird it doesn’t matter.

JANET: Or even more so, they’re going to think that that speech impediment is the same as not being able to say your “r’s” and “l’s” and it’s day and night.

INTERVIEWER: That brings up an issue that I also wanted to ask about. School can be challenging and difficult for lots of reasons, you know if you have cerebral palsy or ADD or a language disorder, how do you think your experience, do you think there are unique issues and challenges that are specific to your experience? I guess when you think about your experience in school and the difficulties and challenges that you’ve had to face, do you think that there are any unique issues and challenges that are specific to stuttering that maybe other people don’t experience?
LIZA: Well yeah. We had a speech and language pathologist, I believe she was a graduate student at one of our meetings, and I don’t know if you guys remember this, but she compared us to autism. Like she just thought they were the same. And they’re not the same.

JANET: There are some links though, I think that’s what she was saying.

LIZA: There are links but they’re just not the same, so for speech and language pathologists not to make a blanket statement because our minds work normal, it’s just, we can’t get the words out. But it isn’t the same as some of the other handicaps and disorders which are, maybe learning disabilities, we don’t have a learning disability we just can’t talk.

JANET: I think my answer to that question and again it was how is our challenge unique?

INTERVIEWER: Or do you think it is?

JANET: Or do you think it is? And my, I remember comparing myself back, or even my dad, if I was having a real bad night and crying, he’d say “there are people out there that have no legs, and there are people starving that don’t have any food” you know, he would try to make me feel like my problem was less than other people’s, and of course I’m sure it was in many cases but the unique thing is that your communication is being halted and affected and communication between human beings is I’d say the most important thing so for that one trait of mine to be the one that’s affected, I think is more of a challenge than if I couldn’t walk. ‘Cause at least if I couldn’t walk I can still have a wheelchair but (if there was a person in a wheelchair here I’m sure they’d argue with me) but they could talk and express themselves and say whatever they want and whenever they wanted and I think that’s the most unique thing.

SERENA: Yeah and along the lines of what you [Janet] just said, when you see someone in a wheelchair you know that something, they have an impairment. You meet someone, and you walk up to us to talk to us you have no clue and then all of a sudden you hear [imitates stuttering]
you know and then they’re like “what’s going on?” and it’s just like it’s something that, I mean it’s not obvious until you talk to us and every phone call you make, every meeting, everyone you meet, I mean at least with me it’s on my mind before I even make it, I mean it’s constantly there, it’s like a bubble, it’s constantly there, and it’s never, no matter who I talk to, my mind’s never not going “am I going to say it right,” I mean and I know what, I scan ahead, I know what I can’t say, it’s always obvious, it’s always there, I would love a day where I just don’t think about it at all.

EARL: There’s a lot of emotion. I’m a covert stutterer and there’s a lot of emotion involved there too, like you feel like “how come I’m not like this person or that person, am I a little bit less because I’m a stutterer,” and I guess you have to come to your own terms with that, how you feel about that, and I think that’s a lot of stuttering too, a lot of it is the emotional side too that you have to really deal with. I think that’s part of it too.

INTERVIEWER: And that issue brings up XXX sometimes in school, just think about the issues that you’ve had to deal with, some experiences are out there, they’re observable, like if you asked someone off the street “what do you thing a person who stutters goes through in school, what are some challenges” they may be able to tell you oral presentations or reading aloud in class. But then there are other experiences that may not be so observable, they may be hidden and more subtle. So I guess what do you think those experiences are like for people who stutter and for you personally. Like the example you [Janet] gave when you had to read aloud in class and you went to use the bathroom and came back, you knew that was because you wanted to avoid reading but other people may not have known why you wanted to use the bathroom, so I guess what do you think, what are the subtle, “behind the scenes” experiences that people who stutter may go through in school, what do you experience that people may not know about?
LIZA: I’d say it’s the beating yourself up afterwards. People don’t see what’s going on in your mind for the next 8 hours of the fact that you couldn’t say 5 words. That’s huge.

STACEY: And the internal frustration of trying to say a specific word or what not. And it’s a big struggle to not get that word out.

JANET: I think they’d never know that you substitute words and say “my mother’s son” when you very well could have just said “my brother”. They don’t know why you’re doing that. Or that you even did it ‘cause a lot of times I would say “my father” instead of “my dad” and they would never know that in my mind I was going “I want to say ‘dad’, I want to say ‘dad’ but I’ll just say ‘father’”. And I didn’t like the way that father even sounded. Or when we would say things that sound stupid and you hate that you just sounded stupid, that you didn’t know the real word for it, or you act like you didn’t know. Like you’ll say “um, what’s that thing called where Abraham Lincoln wrote on the thing” like you act like you don’t know.

SERENA: I do that all the time and I even do a lot of it now at work. I will sit at meetings and I will know the answer and I just, if I’m asked anything, I’ll say, I won’t use the most intelligent words. So then I’ll go back to my desk and I’ll write a huge email, I still feel I need to prove that I’m capable. Everyone at work says I’m very [pause] very detailed. And I get the job done. Example: I get a phone call and they ask me something. It takes me 10 seconds to call them back and give an answer. No, I prefer writing an email, give them an answer, give them more, and I anticipate what they’re going to ask based my answer, and provide them with that information to avoid having them call me again and keep returning their calls with an email, it’s a lot work…

JANET: And I think that’s what she goes through now, and what we would go through back then too.
SERENA: In school, if I had to do a written report or anything, oh, it would be awesome to balance off the poor oral presentations, although I always did good with them, but I don’t know, they just didn’t grade hard.

LIZA: Serena once, you once told me during a performance review that they said that you don’t always use the most professional language. And a lot of it is because she’s always substituting because she knows that she can’t say certain words. And rather than tell them it’s because she stutters, she just lets them believe that she doesn’t know the words. But we do those things.

SERENA: It’s a fear of being [pause] found out.

JANET: I was going to say the other thing about school that people might be surprised about is your name. That your name is the number one hardest thing for you to get out. It’s unsubstitutional, it comes up every day, people are sometimes surprised about that.

INTERVIEWER: I have just a couple more questions. What do you think the school climate is like for people who stutter now? So if you had a five year old person, and they’re about to go through 12 years of school, what are the issues and challenges that they’re going to face? So how would you describe the school climate now for people who stutter?

Clay: I think kids are probably going to deal with the same things we dealt with, but they’re going to be better prepared to deal with it, I think.

Serena: If they have a knowledgeable source.

Clay: I’m sure that if Janet’s child stutters, which it could happen who knows, that she’ll have more people to turn to, to help her and her child. It’s going to be better, for sure I think.

Serena: For her.

Clay: No, for the child too.

Serena: No, but for parents out there that don’t know about the SFA [Stuttering Foundation of
America] and NSA [National Stuttering Association] and have school SLPs that don’t know that, nothing’s going to change.

Janet: But it’s so easy today to go on the internet and…

Serena: That’s true.

Janet: …google stuttering and “boom” you’re at the NSA website in a moment, and that’s the difference. I mean my parents obviously love me a lot, they wanted the best for me, they sought out some resources that were local and available, and maybe we’d look at the old encyclopedia that was downstairs that said the definition of stuttering. But I mean that was really the extent of it. I mean there were a couple books that the SLPs had in their office, but again they didn’t know anything about stuttering except that one class that they took, so like he was saying, it’s interesting to think that 10 years ago I wouldn’t have wished stuttering on my worst enemy, I thought it was like the end. And today if my kid stutters, I think [Janet becomes emotional with tears], I think it would be a better human being, because then I’ll be able to teach it. But kids today, they have more resources at their fingertips, not always good resources. But that’s the main thing. You can get resources.

[Tape stops]
FOCUS GROUP – 2
Date: September 26, 2006
Place: Northwest Ohio

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview [laughter] about your school experiences, what school has been like for you, so I’m going to be asking you questions about your school experiences and your opinion on what school is like for people who stutter, so actually the first question is going to be an individual question where one person goes and then the next person, but after that it’s going to be kind of a collective discussion so feel free to jump in as you wish. So I guess the first question is, I’m wondering if you can just tell me in general what school has been like for you? So starting from kindergarten and going up through the twelfth grade, if you could walk me through your school experience, what has school been like for you? Anyone can start.

LANCE: Well it all started when I was 5 years old. And I, let me think. Well I was hypersensitive as a kid, so I couldn’t stand anything, loud noises, but I know that kids used to mimic me as a kid and then as I aged and got into 4\textsuperscript{th} grade and up through 6\textsuperscript{th} grade, during recess I would walk around the playground and not talk to anybody and one of my friends, I mean still today, says, “Lance what were you doing in 4\textsuperscript{th} grade kind of like walking around” and I’m like, you know, “I was thinking”. He goes, “what do you have to really think about besides eating lunch and playing soccer?” I’m like, “I was just thinking about how I talk” and that’s something I did for a long time. Then in middle school I got teased more and my older brother who was also there at the time, he actually beat up the kid who did tease me. So, high school, high school was a little weird because there were times where I know I was more fluent like 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} grade. Then 11\textsuperscript{th} grade and 12\textsuperscript{th} grade came in and I became more disfluent again. And kids didn’t tease me anymore in school but it was more I noticed the ignorance of the community
at stores, restaurants, and stuff, outside of school at that point. I didn’t really talk a whole lot in school. I remember having to do a presentation in 11\textsuperscript{th} grade and the teacher said I didn’t have to do it because I stuttered and I felt bad that I didn’t have to do it, even though I didn’t really want to do it because I stuttered but I felt bad at the same time, I felt guilty, I felt ashamed of myself for not doing it. So those kinds of situations came up. I sang in band at that time, so the, that kind of leader role kind of I think helped me cope with stuttering.

JAMES: Do you want us to describe like our experiences in school where we first started to stutter almost until now or how far do you want this?

INTERVIEWER: Your K-12 school experiences.

JAMES: K to 12, ok.

INTERVIEWER: From kindergarten through 12\textsuperscript{th} grade.

JAMES: Ok. Let me think back. I think my stuttering started when I was around 4, I think. And back when it started I was just repeating words “like-like-like” that, and there was no tension or anything just a lot of whole-word and probably some part-word repetitions. And I wasn’t really aware of my stuttering back then. The first time that I really realized that I had a problem with my speech, I was riding in my sister’s car somewhere, we were going somewhere for an errand or something, and I think I was 7 or 8 at the time, and we were driving over these railroad tracks and I was telling her something, something important, I forget what it was, and I was repeating this word over and over again, and she was like, “James you’re stuttering, stop stuttering.” So I sat there, I’m like “Oh my God, what’s wrong with me.” And so that was a pretty significant moment for me, I felt. I felt after that I started thinking more about my speech and probably started to even stutter more, so that was around 7 or 8. I would say throughout grade school my speech was about the same, most I just had lots of repetitions and some kids would tease me but I
don’t think it was real bad, I don’t think. But then my stuttering got worse in 6th grade, I think kids were teasing me more and I was stuttering more and so I had this bright idea that I was going to stop stuttering, like I’m tired of this, I’m just going to quit stuttering, you know. So every time I started to stutter I just tried to stop, so I would hesitate more, and think about my speech more, and temporarily I was more fluent, and then once I started doing this, I would say after a few weeks I started to block. And my mom saw this and she was like “James what are you doing, you know, this blocking stuff is not good for your speech” and I told her, “You know what, I know what I’m doing, I’m trying to stop stuttering, this is what I’m doing”. And so she just told me not to do it, and the strange thing is that when I first tried to stop stuttering, I would say for about a month or so, I could have well decided whether I wanted to block on words or just have repetitions on words, so I had pretty good control over my stuttering for a short period there. And then after a month or two I couldn’t control the blocks anymore, and it started to get worse and worse, and so I started to avoid talking and the telephone got really difficult, like when the phone rang I would just either stay in my bedroom or walk out of the house or just do anything to avoid the phone. So my speech got really bad from 6th grade on through middle school. And in classrooms where I had to talk my speech would just totally fall apart and I would get in these long 30 second to one minute blocks and just be totally stuck and be like flailing my arms around and all kinds of secondary behaviors and so like those experiences everyday just put me in a horrible mood. That was middle school and I think it was its worse like 8th or 9th grade. It got so bad that I avoided talking to as many people as possible, friends, family, I just tried to avoid everybody and became depressed, and suicidal and sort of bottomed out basically. So I think things started to turn around once I was a senior in high school, I think. So I guess to recap
for me, my worst stuttering years was like 6th grade through I’d say 10th or 11th grade, was the worse, so that’s kind of my story.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

KEVIN: I think that my stuttering began, so K through 12, correct?

INTERVIEWER: Right, your experiences in school, K-12.

KEVIN: In kindergarten I went to a special ed school, in kindergarten, like a preschool, kindergarten, it dealt with families who had a unique – I’m trying to think of the right word – families who had a unique background. In my family I have two older brothers, one older brother, yeah I have two older brothers. The oldest brother I have, he has autism. And when I was younger, it was kind of more on the maybe moderate to severe end of the autistic spectrum. He’s gotten a lot better now through therapy. But growing up it was really just different, you know, like, we didn’t have, I kept thinking we really didn’t have, my family life was different than all the other kids, and it was just kind of different to grasp that. My parents decided to enlist us into this special ed school that was able to deal with different family backgrounds. They were teachers, but they were kind of like social workers slash like psychologists, like really big on talking about your feelings, about you felt about stuff. It was just really different for me in kindergarten and my mom says that’s when I started stuttering, I was right about 4 or 5 when I was in this kindergarten. And I just remember reading was really tough for me, not because I didn’t really know what to do, or not because I didn’t know how to read, it was because, I think stuttering, I think that I was really like “Oh my gosh, why can’t I get this out”, you know, and then sometimes I just kind of like not wanted to read, sort of would really get emotional about that as a kid, and talk about my feelings, be very sensitive about my feelings, like, well maybe I should talk about my feelings. XXX So it was different in kindergarten, I was like “why am I
here, I don’t really understand ‘why’”. Then in grade school, I was held back in kindergarten because my parents didn’t think that I was ready to move on just ‘cause I had some things that I had to work out on my own, I think it might have been the reading thing too because reading was really hard for me, I think. I can’t remember if it was for stuttering reasons or just because reading was tough. But I got held back, and when I was in first grade I remember really trying to fit in because it was a brand new school. I still stuttered but no one really talked about it that much. Then I actually skipped the second grade because I wanted to be with kids my own age since I was older than everyone else in first grade XXX. So I ended up skipping the second grade, I remember in third grade my speech was really hard ‘cause I really tried to fit in with a brand new group of people. Reading out loud in class was just like “ugh!” it was like paranoia, you know, it’s was like no way am I going to do this. I remember in third grade stuttering but kind of avoiding stuff. You know I was a big avoider. And then in school, I went to go see a speech therapist when I was in the school SLP, and I remember this being a big moment where I had to, they had saw me, she saw me because I had a hard time saying “s”, so she treated my “s”, but my mom was like, “well you know he stutters, pretty moderately, is there something that you can do for him”, and she said “no, you know, you talking about it is making it worse, so he’s going to outgrow it” and I remember being really frustrated XXX, so that was kind of hard in the school, it was like “aw man, I’m on my own now with this”. So the rest of grade was alright. Middle school was tough, I think I just kept avoiding a lot, you know, I just would avoid any chance that I would get to not talk, you know, I’d avoid people, I’d avoid raising my hand in class, it was one of those things where if I had to speak I’d just go ahead and do it and I would be able to incorporate enough secondary behaviors to get by, you know, talk around a word or pretend I didn’t know what I was talking about. High school, it was ok, I mean I was involved a
lot in high school, I was involved a lot of sports and stuff, and I was also in bands and stuff, it
was cool, I think that helped me in a way to be out in front of people playing music, like “oh if I
can do this, I’ll be able to go to someone and ask a girl out on a date or something”. I guess as I
think back to school, I think it’s more of a kind of like a social thing more than anything. I think
it affected me in school a lot, you know, I just really didn’t participate enough. I always said like
things were probably more like 70 or 80 percent of what they could have been in school. Just
cause like, maybe like 80 percent of what they could have been.

SUSAN: I would say K through 5th grade was all pretty easy for me like I was, I stuttered pretty
moderately throughout the whole time and I did go to speech therapy in elementary school but so
did a ton of other kids. And so I feel like we were all too young or I was too young to really
know or care what was going on, and I was always a really good student so I enjoyed school, so I
would K through 5, it really didn’t affect me at all. But now that I’m older, I was going through
this drawer of a bunch of my old school records and stuff. I found this folder that was full of
different teacher conferences and stuff that my mom had gone through and sat through and
talked to the teachers about: “She stutters, we don’t know what to do, blah, blah, blah” so I
thought it was weird that that huge folder of papers made it seem like such a huge deal but it
wasn’t a big deal to me at all, so that was sort of interesting the administration was freaking out
about it, and then I was just XXX and on my way. XXX. And then sixth grade is where sort of
like the teasing began, so that’s where like the secondary behaviors started to set in with trying to
avoid different words. I would say my main thing, my main secondary behavior would be not
avoiding situations but avoiding particular words and sounds, like I got really, really good at
talking around words, I think some of you had mentioned that too, and so, I was, and I really
enjoyed participating in class as long as it was myself that had made the decision that I was
going to participate. So I didn’t mind like going up to the board and doing something or raising
my hand, or I didn’t even mind reading out loud as long as it was myself that raised my hand and
said “sure, I’ll read this paragraph”. But as soon as we would do that thing where we would go
up and down the rows, and each person would be assigned to read a paragraph, I would sit there
counting and recounting over and over, seeing what my paragraph was, and I remember in my
book like circling what sounds I thought I was going to stutter on. And at that time I really didn’t
have any techniques to help with it, so I was basically just spasing? myself out hardcore with
that. So I would like sit there and be like freaking out the whole time, I wouldn’t learn a single
thing ‘cause I wouldn’t hear what anyone else was saying. So that was probably like the hardest
thing for me is when I would have to talk in class when I was told to talk. Like I didn’t mind
talking if it was my own decision but if I was told that would really, really upset me and I would
get really anxious and all these thoughts formed in my head, and now looking back on it, I would
say that all of that stress and anxiety and going home crying, being like “when I read my
paragraph I stuttered this many times and I know that everyone hates me now”, I think most of
that was really in my head. Because it was a very unspoken thing, like none of my teachers ever
brought it up to me. I wasn’t really going to therapy or anything, my friends never really brought
it up to me. And when I finally did bring it up to my friends they were like, “Oh yeah, that’s no
big deal, we don’t really care”, so although some schools situations made me so nervous and so
anxious and so upset, I think a lot of it was just in my head. And I bet that’s true for a lot of you
guys too, whether or not you realize it, but, so, and I would say, and I’ve said this a lot before,
that I really think that school has made me overcompensate a lot, like I would work really, really
hard because I knew that, I thought something was wrong with me, but, so I’m going to make up
for that by being a straight A student, and that sort of thing, so I think a lot of it was in my head,
and all I needed was someone, like a teacher, a counselor, anyone, to just come up to me and say “it’s ok, you’re ok, you’re fine” but I never had that. It was just such like an untouchable thing. That was probably the worst part of school was that no one had the guts or the courage or the knowledge to even know to approach me about it. And I remember I approached a teacher one time about it, cause even though I had to give oral presentations all the time, on one of them there was a very specific, she was being very strict about “if it’s over 5 minutes, if it’s a second over 5 minutes, I’m taking off points” and I was like “Oh my God, what if I’m on one word for 3 minutes, my presentation’s shot” and so I sort of approached her about it and as soon as I started talking to her about it, I could tell that she was really nervous, and so like “Oh, well you don’t have to do the presentation at all if you don’t want to” and that sort of thing and so, that’s my main thing is that no one ever approached me about it from the schools. And the therapy I did receive was a connection that my mom had found. So I felt like the school didn’t really know what to do with me either.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. My next question sort of piggy backs off of that, and anyone can jump in, and if you have questions for each other, you can also do that, so it feels like a collective discussion, but what was the classroom like through your eyes going through school as people who stutter. Like what was the classroom for you?

LANCE: Are you talking about the physical classroom or the actual students themselves surrounding us, or the teacher…

INTERVIEWER: Oh, ok, it can be any part, it can be the physical classroom, students, teachers, I guess the entire classroom setting going through school. What was that experience like?

KEVIN: It was dangerous. [Laughter from the group]

INTERVIEWER: Why do you say dangerous?
KEVIN: Well I say, you know, so much, I think what you talked about, I think so much of this was in my head, and like trying to do, you know, just, I think that I just avoided a lot of stuff, and looking back on it, it’s like I wish that I really did raise my hand in class, I wish I did say more things, I wish I did talk to more people. And I think that I kind of created these challenges in my own head that may have not really been there, ‘cause I really didn’t talk to anybody about my stuttering, I think people knew I stuttered but they didn’t really say anything to me about it. So the classroom I think for me was just like “oh my gosh”. But really it should have been this thing that was like, it should have been this thing that was to help me, but I saw it as like danger, like oh my gosh, I don’t want to go, you know, I don’t want to participate, don’t want to be called on, again, I think if I raised my hand I would have liked it to be on my own terms rather than having someone calling on me.

INTERVIEWER: Was that pretty typical of your experience, the classroom being dangerous, so to speak?

KEVIN: Not always, I’d say it might have been, like the later half of high school was a lot better, like junior and senior year was really good socially and for my speech it was really good too. But yeah I’d say like middle school and like early high were really rough for me.

LANCE: School was all XXX. The actual classroom itself XXX very stressful time, knowing that I could get called on, XXX and then you have to talk in front of this, it felt like it was a dead silent room where every ear was focused on my every sound, and to mentally get past that, at the same time trying that I stuttered, when it had been known in my entire school career, but still even in 12th grade still trying to feel as if I had to hide it or in some way talk perfectly for fear of being thought of as stupid. So it was a real mental obstacle course that I just could not break.
INTERVIEWER: Was that pretty typical throughout your school years? Going through the mental obstacle course?

LANCE: Pretty much. Pretty much, yeah.

SUSAN: I would say something for me that made the class XXX, that affected how I saw the classroom was just the students in the classroom. I know a lot of my honors classes were a lot the same kids, it was smaller, they were all really nice people. There were like these two boys in the school that always teased me about and if either one of them were in the class I would be like “oh no, they’re here” and that, and like those classes just wouldn’t go well. And it was almost like they were the two boys that teased me in the 6th grade, and up till 12th grade, and I want to think I heard them teasing me to my face in 6th grade, XXX I only heard them in 6th grade but up till 12th grade every single time I’d be in class with them, I’d [be like] “oh great” and I would just tense up and XXX

INTERVIEWER: So about your teacher relationships, how would you describe those, what were those like through school? Your relationships with your teachers.

JAMES: I don’t know, I think my teacher relationships were ok, I mean I avoided talking to my teachers too. So I didn’t really have much of a relationship with them ‘cause I tried to avoid talking whenever I could. I guess you could say that my teacher relationships were very minimal. And something that I wanted to add to what Kevin said earlier, when I was first learning how to read I had a very difficult time learning how to read and that made my stuttering worse too, I feel, because my teacher would have me read out loud during class and I was a slow reader and so that really put stress and pressure on my stuttering, I think, which probably reinforced it even more, I’m guessing. So I just wanted to add that too to your tape. [Laughter].
LANCE: Teachers, um, I think, I always a pretty good relationship because like Susan I always tried to overcompensate as far as like grades go, I would try overly hard on everything so that I would get good grades, so that mentally that would tell people that I wasn’t dumb and that in some crazy way have them not see me as a stutterer.

INTERVIEWER: Were there ever any insensitive teachers that you had going through school?

SUSAN: They didn’t even have the chance to be insensitive, we just would even talk about it, does that make sense, like I have no idea…

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see what you’re saying.

SUSAN: Like there wasn’t ever an opportunity for them to say something mean, nothing said at all. So I guess just not saying anything was insensitive.

JAMES: Looking back on it I had one teacher who was sensitive and she tried to help. I think it was in 10th grade English, I believe, or 11th grade, she could tell that I was really struggling with my speech, and one day after class she pulled me aside and she said, “I can tell that you’re really struggling with your stuttering, if you ever want to talk about it, just let me know, and she gave me a book about stuttering, and I was so much into the avoidance of my stuttering and I just hated that I didn’t want to talk about it or think about it or read about it so I just took the book and thanked her and never looked at it. And looking at it I’m like, wow, I really pretty far off the path but that’s just how I was back then.

KEVIN: XXX It was one of these things where like I don’t think the teachers really had even a chance to say anything because I was just really good, I just had a lot of tricks, I had a lot ways just to hide it, to avoid it, but I guess, this kind of goes back a little bit and I was thinking about this, I had a teacher, I ran cross country in school and my cross country coach was a teacher, he was a Spanish teacher and I remember that he was really patient guy, and I remember I never
actually, he knew that I stuttered because I just felt more open to talk to him about my stuttering
a little bit, we only talked about it maybe once, and I remember that, I guess this is seeing
teachers in a positive light, he kind of challenged me in a good way, I think, he’d be like, you
know, say hey, you know, you should talk in the class, this will be good for you, you know and I
think he was trying to help me out, but just where I was then being 13 or 14 I thought it was like
a challenge, like “oh no, this stinks, I don’t want to talk” but I think I was just kind of viewing it
the wrong way, he was trying to help but just where I was at that point in my life I don’t think
that I saw it as help.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned hiding your stuttering, what are some of the things that you
did to hide your stuttering, what were some of your coping strategies, if you had any?

JAMES: I was sort of a master at avoidance even though I wasn’t able to avoid stuttering
because my stuttering was so severe back then, I couldn’t hide it, but I tried to still, so I guess my
avoidance strategies were just avoiding everybody when possible, so I would avoid talking to my
friends, and avoid my family, and just pretty much I tried to be alone as much as possible which
now seems really crazy but that’s where I was at in middle and high school, so that’s how I dealt
with it.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, by avoiding people and situations?

SUSAN: I was also a master at changing my sentences and my words to only the sounds that I
thought that I could say. Just thinking about how much effort that that takes, I was exhausted but
I was really, really good at that, so that was one of my avoidances. And apparently slapping my
leg [slaps leg], not as hard as that, like pressing down on my leg also helped the word get out, so
I used to do that a lot. And I thought back then that that helped me a lot, like right after I sort of
discovered it, I was like “yes, I am so glad that I found this, it’s helped so much”, but then it stops helping you, so those are two of my really big secondary behaviors.

LANCE: Yeah I guess like those two I would avoid talking but I didn’t start doing that on a permanent basis until just after high school when I actually stopped talking for 6 months, but as far as in school I would use a lot shorter utterances, like I wouldn’t explain myself, I would stick to things like “yeah. Oh yeah. Totally. Sure.” You know and not really go into any kind of detail at all. And if I had to answer a question in class, I would try and find the shortest answer possible that I could get out, most times a word or two, so at least that way I felt as if I was talking XXX and again as if I was hiding it XXX.

INTERVIEWER: How about your academic performance, what was that like going through school?

SUSAN: Mine was great, I was a really good student. I used to work really hard in school. I graduated with over a 4.0. Like now, looking back on it, I spent way too much time doing homework and worrying about school, where I could have been like hanging out with my friends and that sort of thing. But I chose to sit home and study ’cause that meant I would get the A, so it would make up for XXX

KEVIN: I was always a really good student in school and I think that I overcompensated a lot because of my stuttering. And I was as good as I wanted to be. I mean, I think in high school I got like a 2.8 or something like that, I mean, but it was like, I didn’t try as much, so I was as good as I wanted to be, and I did fine in school. I liked school, I liked learning.

JAMES: I was never that strong of a student during high school, I was in resource during elementary school, and then I pretty much struggled the rest of the way through school. I’m sure how much of that was my academic abilities versus how much I was avoided listening to people
and thinking about the next time that I’ll have to talk, so I missed out on opportunities to ask teachers questions and to actually have discussions with teachers and peers about what we were studying, so I think that really hurt me a lot, but, so I guess I did ok during school but not that great. I guess I did the best during my senior year because I realized I needed to figured out what I’m going to do after high school so that’s when I really started to apply myself better.

LANCE: I was always pretty good except for like reading classes and English classes, which is kind of odd because now I write in a lot of different styles, so it’s odd that those classes I did not do so well, but I excelled in math and sciences and I was in all the honors classes and stuff going up through high school, but then again it was me trying to please other people and not really myself.

INTERVIEWER: So when you think about all the issues, ‘cause school can be challenging for a variety of reasons, people go through all kinds of issues and challenges, so where do you think you would probably rank stuttering in your school experiences, would it be like at the forefront, would it be on the backburner, sort of in the middle, I guess in relation everything, to any challenges or difficulties that you’ve had to go through throughout school, where would you probably rank stuttering in the mix?

JAMES: For me, that’s an easy one. See I see myself as a stutterer and that’s pretty much all I saw myself as, so my stuttering was my primary obstacle in school, and I’d say primary obstacle everywhere else too. That was it.

LANCE: Yeah, I’d say stuttering was the main obstacle because that in turn affected how if I would ask out somebody on a date, which I didn’t really do because I was scared that I would stutter as I did it, so that obstacle of stuttering affected those other kind of growing up
difficulties, dating, socializing, those kinds of things. And I didn’t really find school as an obstacle.

SUSAN: I don’t know if I would say that stuttering was my first obstacle in school, but it was definitely the first thing on my mind thought, like I used to think about it all the time, but I would just try really hard not to let it affect it that much. But, so I would say it didn’t really affect my school experience too, too much except for the overcompensate part, but just all of the time and mental exhaustion, it was always the first thing on my mind though for sure.

KEVIN: Yeah, I think the, it was a big challenge in school and it was always something that was in the back of my mind. I had a lot of friends, you know, I got by in school, but yeah it made, I think that stuttering, a lot of things revolved around if I was going to stutter or not, which is crazy to look back on that. Yeah, I think that it was always kind of present. XXX

INTERVIEWER: This next question, I was really curious because all of you, you’re either in the school system right now or had some close connection with it, but I guess when you reflect back on your own school experience, and then also your work experience or where you are now, how would you describe the school climate for a person who stutters? So if you had this five year old person who stutters and they’re about to go through 12 years of school, what do you think the challenges or the issues would be? How would you describe the school climate for a person who stutters?

SUSAN: I don’t understand the question.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. Like what would be the issues and challenges do you think nowadays that people who stutter may face in school.

SUSAN: Well I would say that the school that I’m placed in now is a lot more sensitive than the school that I went through. I know that a lot of the students are on, well at least a lot of the
students that I have are on, IEPs. I haven’t encountered any stutterers yet but a lot of other just different learning disabilities and stuff that comes up in the school. And one of the students has a vision problem where he can’t see very well. And he’s in a class that we have at the end of the day, and that exact same class occurs in the morning of the day. And the teacher was like asking the class, “oh, does someone that takes good notes, can we copy your notes for the end of the day” and all of the students were so willing to help out and they were even having to argue about who takes the best notes. And the girl that was finally picked to take the notes, after each class, she’s like, here, and then I’d take them down to the office, and copy them so I can give them to the student with the vision problem. So just how open that the teacher was about talking, like, hey I have a student in my class in the afternoon, he needs help, who can help him. So they all seem so open and honest about it and I think it’s because it’s a smaller school, so they all know each other and they’ve all grown up together, whereas I never had any issues or problems with the kids that I went to elementary with, but then the way my school system is, there’s like 5 different elementary schools, and once you hit 6th grade, you all go to the same school, and so I’ve never felt uncomfortable around all of the kids that I grew up with in my elementary school. So I think like smaller schools have that same atmosphere. But I think a smaller school atmosphere would be a lot more welcoming and sensitive towards someone that stutters.

JAMES: My school was pretty small. But I’m from a small town area. And actually the first school that I went to was pretty friendly looking back, and then I think after 3rd grade we joined another school system. I think as things got bigger things seemed more difficult and less maybe friendly. And as far as overall attitude about how I think the school situation is now for people who stutter, if I was a parent of a child who stutters I would be pretty nervous because I think there’s really good SLPs out there working right now, and I think there’s some who know
nothing about stuttering. So you’re sort of playing Russian Roulette, you know, if you’re hoping
gets good speech, language services, they may have a great therapist, they may have somebody
who knows nothing about stuttering, so that SLP dismisses that client because they know nothing
about it, which is what I had in grade school. So I’m hoping that things are getting better, but I
wouldn’t bank on it is what I am saying. That’s my pessimistic view, I guess, of the school
situation.

INTERVIEWER: Because what criteria do people usually, I mean when they’re going to
dismiss the person who stutters from their caseload, is it mainly how they sound, how they do in
the classroom, I guess what would be the….

JAMES: Yeah, I guess different SLPs look at different criteria. Personally I think that a good
criteria to use is the student able to communicate as well as they want it, is it affecting their
social-emotional health, yeah, I think as long as they’re able to communicate what they want to
and they’re not depressed or thinking too much about their speech that they could be dismissed
possibly.

LANCE: I think that the education about stuttering to the teachers and staff has improved a little
bit. I think the speech therapists, I think as a whole, are improving and that allows a kid XXX,
speech therapy when I was 8 years old, it only lasted 6 months and the only thing that she had
me to was read out loud and at 8 years old I could read these simple books but and I felt that it
wasn’t really helping me out so I walked in and I say “you know what, I quit”. And at 8 years
old, and apparently at that point, I knew this is not helping me, I still stutter. But I think that the
therapist population is improving, but I think a big problem is the lack of education to the general
public, one to teachers and even among therapists, stuttering is still the unknown. You know, we
don’t have a cure, we don’t know how it starts, it’s still very vague, and that scares, I think, a lot
of therapists, a lot of teachers, and a lot of parents as a whole. So the whole general education of
everybody has to be improved.

INTERVIEWER: That education piece, what do you think, I guess if you had a group of
classroom teachers at your attention, what do you think they need to know about stuttering or a
person who stutters in their classroom? So I guess, if maybe you had to consult with a teacher or
maybe if you just had to give a presentation to the classroom teachers, what would be the “do’s”,
the “don’t’s”, or just what do you think in general teachers need to know about people who
stutter?

JAMES: That’s a great question.

LANCE: I think they would have to be taught how to be a good listener, and that’s not only for
teachers but for XXX then that way teachers can actually teach the class how to be a good
listener as well because I think listening is a big part of the mental stress that a person who
stutters puts on themselves because the listening party is not doing their part.

SUSAN: I would say probably to let teachers know to let us make our own decisions about stuff.
I know I’ve heard from a lot of people, and including myself, that when we’re given the
opportunity of “oh, you won’t have to do that presentation, you won’t have to do this” as soon as
they say that you’re like “oh thank God ‘cause I was so scared for that” but after you give it
some thought, you’re like “wait, how come I can’t do that” and then you feel really bad about
yourself, and you feel really inadequate and all those sort of feelings, so although they think
they’re helping and maybe the stutterers’ instant reaction is that they are really helping, in the
long run it’s not helping. And on a quick note of XXX I’ve obviously gone through the education
training program in this school, and BG supposedly has one of the best ones in Ohio, and all of
that kind of jazz, but we took a class called teaching students with special needs, and there was
like a chapter and a section on stuttering in our book and we just completely skipped it. Didn’t even do it.

LANCE: Really?

SUSAN: Yeah.

LANCE: Oh.

SUSAN: Well it was one of those things where it was like on our syllabus. You know how you like get the syllabus at the beginning of the year but then things sometimes change, XXX and we had just gotten behind and a couple of chapters just needed to be X’ed out and that was one of the ones that got X’ed out. I mean we were supposed to read it but I didn’t even read that chapter. It was one of those classes where you could get through the class without having to read so no one did read. So here we are, supposedly the best education school in Ohio, and I’ve essentially been through the program and it hasn’t been brought up once.

LANCE: Wow.

KEVIN: Yeah, I guess, just listening to that, and maybe this is going back to your other question about what is it like for a kid who stutters to go through the school system. I think about where I’m at now, I kind of like try to take a step back, and it’s almost kind of like this touching scene, seeing someone with special needs, they may not take the form of stuttering, but you have this team, it’s like an IEP team, and it’s almost touching if you really think about it, all these people come together around the table helping someone out, you know talking about “oh, this kid needs this, this kids needs this” and it’s very, it’s very touching, like a lot of people are caring about kids with special needs. But I think people define stuttering differently where it’s like “well they may not need special needs” you know it’s like, I mean, so I think that it’s different, maybe, I think that people who stutter may kind of slip through the cracks on this.
INTERVIEWER: Interesting because I’ve been thinking about this. It seems to me like, and this is just my own personal opinion, this may not be in any book or article, but it seems to me like, people who, like if you see someone in a wheelchair, you know people are sensitive to their needs, you know, they’ll hold the door open. If you see someone with a walking stick or someone with any type of disability like blindness, people seem to embrace them. But with people who stutter, it seems like, you know I still have people who would rush my sentences or kind of imitate it or whatever, so, but we wouldn’t like imitate the tremors of someone who has Parkinson’s Disease or we wouldn’t mock the speech of someone with hearing impairment, so there seems to be a disability hierarchy, at least in my opinion, so I was wondering do you think that phenomenon exists, and if so, why do you think that is?

KEVIN: Yeah I think there’s some truth to that, you know like when I see this touching scene of everyone around the table and talking about the kid and what’s best for this kid, well I think that people who stutter deserve that too, like why isn’t a child who stutters not getting that attention. And yeah I guess it’s how you view it.

SUSAN: I totally agree about the IEP thing though, like I know the first day in my classroom, a teacher was like “here are all my class rosters, here are all my students on IEPs” and there were these stacks of papers full of all the different things that they do for each student, and I was like, where was my sheet when I was going through school. So obviously I really agree with that, there is, like why aren’t we on that list.

JAMES: One of the problems for people who stutter, I think, is that we can sometimes hide our stuttering when we choose to, where it’s not as noticeable as somebody who’s in a wheelchair or somebody who has Parkinson’s, and so it’s something that doesn’t always stand out that much.
So it’s easier just to sort of push it aside, push it into the cracks, and maybe over time, it’ll go away. So that’s my view on that.

LANCE: To kind of add to that as well, I think typically people who stutter, kids who stutter tend to be fairly good or average students and the law for a long time has been that you can only service students if it is affecting them at an academic level, so even if a kid was stuttering and they have A’s and B’s, it’s not really hurting them on paper, so they get totally ignored because of the system in place. Now speech therapists nowadays can actually say, well it is affecting them in a social setting as far as they are not able to answer academic questions in class. So there are ways around that now, but years ago it was like that: “A’s and B’s, you’re fine”. So it wasn’t seen as serious as a person who has ADD who’s getting F’s and D’s.

JAMES: That’s a good point.

SUSAN: Something about what you had said before about the disability hierarchy or whatever. I think a lot of it is how we perceive ourselves. Like a person in a wheelchair isn’t going to pretend that they can walk, whereas all of our avoidances and stuff are essentially pretending that we’re fluent speakers. So I think the fact that we are so uncomfortable with it, that makes other people uncomfortable with it as well. Whereas a person in a wheelchair, they’re in a wheelchair, they’re not going to hide it, like they’re obviously not like comfortable with it but they’ve come to terms with that, so I bet like them just being comfortable, I’m here and here’s what’s wrong, here’s what’s going on, makes other people respond to them.

LANCE: That’s a good point.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, it is, how we perceive it.

INTERVIEWER: You had brought up the issue about accommodations, what would be your thoughts on accommodations for people who stutter in the classroom. There are different
opinions, some people say it’s a crutch, some people say it’s helpful, what would be your 
thoughts on accommodations like giving a presentation to a small group or just to the teacher or 
whatever form they may come in.

SUSAN:  I think that they should always have to perform the actual assignment XXX because it 
can be a crutch but maybe give them a chance to give the presentation to the teacher by 
themselves first or something like that, or if there is a time restriction, be like “for you it doesn’t 
matter” that sort of thing. I haven’t thought completely about this but I do think that they should 
have to do the actual assignment in some form or some way but have accommodations that lead 
up to that. And like make it known to the class that, to be sensitive and patient the whole time.

LANCE:  I completely agree, I think that the student should have to do the assignment in some 
form as well, whether that be presenting it to a smaller group or just to the teacher. I think they 
need to structure the accommodations at the student’s level and not turn the assignment into a 
negative speaking situation but more of stepping stones to build off of. Maybe start off in front of 
the teacher, then do the next assignment to a smaller group, then naturally build on those positive 
experiences and feelings, and then do it in front of the whole group. So I guess it’s a constantly 
changing accommodation system.

SUSAN:  In education, it’s called scaffolding.

JAMES:  To follow what Lance said, I think the accommodations need to be client specific, 
‘cause all people who stutter are in different spots with their speech. So it has to be client 
specific and they should still complete their assignments but the speaking assignments should be 
modified as needed, maybe they can write a report instead of talking to the class, maybe give the 
presentation to the teacher only or to their parents or something. Just looking back as a stutterer 
in school, I wish I would have had something like that, ‘cause looking back I felt like I had no
options, like everyday that I talked, I would pretty much fail in talking, and then do the same thing the following day, and then the following day, for like years, and so I wish I had like some kind of options there. It would have been nice.

LANCE: The sink or swim idea.

JAMES: Yeah.

LANCE: Like none of those kind of like, what do they call them, like floaters on your arms.

JAMES: Arm floats.

KEVIN: Yeah I think just the same thing everyone’s talked about, just like to not have the person feel time pressure and kind of working up to a goal. Also, this might be like getting off on a little bit of a tangent but I think too in school, I wish that it would have been ok for me to talk about my stuttering. I think it needs to be ok to talk about stuttering, just to, I mean there are so many feelings, thought, emotions, at least I had a lot with my stuttering. I wish that I would have been able to talk to somebody about it. I don’t know if like the school psychologist would be a part of that or if the SLP would, but I wish that, and again, and I guess this is getting off to something totally different, but I feel like it needs to be ok to talk about stuttering in school and it was like taboo. Like teachers, everyone just really didn’t know anything.

JAMES: To add to what Kevin said, stuttering needs to be something that educators know about, teachers, principals, SLPS, which I think that the key is that educators know something about people with disabilities, including stuttering.

INTERVIEWER: How would you relate stuttering in comparison to other disabilities, you had talked about how it seems like other people with disabilities who don’t stutter but who have other disabilities that may be nurtured a little bit more. When you think about stuttering, the experience of stuttering and the experience of other types of disabilities like visual impairments
or hearing impairments or people in a wheelchair, can stuttering sort of stand on its own in a way or are there unique, nontrivial differences to the stuttering experience that maybe other people with disabilities don’t experience or can we put stuttering on the same level as other disabilities.

SUSAN: I know like way, I don’t know if you can put it in the same category as other disabilities but you can definitely put it in the same category as the way that they’re dealt with in school. Like on an IEP, it doesn’t say at the top “has ADD or has a LD” it doesn’t say that, all it says are what the goals are, how you can accommodate for them, how you’re supposed to help them, so I think in that way like, let’s say that, like I got hit with all of these sheets, like where was my sheet when I was going through school. So like at the top of the sheet it wouldn’t say “has a stuttering problem” it would say “needs to be given more time on oral presentations, when different oral things come up they need to be talked to in a one-on-one basis, needs to see the school psychologist one time per month” so I don’t know how to answer can we put the disability in the same category but can we put it in the same category as how is it dealt with for sure.

LANCE: I think that’s absolutely right, I don’t think it should be dealt with less than any other disability. I believe it does stand on its own as far as you cannot lump it in with like articulation disorders or XXX but it’s got a very emotional component to it that is not just a speech concern but more psychological concern that needs to be addressed.

INTERVIEWER: And going along with that, with people who stutter, there are experiences that we have that are very visible and that are observable, like reading aloud in class is a visible sign that a person who stutters is having difficulty or you know raising your hand in class and having to answer a question and having a tough time, that’s something that people can see. But a lot of what people who stutter go through is what you can’t see. So I guess what do you think would be
those “behind the scenes” experiences for people who stutter, things that people who stutter may go through in school that no one else would even know would be an issue unless they were in shoes.

KEVIN: I think like not raising my hand, like I really knew the answer but I didn’t say anything, but I knew it but no one else knew it. I think just like participation in class and, which now that I’m thinking about it, I think that a big thing, maybe this is going off on another tangent, but I think the thing is that I wish I had been a better advocate for myself and I think that for people who stutter you kind of have to be an advocate for yourself. Because where I was at in school I wasn’t comfortable doing that, so I don’t think I really had a model of how to handle my stuttering. Like, you go to a speech therapist but like no one stuttered, or it’s like “you don’t know what I’m going through”, it’s like I didn’t have another person who stuttered who knew what I was going through who was just a good model to tell me how to be a good advocate for myself, stick up for myself, stand up for myself in school, so these “behind the scene” things that I was feeling, they didn’t have to be behind the scene, they could have been out front, everyone could have been helping me but I just never had that model to tell me how to handle this.

INTERVIEWER: Lance had mentioned that unless it affects your education or unless you meet this particular criteria, then you’re not seen. So I guess I’m trying to pull out what are all those things, the other experiences that are difficult that people who stutter may go through but no one’s going to know that it’s an issue because it’s just not something that they can see.

LANCE: I had one too that, just getting your school lunch, if you’re buying lunch and you’re offered a choice of foods, just saying those foods and trying not to stutter so that you wouldn’t be holding up the line, so that people around you wouldn’t hear you stutter, or if the lunch lady was in a hurry, those situations that seem pretty easy: choose a pizza or a hot dog, but for a person
who stutters, it may be hard to actually say pizza, so, and then if it is and then you change words and say “well I actually wanted a pizza but hot dog is easier to say, I’ll say that instead”.

SUSAN: I used to do that a lot, like change what foods I was eating or just pick a food I could say. Like, that’s a “behind the scene”, I’m not going to tell someone “oh, by the way, I ordered a hot dog, I really wanted pizza but I couldn’t say that” like who could relate to that. Like I to this day can’t imagine how someone who doesn’t stutter can relate to that at all.

LANCE: Absolutely. That’s a great point, like situations that people who don’t stutter can’t even comprehend.

JAMES: Yeah, also some “behind the scenes” stuff, when I was in school and the teacher went down the rows, you know, and you’re waiting for your turn, behind the scenes I was like freaking out, you know my heart was racing, I was sweating, just totally freaking out and so by the time it was my turn I was all stressed out and I stuttered through every word and kind of pushed through as hard as I could and got totally worked up. And so that was my experience for every usual “around-the-class” speaking situation everyday.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think the school experiences are like for people who don’t stutter?

SUSAN: A lot different than ours. I know I always get angry at shy people ‘cause I think you have this beautiful gift of fluent speech and you’re going to sit there and be quiet, are you kidding me. So that’s one thing, if someone in the class knows what the answer is but doesn’t feel like raising their hand, I sort of get mad.

JAMES: I don’t know, I’ve heard different people talking to others, most people found school very difficult also, even if they didn’t stutter, you know they had different issues that they were dealing with, and so I think that for those of us who stutter, especially myself, you know, I sort
of grabbed on to stuttering as my number one problem, whereas I think people who don’t stutter sort of focus on other problems that they have to deal with.

SUSAN: Yeah, kind of going along with what you were saying that they would focus on another problem, well a lot of other students hated to give oral presentations, hated to be called out in class to give an answer, but for a completely different reason than us. Like we didn’t care about being embarrassed because we didn’t know the answer, I mean we might, but our first concern was “am I going to stutter when I give this answer or not?” So we have to worry about two things, like “am I going to look stupid when I stuttering?” and “am I going to look stupid ‘cause I don’t know what’s going on” whereas people that don’t stutter, their first concern is “oh, I’m afraid to go up and do public speaking” or “I’m afraid to have the wrong answer”. So they have similar concerns but for a different reason.

JAMES: That was very well said.

SUSAN: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: My last question has to do with how people view people who stutter in school. Like a lot of the research, teachers tend to have a, or research has shown that some teachers may have negative stereotypes of people who stutter, that they’re anxious, they’re shy and nervous, withdrawn, sometimes peers also have negative perceptions of people who stutter. So this may seem like a simple question, but why do you think those perceptions and stereotypes exist for people who stutter in school, or why do you think teachers or peers may hold those negative stereotypes or perceptions about people who stutter?

LANCE: I think you can kind of generalize some things as far as, I think through history people who stutter in schools tend to not possibly talk as much, so that’s the shy piece. Just anything, any negative components?
INTERVIEWER: Yeah. And this is not across the board, but it’s just that some studies have shown that shy, anxiousness, withdrawn, being nervous, the research has labeled those as negative traits that sometimes teachers may have about people who stutter. And sometimes peers have negative stereotypes of their peers who stutter, so why might those stereotypes exist?

LANCE: And I certainly think of a person whose public speaking, and I think of someone whose nervous, they will stumble on their words and use lots of pause times. And I think that idea of being XXX is being translated into, well since people stutter kind of display some of behaviors, those kind of actions, they have to be anxious, nervous, and I think all of us here have actually shown our peers and teachers that if we are called on in class to read something or answer a question that we are very anxious about that. But like SUSAN said, our anxiety is not for the same reasons as a fluent persons’ label of nervousness is.

INTERVIEWER: And the teachers don’t know that.

LANCE: Right.

INTERVIEWER: XXX …They attribute it to something else.

LANCE: But it seems to looks the same.

INTERVIEWER: Well those are all the questions that I have. Is there anything else central to the school experiences of people who stutter that maybe didn’t come up in the conversation or anything else you’d like to add?

KEVIN: Yeah, I was just kind of thinking when Lance was talking just about how I think that why teachers hold stereotypes or why people hold stereotypes of people who stutter is that I think people who stutter really need to be advocates for themselves. And I’m really big into this whole thing about like the truth will set you free, I think the truth will set anyone free. I think being open and honest about something and letting other people know “the reason why I’m
doing this is because of this” and I wish I could have been able to in school say the reason why I do [imitates stuttering] then I say words, it’s not because I don’t have an answer, it’s because, yeah I feel really nervous because I’m going to stutter, I don’t feel nervous about participating. I think why they hold negative stereotypes is because they just don’t know. I think that it’s our responsibility, SLP’s responsibility to stand up for people who stutter, to let people know what’s going on.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think keeps people who stutter from being their own advocates? What reasons do you think?

KEVIN: I kind of touched on this about having a good model. It’s not having a good model. Maybe it was just me growing up, but I didn’t know anyone that stuttered, I didn’t know a successful person who stuttered, at least. I was like, wow, all people who stutter just hide their stuttering like me. So I think just maybe a good model.

JAMES: To add to what James said I think it would have been very helpful if we had a model too. Because I had no idea what this stuttering was about, I didn’t really understand it. I just tried to avoid it and deny it as much as I could, which made it much worse than it had to be. So if I knew somebody that was dealing with it well I think that would have helped me.