

FROM STUTTERING TO NATURAL SPEECH

TIMOTHY STEADMAN

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On Jan 30, 2015, at 1:52 AM, tim@timsteadman.com [neurosemanticsofstuttering] <neurosemanticsofstuttering@yahogroups.com> wrote:

Hi everyone, this is my first post to this group.

I am working on my Masters degree in counseling.

In one of my classes, a classmate asked me a question. I answered with a much longer answer than I intended. Below is the question and my answer. I hope you enjoy my point of view!

THE QUESTION:

Hi Timothy!

Thank you for sharing your personal experience with stuttering. I find it fascinating that you were able to make such profound changes in such a short amount of time. I am very curious as to what types of thoughts, memories, and/or beliefs were intertwined with your stuttering (although even typing that feels highly invasive). Do you feel that your stutter has shaped your personality in any way? HOLLY

MY ANSWER:

I could write pages about what types of thoughts, memories, and/or beliefs I had and still have that fueled my blocking (which is really what it is...stuttering is a very vague term...someone stumbling over his/her words when they are temporarily discombobulated is a totally different type of "stutter"....I digress...).

Performance fear was a big part of my realization. Somewhere along the line when I was a child, I realized this normal childhood developmental disfluency made me different from other people.

Being highly sensitive, I internalized this feeling of being different....unfortunately this took place before the time when developmental disfluency fades away in young children ("they grow out of it").

Since I internalized this "being different," I had to be perfect and try and control my speech so I wouldn't be different. I believed then that I had to closely monitor what I was going to say so I wouldn't stutter (which is also what my parents...with good intentions...ingrained in me time after time with concerned looks on their faces ("Now stop, Tim! Take a deep breath and think about what you are going to say and then say it."))

They meant well, but it TOTALLY messed me up.

## NATURAL SPEECH

For the most part, speaking is a reactionary experience...when you talk, you don't monitor current speech while also monitoring future words for problems. You just simply speak. For example, you know how people sometimes can't believe what just came out of their mouths? There is no real thought to natural speech, at least the mechanical aspects of speech.

Believe it or not, I only fully realized this fact just 10 months ago. I used to avoid "problem words" (they had emotions attached to them) when I saw them approaching by substituting other words that were easier for me to say...all while trying to get the current words out of my mouth and trying to handle my frustrated emotion.

Avoiding "problem words" ends up creating more "problem words" which depletes your mental thesaurus which decreases your verbal fluency because there are no more words left to substitute...then you're left with only your mental disfluency, which, in a sick way, comes out as blocking...which is what adult stuttered speech really is for many, not all, stutterers.

By this point, my perceptions were getting totally out of whack. I would read into peoples' simple gestures and facial expressions that they were thinking, "wow, this guy is an idiot", or "poor Tim, I feel so sorry for him" all while trying to monitor my current words, future words, and feelings of frustration. The truth is, in reality, they were probably just

scratching their head because they had an itch.

Sometimes, my speech weirdly got better. I really didn't know when I was going to have a "good day/moment" or a "bad day/moment." They just came and went, depending on different situations. So, add uncertainty to the lethal mix.

I had role issues as well (child/parent/adult).

For example, I would assume the child role in many situations where I felt threatened such as picking up the phone to call someone...or if I was talking to someone of authority...or someone who I thought knew more than me...or someone that I thought my stuttered speech would annoy because I was taking up their time (which was a lot of people I thought).

The rare instances when I was "spontaneously" fluent, I was in the adult role, I felt comfortable, I felt like me (something I didn't realize before reading "the book").

Now, take ALL of what I've mentioned, and pile it on top of my highly sensitive self that has an amygdala that goes NUTS when I feel threatened. My amygdala can't tell the difference between me being attacked by a hungry tiger or me simply picking up the phone to talk to someone. That's the problem with the amygdala. No amygdala can. Both threatening situations would trigger my "fight or flight" response. Adrenaline would pump through me, pretty much rendering me unconscious to what I was really doing.

I felt this.

Oh it doesn't stop there. When a part of your body has a

problem, other parts adapt to support the problem. This is where speech behavior comes into play. The slamming of my tongue on the roof of my mouth or me hitting my leg to "help" get the word out were all acquired behaviors. Sometimes stutterers blink or shake their head in a way to "help" the words exit their mouth.

This is all happens because they are trying to support and "help" the blocking in a twisted way.

That's why no two stutterers are alike when they stutter.

Each has their own unique behavior. Years of these types of behaviors give the person muscle memory. It becomes their default for the most part. Stutterers who have have a lot of these behaviors usually have a harder time recovering because of the muscle memory. Those are the individuals that most likely need fluency shaping programs that focus on speech mechanics.

PRETTY LETHAL COMBO OF STUFF GOING ON HUH??!!!  
10 months ago I never realized all this stuff about myself.

I knew something was going on though, that's why I've searched for years to find something that could help me. "Professional" therapy didn't work (or at least the professionals I saw) because most of current stuttering research and methodology is stuck in a sort of paradigm paralysis. They are looking for the "stuttering gene" and mostly focusing on the mechanics of speech - which is the part that is most obvious.

For example, why does a broken down car not move? Oh it's got to be the wheels right? Obviously! NOOOOOO!, just as the car is a system of parts, so are we.

Just as the problem with a car can be any part of the car or a even a "system" of parts working together (the alternator) or a system of systems that's the problem, so it is with stuttering. It is different for every stutterer. This, I believe, this is why no easy “cure” has come about for stuttering. There will be no “magic pill.”

I believe, because of my own recovery, it is:

Genetics (being a sensitive person with a rapid fire amygdala),

Behaviors (my short breath and my tongue slamming to the roof of my mouth when I say an "L" word), as well as (and most importantly),

A dysfunctional mindset (negative beliefs, intentions, perceptions and therefore emotions).

Fortunately, this mindset can start to be fixed when it is realized, accepted, and we are truly motivated to improve (which means, partly, getting out of our own comfort zone). Speech behavior/mechanics can be smoothed out as well if you find you need this. There is not much you can do about your genes (your sensitivity and your highly reactive amygdala) though. However, by simply realizing what is happening in this regard should be all you need to put your mind at ease.

## REDEFINING STUTTERING, BY JOHN HARRISON

The author of the book, *Redefining Stuttering*, explained everything in a way that spoke to me. He is a "recovered" stutterer himself and he's interviewed/talked with thousands of people who stutter. The book is a culmination of what he's learned from the stuttering community as well as his own recovery.

Lightbulbs were going off with each chapter.

Tons of self realization was happening. I finally knew what the HECK (I'm being very reserved here) was going on with me. It was such a relief that I was an absolute wreck for a few days because emotions were pouring out of me...and still are today from time to time. I realize these feelings and feel them for what they are. It is a part of the healing process.

I still have some minor disfluency from the lingering bad habits of 34 years. My intentions, perceptions and beliefs still need work, but at least I know now what to work on. The remaining bit of disfluency will just fade away as I know it is hanging by a thread...I just need to put myself and my new awareness into gradually increasing "tough" situations and simply let go and let me be me. If a block comes up, I just observe it, my self, and my surroundings and move on. My observations will then form a pattern that I can study and adjust accordingly.

That is the short story.

Did stuttering affect my personality?

Looking back at videos of myself as a kid, I was full of energy. I liked to annoy people on purpose by doing funny things and ultimately getting them to laugh. That never left my core thankfully, but because of my stuttering, I became very reserved around people I did not know as I moved into high school and beyond.

I did not feel comfortable letting myself be me in front of most people because a huge part of me was "Stuttering Tim."

I wanted to HIDE that part of me...which, in reality, is a dumb thought because I couldn't hide.

People would eventually ask me questions that I'd have to answer right!? I've realized now that if I just LET GO and be myself, sure I might stutter on a word or two, but then I quickly get over it because I am being true to myself (Tim, the adult). This, in turn, naturally causes fluency. This is sometimes tough, as I have to break YEARS of "trying to hide."

In a bit of irony, I never felt nervous around girls growing up because I am good looking and tall...and I knew this...therefore I assumed the adult role in most interactions with the ladies. Being in this role, I was usually fluent. Thankfully, this didn't hinder me from meeting women and eventually finding my wife, someone with whom I always feel comfortable, and this in turn kept my true personality alive.

In an interesting side-note of realization, I didn't stutter much when I was drunk in college either. This was because I didn't

have any inhibitions. I wasn't hiding "Stuttering Tim" because I really didn't care. I just wanted to have fun.

SO...did stuttering affect my personality? Not so much. I think it made a mess of my personal image (what I feel is me) which held me back from being myself in front of most people.

Ok, this has taken me 5 hours to write and I still have many chapters to read in my text books. Thanks for asking, Holly! :) I've been meaning to write all this stuff down!