

Stuttering: Part of Me, Voices of Females Who Stutter

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BACKGROUND

Approximately four times as many males stutter than females (Craig, Hancock, Tran, & Peters, 2002), which has led to an underrepresentation of females who stutter in the research. Although several studies have included women participants, few studies have exclusively investigated the unique lived experiences of women who stutter. Among the few, one recent study reported the impact of stuttering on the lives of women (Nang, Hersh, Milton, & Lau, 2018). Results from semi-structured interviews and the *Overall Assessment of the Speaker's Experience of Stuttering* (Yaruss & Quesal, 2008), indicated that participants' quality of life was negatively impacted by stuttering. In fact, stuttering influenced how they perceived themselves, their career potential, and their relationships, which were further compounded by overarching societal expectations for women. Importantly, many women reported their challenges emerged at a young age. Lack of connectedness was cited as a recurring theme, which is not surprising given females are a "minority within a minority" (Graham-Bethea & Mayo, 2012).

Not only is stuttering research dominated by male participants, but so too are clinical resources. A few autobiographical books by female authors who stutter have been published in recent years such as *Stutterer Interrupted* by Nina G and *Out With It: How Stuttering Helped Me Find My Voice* by Katherine Preston. These books emphasize the array of emotions and challenges being a female who stutters, but additional, female-specific resources that can be efficiently utilized within therapy sessions are needed. The development and availability of high-quality resources for females who stutter is critical to represent an important minority of people who stutter. Such resources not only have the potential to lead to improved feelings of connectedness for females who stutter, but also as educational tools for the nonstuttering majority.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to create a free, clinical and educational video resource specifically tailored to females who stutter. It is an extension of the documentary *Stuttering: Part of me* (Westfall, Coleman, & Weidner, 2018), a documentary in which several males discuss their personal experiences with stuttering. The need for female-only sequel was inspired by a female child who stutters who advocated for more female representation. The producers enthusiastically agreed. The resultant documentary, *Stuttering: Part of Me, Voices of Females who Stutter* (Chapin, Chiasson, Merkel, Weidner & Coleman, 2021) is a freely available video highlighting the experiences of females who stutter, which is intended for use in clinical and educational settings.

METHODS

Four females with childhood-onset stuttering, ages 11, 11, 25, and 26, participated in the documentary. Participants were either known by, or referred to, the last two authors. All individuals (and parents, if under 18) consented to participate and for the free release of the video upon completion. Interviews were conducted individually and recorded using the ZOOM™ application and edited with iMovie® software.

Three graduate student clinicians (the first three authors), under the supervision of two faculty mentors (the second two authors), carried out semi structured interviews with each participant. Questions pertained to participants' general interests (e.g., what are you good at doing?), stuttering experiences (e.g., how has stuttering shaped who you are?), preferences for nonstuttering listeners (e.g., what is helpful for someone to do when you stutter?) and advice for other people who stutter (e.g., what advice would you give to other people who stutter?). Specific questions pertaining to being a female who stutters were also included. Each interview lasted approximately 45-minutes. Select quotes from the interview follow:

"It really just gives you a different perspective on talking, listening, communicating..." Tiffani, 26

"We're not sick, we're not impaired we don't lack any sort of level of intelligence, we know what we want to say we just need a little more time to say it." Georgia, 25

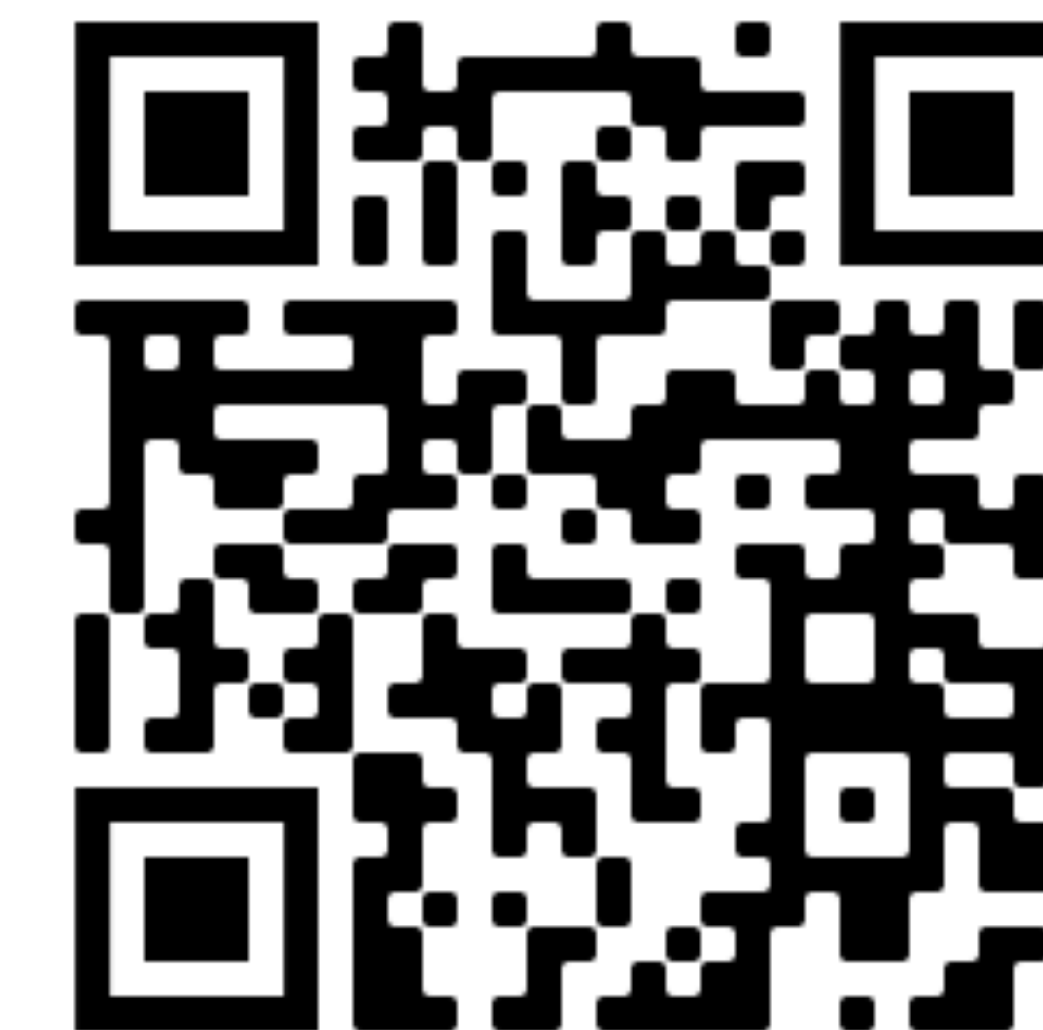
"I think it's important to make a video about a girl who stutters and girls who stutter so people know that it's not just boys." Zara, 11

"The fact that I stutter, I feel really good about. I think stuttering is unique, it make me like the person that I am in so may ways and I like that I stutter, just not always actually stuttering." Tiffani, 26

"It makes me feel embarrassed, sad, or maybe a little anxious. Sometimes I feel alone or different." Harlow, 11

RESULTS

The final 22-minute documentary was released in June 2021 and is freely available on YouTube (QR code below). The interviews highlighted the many challenges, triumphs, and resiliency participants faced in their stuttering journey.



CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Stuttering: Part of Me, Voices of Females who Stutter, is a video resource which is intended to be used in therapeutic and educational settings. At this time, it is the only known video resource that features only females who stutter. In the clinical setting, this video can be used as a springboard to discuss clients' own thoughts, emotions, and experiences with their stuttering. In an educational setting, this video can serve as a tool to improve nonstutterers' understanding about stuttering and sensitivity toward people who stutter.

Future expansions to the *Stuttering: Part of Me* series might feature other underrepresented minorities who stutter, such as gender diverse individuals or those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. It is hoped that strides continue to be made in order to support *all* people who stutter.

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