Living With Stuttering: Authenticity, Identity, And Mental Health

Sarah Musilli
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses

Part of the Speech Pathology and Audiology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/5330
In an effort to manage stigma, some PWS attempt to conceal stuttering and pass as a fluent speaker (Constantino et al., 2017). These efforts to conceal may be counterintuitive, as concealment of stuttering is predictive of elevated distress (Gerlach et al., 2021) and decreased quality of life among PWS (Boyle et al., 2018). Although this association exists, the factors explaining how and why it exists are unexplored. Identity conflict and feelings of in/authenticity are two potential factors that are explored in this study. Qualitative interviewing supplemented with quantitative survey data is utilized to explore the lived experiences of identity conflict and in/authenticity among participants. Reflexive Thematic Analysis is used to analyze interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Results show that participants experience identity conflict as; 1) conflict resulting from discordance between the stuttering identity and ideal personal and professional identities, and 2) conflict from a mismatch between how adults who stutter perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Each type is fueled by stigma to an extent and is described to negatively impact quality of life. In terms of in/authenticity, participants express that concealment promotes feelings of inauthenticity and openness promotes feelings of authenticity. Environmental factors, including threat, familiarity, and acceptance, also play a role in participants' willingness to express themselves authentically. Because this was a preliminary study with a small sample, more research is needed to understand what role, if any, identity conflict and in/authenticity play in mental health among adults who stutter.
LIVING WITH STUTTERING: AUTHENTICITY, IDENTITY, AND MENTAL HEALTH

by

Sarah Musilli

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Speech-Language Pathology
Western Michigan University
April 2022

Thesis Committee:
Hope Gerlach-Houck Ph.D., Chair
Laura DeThorne Ph.D.
Jesse Smith Ph.D.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank and acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Hope Gerlach-Houck, Dr. Laura DeThorne, and Dr. Jesse Smith. Thank you for all your guidance and knowledge on the topics of identity, authenticity, and the qualitative research process. I have learned a great deal from each of you, and I appreciate all the time you have put in to help me make my thesis project what it is today. I would like to further thank Dr. Hope Gerlach-Houck for her mentorship during this process. With your guidance and expertise on the topic of stuttering, I was able to expand my knowledge on the topic way beyond what you taught me in the classroom. Thanks to you, I also gained a greater appreciation for research and the research process. I appreciate all you have done for me during my time as a graduate student.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the six participants of the study. Thank you for sharing your experiences of living with stuttering, as they provided me with knowledge that I would have not been able to get anywhere else. Without them and their willingness to share their stories, this project would cease to exist. I wish each of them well and hope their experience participating in the study was as beneficial for them as it was for me.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported me and helped me grow throughout this process, as well. To my friends who encouraged me to take on this thesis project, I cannot thank you enough. I would have never discovered my love for research if it was not for you. And finally, to my family. Thank you for always being there for me through the ups and down of graduate school. I could not have done it without you.

Sarah Musilli
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS...........................................................................................................ii
LIST OF TABLES......................................................................................................................vi

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION..................................................................................................................1

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE....................................................................................................8
   2.1 For some, stuttering is a lifelong experience.................................................................8
   2.2 Stuttering is stigmatized.................................................................................................9
   2.3 Stigma associated with stuttering increases vulnerability to mental health adversity..............................11
   2.4 Concealing stuttering is a common response to stigma...............................................13
   2.5 People who pass as fluent may experience identity conflict.........................................14
   2.6 Passing as fluent may interfere with authentic self-expression......................................16
   2.7 Purpose of the current study...........................................................................................17

3. METHODOLOGY................................................................................................................19
   3.1 Study design and theoretical framework........................................................................19
   3.2 Participants.....................................................................................................................20
   3.3 Procedures......................................................................................................................21
   3.4 Qualitative criteria.........................................................................................................22
   3.5 Scales in Qualtrics follow-up survey.............................................................................24
      3.5.1 Authenticity scale adapted for stuttering.................................................................25
      3.5.2 Stuttering concealment scale...................................................................................25
Table of Contents – Continued

CHAPTER

3.5.3 Psychological wellbeing (PWB) scale.........................................................26

3.6 Analysis.............................................................................................................28

4. RESULTS.............................................................................................................32

4.1 Research question 1: How do people who stutter experience identity conflict in their day-to-day lives, if at all? .................................................................32

4.1.1 Theme 1a: Conflict between stuttering identity and desired personal and professional identities.................................................................32

4.1.2 Theme 1b: Conflict from incongruence between others’ perceptions of them and their own self-perceptions ....................................................36

4.2 Research question 2: How does living with stuttering facilitate or pose challenges to feeling authentic in day-to-day interactions? .................................38

4.2.1 Theme 2a: Concealment poses challenges to authenticity...................38

4.2.2 Theme 2b: Openness facilitates authenticity........................................40

4.2.3 Theme 2c: Factors within the social environment (e.g., threat, familiarity, acceptance) affect how authentic people who stutter can be ..................41

5. DISCUSSION....................................................................................................45

5.1 Comparing forms of identity conflict identified in the current study to the existing stuttering literature.................................................................46

5.2 Relationship between concealment and authenticity................................49

5.3 Role of stigma and the environment in authenticity.................................50

5.4 Relevance of the social model of disability.............................................50

5.5 Limitations and future directions.................................................................51
# APPENDICES

A. Recruitment Email Script .......................................................... 54

B. Scheduling Email ................................................................. 55

C. Online Consent Form ............................................................ 56

D. Semi-Structured Interview Guide ............................................. 59

E. Modified Authenticity Scale .................................................... 62

F. Stuttering Concealment Scale ................................................... 63

G. Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale ..................................... 64

H. Qualtrics Survey ................................................................. 65

I. Initial Codes Table ............................................................... 70

J. Member Checking Email and Results Table .............................. 71

K. Signed Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Form ................................................... 73

# REFERENCES ........................................................................... 74
LIST OF TABLES

1. Participant Demographic Information…………………………………………………………21
2. Personal Characteristics of Student Researcher……………………………………………………24
3. Participant Scale Scores………………………………………………………………………………27
4. Summary of Research Questions and Themes…………………………………………………32
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Imagine this. I walk in the door. Tall, Blonde, Macho, Strappy, Rugby-playing Hennie. Next to me is the guy in the wheelchair. His problem is obvious. I look normal. I open my mouth to speak and ... NO. The game is not over yet. Not over till I stutter. Then [stuttering] happens. Out of the blue. It takes me by surprise because I don’t know exactly when it will pop up and until it does I am normal...So now a new struggle starts. I have to struggle from being a stutterer to get back to a normal. The only way I can do that is by not stuttering... Lean over to the normals, from the dark side. Lean back from the dark side to the normal... Through all this you just hope that you can make them understand that there is more to this person than just the stutter” (Kathard, 2003, p. 186).

In this passage, Hennie – a person who stutters (PWS), is describing a distressing inner conflict that many people who stutter (PWS) are familiar with (Connery et al., 2020; Kathard et al., 2010; Sheehan, 1970; Watermeyer & Kathard, 2016). This passage illustrates that in certain social situations, many people do not know that Hennie stutters, or is a “stutterer,” and therefore see him as “normal.” Hennie describes his struggle with alternating between being perceived as a normal speaker, to a stutterer, back to a normal speaker. This inconsistency in how he is perceived by others could give rise to feelings of identity conflict and make the idea of trying to conceal his stuttering alluring. Although there is ample evidence that PWS are vulnerable to experiencing elevated levels of psychological distress (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Connery et al., 2020; Plexico et al., 2009a; Plexico et al., 2009b; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006), the roles of concealment, identity conflict, and authentic self-expression have received little attention in
the literature as potential contributing factors. The purpose of this preliminary study is to take a preliminary first step in filling this gap.

Stuttering is a variation in communication, or communication disorder, that has been defined as intermittent difficulty in producing a smooth flow of speech, characterized by repeating or prolonging sounds, or an inability to produce a sound without a great deal of effort (Guitar, 1985). The most well-known and observable characteristics of stuttering are the verbal disfluencies, which include sound/syllable repetitions (e.g., r-r-r-repetition, rep-rep-rep-repetition), prolongations (e.g., pppppppprolongation), and blocks (e.g., _____block). These three types of disfluencies are called stuttering-like disfluencies because they are unique to PWS and occur with a momentary loss of control. There are other disfluencies, commonly referred to as typical disfluencies, that are produced by both people who do and do not stutter. Typical disfluencies include interjections (e.g., “I was um at the store.”), revisions (e.g., “I want to go - can we go to the store?”), and phrase repetitions (e.g., “I want - I want to go to the store.”) and are not associated with a momentary loss of control of the speech motor system.

Disfluencies, particularly stuttering-like disfluencies, account for the behavioral component of stuttering, but there are also affective and cognitive components associated with stuttering (Connery et al., 2020; Plexico et al., 2009; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004). The affective component of stuttering includes the feelings and emotions that PWS develop toward communication and themselves as communicators. The cognitive component of stuttering includes any thoughts PWS may have towards stuttering or as a reaction to stuttering. It is not uncommon for PWS to develop negative thoughts and feelings toward their speech and themselves as communicators (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Connery et al., 2020).
The negative thoughts and feelings that can accompany stuttering are thought to be driven by the stigma associated with stuttering, which can take many forms including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Boyle, 2013; Corrigan & Watson 2002). Stereotypes are negative beliefs about a group. A stereotype then becomes prejudice when an individual agrees with the negative belief or when a belief causes a negative emotional reaction. Discrimination then occurs when there is a behavioral response to prejudice (Corrigan & Watson 2002), such as not hiring a PWS for a job they are qualified for (Gerlach et al., 2018). A subgroup of PWS may internalize stigma, which can contribute to mental health adversity, including elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as decreased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Briley et al., 2021; Iverach et al., 2009; Iverach & Rapee, 2014).

In order to minimize stigmatization, many PWS attempt to conceal their disfluencies to varying degrees or pass as a fluent speaker (Constantino et al., 2017; Douglass et al., 2018; Douglass et al., 2019). Concealment is the attempt or desire of a PWS to hide or not reveal that they stutter (Boyle & Gabel, 2020). Passing as fluent is the ability to hide stuttering to such an extent that others do not recognize it as stuttering (Constantino et al., 2017). Concealment is common among PWS, and it is thought to be a strategy PWS use to avoid being stigmatized for “sounding different” (Boyle & Gabel, 2020; Constantino, et al., 2017). When PWS conceal stuttering or pass as fluent, it can result in identity conflict, which has previously been referred to as “role-conflict” and “competing self-identity formations” in the limited literature that exists (Kathard et al., 2010; Sheehan, 1970).

As it pertains to stuttering, role-conflict among PWS was first defined by Joseph Sheehan, a researcher and PWS. Joseph Sheehan explained role-conflict through Role-Conflict
Theory (1970), which described the experience of stuttering as “not a speech disorder but a conflict revolving around self and role, an identity problem” (Sheehan, 1970). The self-component of this self-role conflict refers to how a PWS views themselves in the role of the speaker and their status in a social speaking situation (p. 5). The role component refers to how a PWS perceives their audience or listener (p. 5). Through the lens of Sheehan’s (1970) Role-Conflict Theory, role-conflict can be defined as a disconnect in identity in that a person identifies as a stutterer on the inside but is not always perceived as such by society for a variety of reasons. Many PWS have periods of spontaneously fluent speech and are thus perceived as “part-time normal speakers” (Sheehan, 1970, p. 7) by listeners. This experience fuels role-conflict as it can seduce PWS to try to fit the mold or be perceived as a fluent speaker in order to reap the benefits of able-bodied privilege.

Sheehan proposed that role-conflict can be reduced by publicly enacting or embracing the stuttering identity, as opposed to trying to get by or “pass” as a fluent speaker. Sheehan stated that when a PWS enacts the identity of being a stutterer (e.g., stutters openly, discloses their stuttering status), the fear of stuttering and being perceived as a PWS diminishes, and communication is more enjoyable and less effortful (Sheehan, 1970, p. 7). This process of enacting the identity of a PWS in public settings can be difficult as it requires high levels of vulnerability. When a PWS acts in ways that are congruent with their inner identity as a stutterer, Sheehan proposed that they will feel more authentic; when they unintentionally or intentionally pass as fluent, identity conflict can ensue.

Identity conflict has also been studied in other marginalized communities through Disconnect Theory (Ragins, 2008). Many stigmatized groups do not disclose their stigmatized identity in a consistent way across settings and contexts, and this can result in “disclosure
disconnect.” “Disclosure disconnect” refers to disclosing a stigmatized trait in some contexts and not disclosing it in other contexts (e.g., work settings vs. nonwork settings). When individuals experience “disclosure disconnect” it can lead to psychological distress and identity conflict given that there is a lack of coherence in the sense of self across contexts. Individuals with an invisible stigma, or a stigmatized identity that cannot be readily observed, may conceal their identity to avoid negative reactions and discrimination (Goffman, 1963; Ragins, 2008). Concealment of a stigmatized trait can lead to increased fear and anxiety, especially when that trait is not something that can always be readily concealed (i.e., stuttering). Concealment of a stigmatized trait can also lead to identity conflict if an individual conceals a stigmatized trait to different degrees across settings (Ragins, 2008).

Identity conflict and concealment have been linked to feelings of authenticity (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020). Authenticity has been defined in a number of ways and has been semantically related to words including “genuineness,” “naturalness,” “individuality,” expressivity,” and “truthfulness” (Erickson, 1995; Lacoste et al., 2014; Snyder & Lopez, 2009; Trilling, 1972; Van Leeuwen, 2001). Van Leeuwen (2001) defines authenticity, or being authentic, as being genuine or true to the essence of the self. Erickson (1995) defines authenticity as “the extent to which one fulfills the expectations or commitments one has for [themselves].” This definition is derived from Trilling’s (1972) differentiation between sincerity and authenticity, in that sincerity is when a person honestly represents themselves to others, and authenticity is a person’s honest relationship to themselves. Snyder and Lopez (2009) define authenticity as “an accordance between how someone presents [themselves] and what [they] actually are.” For the purposes of this study, authenticity is being defined as a genuine representation of a person’s true self, with
the true self being characterized by a person’s personal values, beliefs, traits, characteristics, and roles.

Individuals may feel less authentic when they conceal a stigmatized identity (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020). On the other hand, when a person enacts certain elements of their identity (i.e., values, goals, traits, characteristics, preferences, social collectives and categories, and relationships and roles) it may result in increased feelings of authenticity (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020; Vignoles, 2011). Thus, it is a reasonable interpretation that when elements of a person’s identity are highly stigmatized, they may be more likely to conceal their identity, which could result in identity conflict and feelings of inauthenticity.

In sum, PWS are at risk for mental health struggles in large part due to the stigma and social penalties they experience (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Connery et al., 2020; Plexico et al., 2009a; Plexico et al., 2009b; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). They often try to manage the stigma by attempting to conceal their stuttering to varying degrees and passing as a fluent speaker (Constantino et al., 2017). Research has shown that concealment of stuttering is predictive of elevated distress and decreased wellbeing among PWS (Boyle et al., 2018; Gerlach et al., 2021), but the factors explaining how and why concealment leads to distress are unknown. One potential factor is the experience of identity conflict. Concealment of stuttering can lead to identity conflict, which often manifests as feeling shameful, guilty, and/or angry for trying to enact an identity (i.e., fluent speaker) that is not consistent with their inner experience of being a PWS (Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Sheehan, 1970).

Another potential explanation for the link between concealment of stuttering and elevated distress among PWS could be that the tendency to conceal stuttering or pass as a fluent speaker
reduces feelings of authenticity, which could be a significant contributor to the well-documented risk for mental health adversity within this community. Identity conflict and authenticity have shown to have significant relationships with mental health in other groups (Grijak, 2017; Hirsh & Kang, 2015; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson, 2012) and thus could play an important role in mental health adversity among PWS as well. Given that PWS are vulnerable to elevated levels of anxiety, social anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (the last of which is only among men), the need to explore and understand factors that could contribute to mental health adversity is urgent (Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Briley et al. 2021; Gunn et al., 2014; Iverach & Rapee, 2014; Kraaimaat et al., 2002). The purpose of this preliminary study is to explore how adults who conceal stuttering experience identity conflict and (in)authenticity in their day-to-day lives.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do people who stutter experience identity conflict in their day-to-day lives, if at all?

2. How does living with stuttering facilitate or pose challenges to feeling authentic in day-to-day interactions?
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is organized into seven sub-sections reviewing the following topics that are relevant to the current study; 1) the developmental nature of stuttering, 2) stigma associated with stuttering, 3) the influence that stigma has on mental health among PWS, 4) concealment of stuttering as a common response to stigma, 5) concealment and identity conflict, 6) concealment and authenticity, and 7) the purpose of the current study.

2.1 For some, stuttering is a lifelong experience

Stuttering is complex and multidimensional in nature. There is no singular cause of stuttering, but stuttering does have known contributing factors related to both its onset and persistence (Ambrose et al., 1997; Howell et al., 2008; Leech et al., 2017; Singer et al., 2020; Smith & Weber, 2017; Sugathan & Maruthy, 2020; Yairi et al., 1996). Onset of stuttering refers to when stuttering first emerges – typically between the ages of 2 and 3.5 years. Persistence of stuttering refers to stuttering that continues throughout the lifetime. Not all people who begin stuttering at an early age will persist throughout the lifetime. About 80% of people who begin stuttering at an early age will experience spontaneous recovery, or recovery without receiving any clinical intervention (Yari & Ambrose, 1999). The remaining 20% of preschoolers who experience stuttering will stutter across the lifespan, and these adults comprise the group of interest in this study.

After stuttering onset, the likelihood of persistence is influenced by several factors. Factors associated with persistence include, sex, family history of stuttering, age at onset, speech-sound skills, expressive and receptive language, stuttering frequency, changes in stuttering, time since onset, and temperament (Ambrose et al., 1997; Howell et al., 2008; Singer
et al., 2020). In terms of gender and age of onset, males are more likely to persist than females, and children with a later age of onset are more likely to persist than children with an early age of onset. Children with any family history of stuttering (e.g., any stuttering, persistent stuttering, or recovered stuttering) are more likely to persist than children with no family history of stuttering. Children with lower or dissociated skills in articulation, phonology, and receptive and expressive language are also at an increased likelihood for persistence (Ambrose et al., 1997; Howell et al., 2008; Singer et al., 2020; Yairi et al., 1996). No two PWS are the same and each PWS will present with a different “recipe” of developmental factors associated with the onset and persistence of stuttering (Smith, 1999). The more risk factors a PWS has, the more likely a child’s stuttering will persist throughout their lifetime.

2.2 Stuttering is stigmatized

Stuttering that persists throughout the lifetime involves much more than just the presence of verbal disfluencies. Stuttering is a stigmatized trait (Boyle, 2013; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Corrigan & Watson 2002), and living with stuttering can have a range of impacts on a person’s life experiences and mental health (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Connery et al., 2020; Plexico et al., 2009a; Plexico et al., 2009b; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). Scambler (2009) defines stigma as “a social process, experienced or anticipated, characterized by exclusion, rejection, blame, or devaluation that results from experience, perception, or reasonable anticipation of an adverse social judgement about a person or group” (p. 141). Stigma can also be defined as the social consequences that accompany possessing a certain devalued trait or recognizable difference (Shelton et al., 2010). Individuals who stutter may experience stigma on both a public and personal level (i.e., public stigma and self-stigma) (Boyle, 2013). Public stigma
refers to reactions of members of the public to individuals who possess a stigmatized trait (Bathje & Pryor, 2011), in this case stuttering. Public stigma includes stereotypes (being aware of negative ideas about PWS as a group), prejudice (holding unfavorable opinions or feelings about PWS), and discrimination (unfair treatment of PWS) (Corrigan & Watson 2002). Self-stigma is when a PWS internalizes public stigma and penalizes themselves through self-discriminating thoughts or behaviors (Boyle, 2013; Corrigan & Watson 2002).)

Negative stereotypes associated with stuttering are well-documented, including inaccurate assumptions that PWS are introverted, shy, anxious, nervous, quiet, tense, guarded, repressed, inhibited, insecure, lacking self-confidence, and frustrated (Ham, 1990; Kalinowski, Stuart, & Armson, 1996). Ham (1990) also found that some people who do not stutter (PWNS) have inaccurate assumptions that stuttering is causally associated with “psychological problems.” Prejudice takes stereotypes a step further in that it involves agreement with or negative emotional reactions to a belief about a specific group (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). Discrimination among PWS is also common and has been shown to cause worry and inhibition related to life participation (Alqhazo et al., 2017). PWS report worry related to participating in a classroom, getting married, being employed, being appropriately paid at their place of employment, being promoted, renting or buying a house, and being teased (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Gilman, 2012; Nang et al., 2018). Discrimination is closely related to feelings of exclusion in social contexts. Discrimination and its related worry are evident in dating and the formation of romantic relationships among PWS (Mayo & Mayo, 2013; Nang et al., 2018). Some PWS have reported avoiding talking in relationships because of the fear that stuttering would have a negative impact on their relationship (Nang et al., 2018). Mayo & Mayo (2013) found that college students are reluctant to date a PWS due to the possibility of becoming frustrated with a
PWS, being embarrassed by a PWS, and having difficulty understanding a PWS. Discrimination among PWS is also evident in the workforce, as PWS are paid less when compared to PWNS for the same work (Gerlach et al., 2018).

The experience of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination across the lifetime can be internalized by PWS and reinforced through self-stigma (Boyle, 2013; Boyle; 2015; Boyle, 2018). Stereotypes and prejudice in relation to self-stigma are similar to that of public stigma but with some key differences. Public stigma is when the public believes in and has inaccurate assumptions about a particular stigmatized group, whereas self-stigma is when individuals in that stigmatized group believe and agree with those inaccurate assumptions (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). When stereotypes and prejudice are believed by the individuals of a stigmatized group, these individuals may then engage in self-discriminating behaviors (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). For PWS this can be decreased likelihood of applying for jobs and beginning romantic relationships, and increased avoidance of speaking situations (Boyle, 2013; Plexico, et al., 2009a). Self-stigma can also be toxic for PWS as it can result in increased stress, decreased physical health, and decreased health care satisfaction (Boyle & Fearon, 2018).

2.3 Stigma associated with stuttering increases vulnerability to mental health adversity

Stigma associated with stuttering can lead to a variety of mental health struggles ranging from occasional negative thoughts and feelings about communication to clinically significant mental health adversity (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Connery et al., 2020; Plexico et al., 2009a; Plexico et al., 2009b; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). Negative thoughts and feelings are commonly referred to as the cognitive and affective components associated with stuttering. The affective component of stuttering encompasses feelings and emotions PWS have towards
stuttering (Connery et al., 2020; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). PWS have reported feeling guilty, annoyed, embarrassed, shameful, nervous, disappointed, sad, fearful, pessimistic, worried, lonely, emotionally exhausted, and anxious (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004).

The cognitive component of stuttering encompasses thoughts and “cognitive reactions” PWS have towards stuttering (Connery et al., 2020; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). In the literature, thoughts about communication among PWS are documented as predominately negative and include reduced self-esteem, thoughts that stuttering is a hindrance to their life, and at the extreme end of the spectrum, thoughts of suicide (Briley et al. 2021; Plexico et al., 2009; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004;). Tichenor and Yaruss (2019) found that cognitive reactions to stuttering can be related to both the anticipation of stuttering and its social penalties. Jackson et al. (2015) defines anticipation as “the sense that stuttering will occur before it is physically and overtly realized” (p. 38). Some PWS report that anticipating moments of stuttering and its potential social penalties can lead to emotional reactions, such as embarrassment, shame, anxiety, and worry (Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019).

Stigma associated with stuttering has also been found to have links with negative mental health outcomes among PWS (Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle, 2018; Boyle & Fearon, 2018). Public stigma, also referred to as enacted stigma in the literature, is inversely related to mental health (Boyle, 2018). Self-stigma is also associated with increased level of stress, anxiety, and depression, and decreased levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2018; Boyle & Fearon, 2018). Mental health adversity among PWS can be clinically significant, with PWS as a group being more likely to be
diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and social anxiety (Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Briley et al., 2021; Gunn et al., 2014; Iverach & Rapee, 2014; Kraaimaat et al., 2002).

2.4 Concealing stuttering is a common response to stigma

It is clear from the literature that there is a significant relationship between stuttering, stigma, and risk for negative mental health outcomes among PWS. In efforts to manage and mitigate stigma, some PWS conceal their stuttering from the public and attempt to pass as fluent (Boyle et al., 2018; Boyle & Gable, 2020; Constantino et al., 2017; Douglass et al., 2018; Douglass et al., 2019). Research on concealment of stuttering has shown that PWS may conceal stuttering or attempt to pass as fluent for a variety of reasons (Boyle & Gable, 2020; Constantino et al., 2017). Many PWS attempt to pass as fluent to avoid negative reactions they may receive from misinformed people or to avoid feelings of shame. (Boyle & Gable, 2020; Constantino et al., 2017). PWS may engage in a variety of behaviors to keep their stuttering a secret (Boyle & Gable, 2020; Connery et al., 2020; Grossman, 2019). This can include omitting words, changing words, or “speaking around” words when talking (Grossman, 2019). People who conceal their stuttering may do so because of the fear and anxiety brought upon by certain speaking situations (e.g. phone calls, doctor’s visits; Connery et al., 2020).

Although concealment is often enacted to avoid social penalties and the associated negative effects on wellbeing, these efforts may be counterproductive because stuttering concealment itself is predictive of elevated distress (Gerlach et al., 2021) and decreased quality of life among PWS (Boyle et. al., 2018). Although concealing stuttering has been linked to elevated distress among PWS, how and why concealment has a toxic effect on wellbeing is unclear. The purpose of the current study is to explore identity conflict and feelings of authenticity/inauthenticity among adults who conceal stuttering as a first step in understanding
factors that might explain the association between concealment of stuttering and elevated distress.

2.5 People who pass as fluent may experience identity conflict

Identity conflict is a relevant construct to PWS and could be one contributing factor to how passing as fluent negatively affects mental wellbeing. Research on identity conflict among PWS is in its infancy, and the limited research available conceptualizes identity conflict in several ways (Connery et al., 2020; Kathard et al., 2010; Sheehan, 1970; Watermeyer & Kathard, 2016). Specifically, stuttering-related identity conflict has been alluded to in the literature as taking the forms of (1) inconsistency between how a person feels on the inside and presents on the outside, (2) confusion from having both positive and negative attributions related to the stuttering identity, and (3) lack of coherence in self-presentation across contexts. Next, I review each of these examples of identity conflict in greater detail.

Joseph Sheehan (1970) conducted early research on identity conflict among PWS. Sheehan described the experience of stuttering as an iceberg, with the majority of it being below the surface and not visible to others (Sheehan, 1970, p. 13). For example, a listener may see the physical component of stuttering and hear a person's disfluency, but they can’t see the thoughts and feelings a person may be experiencing during a speaking situation. With much of stuttering being not being visible to others, it makes sense that PWS would experience some form of identity conflict in that how they feel on the inside is not always consistent with how they look on the outside.

More recent research on identity conflict among PWS has shown that PWS may experience identity conflict related to both a positive and negative self-identity (Connery et al., 2020; Kathard et al., 2010). Identity conflict can result from a conflict between yourself as
‘Able’ (positive self-identity) and ‘DisOther’ (negative self-identity) (Kathard et al., 2010). PWS may experience a positive self-identity, a negative self-identity, or a combination of both. Identity conflict comes into play when there are competing positive and negative self-identities (Kathard et al., 2010). This concept is also explained in a study by Connery et al. (2020). This study found that over the course of their lifetime, a PWS may develop a varied amount of both positive and negative self-identity schemas related to stuttering.

A third potential form of identity conflict is identity disconnect across contexts. PWS conceal or attempt to hide stuttering to varying degrees across situations and contexts (Boyle et al., 2018; Boyle & Gable, 2020). Boyle et al. (2018) found that a significant number of PWS reported often feeling the need to conceal their stuttering, and that there are many aspects of life in which no one knows they stutter. The findings that stuttering concealment varies across contexts, aspects of life, and speaking situations, is consistent with Ragins (2008) Disconnect Theory. Disconnect theory has been studied in stigmatized groups and highlights the degree to which people disclose a stigmatized trait across contexts (Ragins, 2008). This is particularly relevant to stuttering, because research has shown that PWS vary in the contexts and speaking situations in which they disclose or conceal stuttering (Boyle et al., 2018; Connery et al., 2020). It could be that this inconsistency in self-expression across contexts is another way that identity conflict can manifest among people who conceal stuttering.

The existing literature suggests that, for some PWS, identity conflict is relevant to the experience of living with stuttering and could give rise to distress and decreased wellbeing (Connery et al., 2020; Constantino et al., 2017; Kathard et al., 2010; Sheehan, 1970; Watermeyer & Kathard, 2016). More research is needed to determine if identity conflict is an influential factor in the link between concealment and elevated distress among PWS.
2.6 Passing as fluent may interfere with authentic self-expression

Authentic self-expression (or lack thereof) may be another explanatory factor for the link between concealment of stuttering and elevated distress among PWS. Among the general public (college students), hiding an aspect of one’s identity has been linked to feelings of inauthenticity (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020). Crabtree & Pillow (2020) conducted two studies exploring the relationship between identity and felt authenticity. Study one used survey and questionnaire data of 352 college students to determine the relationship between identity enactment versus concealment and wellbeing, and identity enactment versus concealment and felt authenticity. The results of study one found that individuals felt most inauthentic and less motivationally fulfilled when elements of their identity were concealed. In contrast, individuals felt most authentic and more motivationally fulfilled when elements of their identity were enacted, or when their values, goals, traits, characteristics, preferences, relationships, and/or roles were acted upon (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020; Vignoles, 2011). The results of this study also showed that individuals are much more likely to conceal aspects of their identity that are stigmatized. Specific identity elements that were identified by participants as being concealed include, gay, bisexual, conservative, liberal, child-like, clumsy, tired, pro-choice, selfish, idealistic, and feminist (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020).

The second study from Crabtree & Pillow (2020) used the results from study one to further explore the relationship between stigmatized identity concealment and felt authenticity. Participants in this study were 344 undergraduate students who identified twelve identity elements they possessed (e.g., sister, Black, gay, etc.) and rated extent of concealment and felt authenticity for each identity element. Consistent with the author’s hypothesis, results from analysis of survey data indicated that concealment mediated the relationship between possessing
a stigmatized identity and feeling less authentic. That is, people with stigmatized identities do not inherently feel inauthentic, but the act of concealing a stigmatized identity can trigger feelings of reduced authenticity. Given that stuttering is a stigmatized identity that is commonly concealed, the findings in these studies are potentially relevant to the stuttering community and relationships between concealing stuttering and authenticity are in need of further exploration.

It is important to understand more about potential relationships between identity concealment and felt authenticity among PWS because feelings of authenticity have shown to have significant associations with mental health in other communities (Grijak, 2017; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson 2012). Perceptions of living authentically are positively correlated with psychological wellbeing (i.e., general positive affect, emotional ties, life satisfaction) and negatively correlated with psychological distress (i.e., anxiety, depression, loss of behavioral/emotional control; Grijak, 2017). Authentic living also has links to lower depression and higher self-esteem (Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson 2012).

2.7 Purpose of the current study

Growing evidence indicates that concealment of stuttering can lead to distress and decreased mental health among PWS, but the factors explaining how and why this occurs are unclear. Identity conflict and felt authenticity are two possible explanatory factors that are in need of further exploration. Identity conflict has shown to have some relevance among PWS, but more in-depth research exploring lived experiences is needed (Connery et al., 2020; Kathard et al., 2010; Sheehan, 1970; Watermeyer & Kathard, 2016). Authenticity is also a relevant factor to explore because of its established links with mental health among people who conceal other types of stigmatized identities (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020). The purpose of this preliminary
qualitative study is to explore if and how adults who conceal their stuttering experience identity conflict and inauthenticity in their day to day lives.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do people who stutter experience identity conflict in their day-to-day lives, if at all?
2. How does living with stuttering facilitate or pose challenges to feeling authentic in day-to-day interactions?
3.1. Study design and theoretical framework

This preliminary study investigating lived experiences with identity conflict and authenticity among PWS who conceal their stuttering is a qualitative interview study supplemented with quantitative data. Qualitative research is an in-depth method of conducting research that provides a rich, contextualized understanding of human experience using a small sample of participants (Polit & Beck, 2010). Qualitative research centers the researcher within the research process, allows for flexibility, and provides a holistic view on the research topic at hand (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Qualitative research is typically used when the research topic is not well understood and there is a desire to explore the topic thoroughly, as is the case with the current study (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

Supplemental quantitative data were also collected in this study in the form of administering pre-established, existing scales to assess relevant constructs through Qualtrics. Existing scales assessed authenticity, stuttering concealment, and psychological wellbeing. Each of these scales are described in further detail in the proceeding sections. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data provided a more in-depth picture of each participant and helped to further tell each participants story related to the topics of the study.

The theoretical framework for this study is interpretivism. Interpretivism is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on constructing meaning and one that views reality as fluid and socially constructed (Goldkuhl, 2012; Langley & Meziani, 2020). At its core, interpretivism uses subjective meaning from human experiences to guide research and theory (Goldkuhl, 2012). In an interpretivist approach, there is a need for openness and flexibility to allow for in-depth
reports of participants’ experiences (Langly & Meziani, 2020). When conducting interviews using an interpretivist approach a variety of potential practices can be used. Of these practices, introspection and clean language interviewing were implemented in this study. Stimulating introspection during interviews involves allowing the interviewee to relive specific experiences and recall in-depth details from different experiences. Clean language interviewing is an interviewing technique in which the interviewer asks neutral questions so that the interviewees’ responses are less influenced by the questions asked (Langley & Meziani, 2020).

3.2 Participants

Participants were six AWS who currently or formerly have attempted to pass as a fluent speaker in one or more settings. Participants for this study were recruited using purposeful sampling in order to obtain information from participants who have experience with passing as fluent. Purposeful sampling is a sampling method used in qualitative research that aims to select participants that will provide the most relevant, in-depth information related to the aim of the study (Palinkas et al., 2013). Participants were recruited through email using an email database of AWS (See Appendix A for recruitment email script). The email database was obtained from Gerlach et al., (2021) and contained AWS who indicated they were interested in participating in research. The study was also advertised through word of mouth in an adult therapy group that the faculty member regularly interacts with. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study included; 1) identifying as a PWS who currently or formerly has attempted to pass as a fluent speaker in one or more settings, 2) stuttering that reportedly began in childhood, and 3) a resident of the United States or Canada. The table below includes the pseudonyms (selected by participants), and demographic information for each participant. All demographic information
and scale scores were collected through a Qualtrics survey (See Appendix H for Qualtrics survey).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Highest Attained Educational Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilton Silver</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Speech-Language Pathologist</td>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>PhD Student</td>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Thompson</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Procedures

Using an email database maintained by the faculty mentor, potential participants were sent a recruitment email (see Appendix A for recruitment email script) with an invitation to reply to the email if they were interested in participating in the study. AWS in the faculty member’s adult therapy group were also invited to participate through word of mouth. Individuals who indicated that they wished to participate were asked via email to confirm they met the inclusion criteria. Once it was confirmed that participants met the inclusion criteria, they were scheduled for a one-time, one-on-one virtual interview via Webex (See Appendix B for scheduling email).
A consent form was then emailed to the participants to inform them of study procedures and outline measures to protect their confidentiality (See Appendix C for online consent form).

Verbal consent was obtained before beginning each interview. Interviews were conducted using an interview guide to facilitate conversation related to the aims of the study, but participants were also able to take the lead of the conversation to provide more in-depth responses. Interview questions were related to living with stuttering, concealment of stuttering, authenticity, and identity (See Appendix D for interview guide). Across the six participants, interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 5 minutes. Participants were emailed a Qualtrics survey following the interview, which included questions about demographic information, an authenticity scale adapted for stuttering, a stuttering concealment scale, and a general wellbeing scale. Participants provided an email at the end of the survey to receive a $20.00 e-gift card as compensation for participating in the study.

3.4 Qualitative criteria

To promote trustworthiness of the study’s findings, the following qualitative research criteria were considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility helps to ensure the truthfulness of the research findings and ensures that the findings are a correct interpretation of the participants’ experiences. The strategies used to ensure credibility include, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking. For the purposes of the study, persistent observation, and member checking were used. Persistent observation is the process of continually reading, rereading, and analyzing the data to identify the data most relevant to the topic of the study and help validate the soundness of the study (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Member checking is a strategy that provides participants with the research interpretations and findings in order to receive their feedback on
the accuracy of the findings and help to strengthen the data (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In the current study, participants had the opportunity to provide feedback on drafted themes via an email-based member checking process.

Transferability is a qualitative criterion used to judge the degree to which the findings of the study can be transferred, or are applicable, in other contexts and with other participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It is the researcher’s job to provide a “thick description” of the participants and the study procedures, for readers to then make judgment of transferability based on their specific setting. Providing a “thick description” involves describing not only the experiences and behaviors of the participants, but the context as well (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Information provided in this study to aid in transferability included participant demographic information (i.e., pseudonym, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and occupation), inclusion criteria, the interview guide, and a detailed description of the study’s procedures.

Dependability and confirmability are two more qualitative criteria that can be promoted through the use of an audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability is concerned with consistency. To ensure dependability, the researcher needs to ensure that the analysis process is in line with the current standards for a particular design. For this particular study, the steps of Reflexive Thematic Analysis were implemented and documented. The member checking process will also promote dependability of the findings. Confirmability is the degree to which the study’s findings could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability aims to show that the researcher’s interpretations of the data are not “figments of the inquirer’s imagination,” but are actually grounded the data. To ensure both dependability and confirmability, an audit trail was used. The audit trail described each procedural step taken from the start of the study to the development of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The audit trail also helped to keep track
of the time and date of the interviews and show that sufficient time was spent in each interview (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The faculty mentor reviewed the audit trail and provided input on themes in effort to promote confirmability.

The final qualitative criteria incorporated was reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of reflecting on your own personal biases, assumptions, and preconceptions related to the topic of the study and your relationship to the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Tong et al., 2007). For this study, reflexive notes were taken to document the researcher’s subjective responses during the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. The relationship and extent of interaction between the researcher and the participants was also described, as this can have an impact on both the participants’ responses and the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Tong et al., 2007). To further enhance the credibility of the study, the researcher’s personal characteristics are provided in Table 2. Providing these characteristics helps readers make inferences how the author may have influenced the study’s findings (Tong et al., 2007).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credentials</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Personal attributes</th>
<th>Experience &amp; Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science,</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student Clinician at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Michigan University</td>
<td>Clinician and Researcher</td>
<td>Neurotypical</td>
<td>University Clinic (Western Michigan University)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-stutterer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Scales in Qualtrics follow-up survey

In the sections below, I describe each of the scales that were embedded in the Qualtrics survey.
3.5.1. *Authenticity scale adapted for stuttering*

The authenticity scale used in this study was adapted from Wood et al. (2008). The Wood et al. (2008) Authenticity Scale consists of 12 questions and responses are based on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *does not describe me at all* to 7 = *describes me very well*). Each question corresponds to one of three categories: Authentic Living (questions 1, 8, 9, and 11), Accepting External Influence (questions 3, 4, 5, and 6), and Self-Alienation (questions 2, 7, 10, and 12). Authentic living refers to enacting behaviors consistent with a person’s beliefs and values. Accepting External Influence refers to changing to fit the expectations of others. Self-Alienation refers to how well a person knows themselves (Grijak, 2017). Scores from each subscale were summed to obtain an overall score. The instructions for the Wood et al. (2008) Authenticity Scale were modified so that participants were instructed to answer the questions as they specifically pertain to living with stuttering. The original Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008) along with the adapted instructions used in this study can be found in Appendix E.

3.5.2. *Stuttering concealment scale*

This study utilized a stuttering concealment scale from Gerlach et al. (2021). The scale was adapted from the Self-Concealment Scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990) which measures general concealment. The adapted scale is used to measure general stuttering concealment among PWS and has demonstrated good reliability in a previous study (Gerlach et al., 2021). The scale consists of 10 items and responses are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). An example question from this scale is, “There are lots of things about my stuttering that I keep to myself.” Participants’ responses were averaged, and an overall concealment score was obtained. Higher scores
indicate higher levels of concealment. The 10 items used in this scale can be found in Appendix F.

3.5.3 Psychological wellbeing (PWB) scale

The general wellbeing scale used in this study was the 18-item Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) scale developed by Ryff & Keyes (1995). The 18-item PWB scale consists of 18 questions and responses are based on a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly agree to 7= strongly disagree). Each question corresponds to 1 of 6 wellbeing subscales. Subscales include Autonomy (questions 15, 17, and 18), Environmental Mastery (questions 4, 8, and 9), Personal Growth (questions 11, 12, and 14), Positive Relations with Others (questions 6, 13, and 16), Purpose in Life (questions 3, 7, and 10), and Self-Acceptance (questions 1, 2, and 5). When scoring the PWB, questions 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, and 18 were reverse-scored (Ryff & Keyes 1995). Reverse-scored items were worded in a way that was the opposite of what the scale was measuring (Ryff & Keyes 1995). The formula for reverse scoring items is as follows: ((Number of scale points) + 1) - (Respondent’s answer). For example, if a respondent answered 6 on question 1, their response was re-scored as (7+1) - 6 = 2. All other questions were scored using normal scoring procedures (i.e., respondents original answers were used). Participant's responses were summed to obtain a score for each of the 6 subscales. A higher score indicated a higher level of psychological wellbeing (Ryff & Keyes 1995). Appendix G shows the 18-items used in the PWB scale.
Table 3

**Participant Scale Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Authenticity Scale</th>
<th>Stuttering Concealment Scale</th>
<th>Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Authentic Living: 9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Autonomy: 4 Environmental Mastery: 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting External Influence: 25</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Growth: 21 Positive Relations with Others: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Alienation: 20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose in Life: 21 Self-Acceptance: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilton Silver</td>
<td>Authentic Living: 22</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Autonomy: 16 Environmental Mastery: 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting External Influence: 17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Growth: 18 Positive Relations with Others: 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Alienation: 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose in Life: 18 Self-Acceptance: 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Authentic Living: 26</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Autonomy: 15 Environmental Mastery: 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting External Influence: 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Growth: 19 Positive Relations with Others: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Alienation: 12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose in Life: 15 Self-Acceptance: 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Authentic Living: 24</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Autonomy: 18 Environmental Mastery: 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting External Influence: 14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Growth: 19 Positive Relations with Others: 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Alienation: 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose in Life: 18 Self-Acceptance: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Thompson</td>
<td>Authentic Living: 20</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Autonomy: 12 Environmental Mastery: 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting External Influence: 18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Growth: 14 Positive Relations with Others: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Alienation: 21</td>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose in Life: 17 Self-Acceptance: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Authentic Living: 28</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Autonomy: 21 Environmental Mastery: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting External Influence: 20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Growth: 20 Positive Relations with Others: 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Alienation: 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose in Life: 14 Self-Acceptance: 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Possible authenticity scores ranged from 4 to 28 in each of the three subscales with higher scores indicating more of the concept of the subscale (Grijak, 2017). People with higher levels of authenticity should have higher scores in the area of authentic living and lower scores in the areas of accepting external influence and self-alienation (Grijak, 2017). Possible stuttering concealment scores ranged from 1 to 5 with higher scores indicating higher levels of concealment. Possible psychological wellbeing scores for each subscale ranged from 3 to 21 with higher scores indicating more positive feelings related to each subscale.

As can be seen in Table 2, there was some variation in participant authenticity, concealment, and psychological wellbeing ratings. Bill, for example, had a notably low score on...
the authentic living scale and Lily had the highest possible score on that scale. No participants received a score of a 4 or higher on the concealment scale, with scores ranging between 1.4 to 3.5. Compared to their own scores on other sub-scales, many participants scored relatively higher in the area of personal growth compared to other wellbeing sub-scales.

3.6 Analysis

Interview data were transcribed and analyzed by the researcher using reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that emphasizes the researcher’s reflective engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify, interpret, and analyze meaning (i.e., “themes”) in the interview data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). A six-step thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the interview data. The six steps included; 1) familiarizing yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Between steps one and two, an additional step, extracting meaningful units, was added (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Microsoft Excel was used for coding and developing themes.

Interviews were transcribed into written form to begin to interpret meaning and generate themes from the participants’ responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). NVivo transcription was used to create transcripts. Then, each transcript was compared to the recording and corrected for errors. Following transcription, meaningful units were extracted from the transcribed interviews (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Meaningful units from the transcribed interviews included relevant or common details related to the research questions (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Semantic chunking was used to create meaningful units. Meaningful units ranged from a few words to entire stories, and a new meaningful unit was created with each new piece of
information that carried meaning and was relevant to the study. Data were then read and analyzed to assign an initial code or codes to each meaningful unit using the constant comparative method, in which all new pieces of data are compared to all previous pieces of data (Boeije, 2002). Initial codes were words or short phrases that capture the semantic meaning embedded in each meaningful unit (See Appendix I for example initial codes table for one theme). Initial codes were developed using inductive coding (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Inductive coding is an approach to coding that uses terms or phrases that participants directly said to create codes. This approach helps to ensure the codes mirror what is actually in the data. This approach is typically used when there is a limited amount of research around the topic, which is the case with the current study. A list of initial codes was developed, which included several precise codes that reflected the complexity of the data. Initial codes were descriptive in nature to reflect what was in the data (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Creating a list of initial codes helped to further organize the data prior to step 3, developing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once all data were coded with initial codes, a second cycle of coding occurred. This process involved using the researcher’s interpretation of the initial codes to create “higher level categories” from the list of initial codes. This allows the researcher to move from a large number of initial codes to a smaller of higher-level codes or categories. (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Codes were then explored, merged, and reduced to generate themes in the data. When generating themes in the data, analysis was done by combining similar codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). It is important to note that themes did not ‘emerge’ from the data, as they were not ‘hidden’ to begin with. Themes were generated from the researcher’s interpretation of the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2019).
The final three steps in the thematic analysis process were to review the themes, define and name the themes, and produce the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When reviewing the themes, they were analyzed to determine whether there was too little or too much data to support them. Themes with too little data were analyzed to determine if they could be combined with another theme. Themes with too much data were further broken down into multiple themes. This process occurred in two levels. First, the coded data from each theme was read to determine if it formed a cohesive pattern. If the coded data did not form a cohesive pattern, it was then determined whether the theme itself was problematic, or if certain pieces of data did not belong within that theme. Problematic themes were changed and pieces of data that did not belong within themes were either moved to a more fitting theme or discarded altogether. Once each theme had adequate coded data, level two began. In level two, the entire data set, or “thematic map,” was read to determine if themes made sense in relation to the entire data set, and to code any additional data within themes, as coding was an ongoing process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Themes were then further defined and named. In this step, the “essence” of each theme was identified as well as what aspects of the data were represented by each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After a list of themes was developed, researchers sent the list of themes to each participant with a short description of each theme to obtain feedback (See Appendix J for member checking email and results). This process of member checking allows the participants to share their thoughts on themes and share how closely the themes align with their own personal experiences (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A detailed analysis was then written for each theme as well as an analysis of how each theme related to the studies research questions. The final step of thematic analysis was to produce the report. The report aimed to tell
the story of the collected data and provide evidence that the data adequately related to the studies research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences with identity conflict and authenticity among AWS who conceal or have concealed their stuttering. Interview transcripts from six participants were partitioned into 273 meaningful units, with one or more code assigned to each meaningful unit using the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002). 120 initial codes were generated, and these codes were collated to develop two themes pertaining to the first research question and three related to the second research question. Research questions and themes are displayed in Table 3.

Table 4

Summary of Research Questions and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do people who stutter experience identity conflict in their day-to-day lives, if at all?</td>
<td>Theme 1a: Conflict between stuttering identity and desired personal and professional identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 1b: Conflict from incongruence between others’ perceptions of them and their own self-perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does living with stuttering facilitate or pose challenges to feeling authentic in day-to-day interactions?</td>
<td>Theme 2a: Concealment poses challenges to authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2b: Openness facilitates authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2c: Factors within the social environment (e.g., threat, familiarity, acceptance) affect how authentic people who stutter can be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1 Research question 1: How do people who stutter experience identity conflict in their day-to-day lives, if at all?

4.1.1 Theme 1a: Conflict between stuttering identity and idealized personal and professional identities

Several participants in the study endorsed that they had experienced some form of identity conflict associated with being a stutterer. The most prevalent form of identity conflict
experienced was characterized by a perceived lack of harmony between their identity as a person who stutters and other identities they envisioned they could possess if they were a fluent speaker. Bill illustrated this type of identity conflict when he said, “It felt like [stuttering] didn't allow me to fulfill my potential of who I could be. On the one hand, I'm thinking I could be all these things...but on the other hand, I can't because I stutter.”

For many participants, this type of identity conflict fell within the context of their professional lives. Bill and Scott Thompson felt that because they were people who stutter, they would have difficulty or be unable to find a job early in life. Bill shared: “I thought [stuttering] was going to rule me out of getting a job.” Scott Thompson shared the same concern, stating he wasn’t confident in “how [his occupational] path was going to proceed” given that he was a person who stutters. Scott Thompson also expressed dealing with worries that he would not get paid a sufficient amount of money in a job because of being a stutterer, stating “Who's going to pay somebody who stutters sufficiently?”

Another form of work-related identity conflict related to the types of jobs participants were working. Specifically, some participants reported feeling conflicted about their ability to pursue jobs they were interested in because of their status as a person who stutters. Bill felt this form of identity conflict stating: “If only I didn’t have this stutter, I could be a lawyer or I could be a talk show host or president.” Chuck shared a similar experience stating: “I’ve often thought that I would make a pretty good speaker if I didn’t stutter... that I would've entered a different profession... a public speaking occupation, attorney, teacher if I didn't stutter.” These experiences shared by Bill and Chuck illustrate the ways in which being a PWS lead them to feel conflicted about the professional identities they felt were incompatible with being a stutterer.
Lily experienced similar conflict in her professional life but attributed the source of conflict to discrimination rather than stuttering itself. Rather than feeling as though her stuttering identity was holding her back from getting the job she wanted, Lily shared that she was discriminated against for being a PWS, and therefore unable to get the job she wanted. Lily elaborated on this experience stating:

The only thing I ever wanted to be was a secretary, but because I stuttered, I could not get a job as an assistant. Today that’s against the law, but [discrimination] is so hard to prove that I gave up.

Because Lily was not given the opportunity to pursue her career of choice, she found work elsewhere, but she still experienced discrimination. Lily shared: “I once had a job where I had to do some TV interviews... they showed my picture, but none of what I said. It was all of what the director said because he didn’t stutter. It affected me.” In this situation Lily is describing a conflict in that it felt the way she spoke was not acceptable for TV because she stuttered. This affected Lily because it felt like an undeniable example of discrimination. These experiences shared by Lily are similar to those shared by Chuck, Bill, and Scott Thompson in that it was characterized by conflict between being a person who stutters and securing a desired identity professionally.

Participants discussed experiencing identity conflict within their current jobs as well. Bill shared that he avoided presentations and speaking in meetings at work because of stuttering, and that these tendencies to hold himself back had negatively affected his career:

I've reached a plateau in my career, but I'm seeing all these other people, my peers, getting promoted...but I've plateaued here because to get to the next level you've got to be doing [activities that involve speaking]...I can't do that.

Bill discussed being saddened because he felt he could not move up or make progress in his current job because of his identity as a stutterer. Similar to that of Bill, Scott Thompson also
shared an experience of identity conflict in his current job. Scott Thompson shared that his experience in the workplace was “uncomfortable” and that he experienced a conflict because he was worried about stuttering in the workplace and how stuttering would impact his job: “How long can I go to a job where I just have almost a panic attack before I go in?” Scott Thompson shared that he was “self-conscious” at work and experienced worry that he would not be able to hold a job over time. Lily also shared experiencing identity conflict in her current job, because as was mentioned earlier, Lily settled for a job she did not necessarily want. Lily shared: “For the last 7 years, I’ve been selling household goods at a thrift store and it’s a job it pays the bills, but I hate it and that stinks.”

In addition to conflict with professional potential, participants described conflict between being a person who stutters and achieving their personal potential, particularly in the domains of social and romantic connection. Bill shared examples of what he felt he couldn’t do in his social, romantic, and personal life because of status as a person who stutters, including “finding a girlfriend or having meaningful relationships.” Lily described experiencing conflict in personal and social life domains as well. She shared that her identity as a person who stutters forced her to make unwanted choices in her social and personal life that held her back from having other experiences she wanted: “I had to choose between piano lessons and speech therapy... I never got over having to make that choice.” Having to make this choice was difficult for Lily because playing the piano was something she always wanted to do, but she stated that she knew her mom would have wanted her to go to speech therapy. Lily also shared an experience she had in school in which she felt her identity as a PWS caused her to miss out on learning about her interests and engaging with others during school, stating:
In 9th grade, I skipped science class every single Friday because on Fridays we had to give a full report and that terrified me and I found out much later I enjoy science, I don’t understand it but I love learning about it and so I missed out on learning about it.

Some participants shared that these experiences of identity conflict were accompanied by negative emotions. Participants expressed having negative feelings about themselves, about where they would go in life, and about decisions they have had to make. Bill described his experience with identity conflict as “destructive,” and shared that he felt “sad” and “self-pity” because of how he felt his identity as a stutterer held him back from embracing other identities he desired. Lily shared similar sentiments, describing experiences with identity conflict as “hard” and causing “hurt.”

4.1.2 Theme 1b: Conflict from incongruence between others’ perceptions of them and their own self-perceptions

A second form of identity conflict experienced by participants was characterized by an incongruence between others’ perceptions of them and their perceptions of themselves. In other words, participants felt that the way they were perceived by others was not an accurate representation of who they felt they were on the inside. This type of identity conflict was experienced by Joe, Hilton Silver, Scott Thompson, and Bill, but was not experienced by Lily or Chuck. Joe and Hilton Silver described this type of conflict as the only source of identity conflict they experienced, whereas Bill and Scott Thompson experienced this type of conflict in combination with other sources of conflict described previously.

Joe described experiencing this type of conflict most intensely during moments when “stuttering undermines the message” he is trying to get across:

If I’m giving you a lecture or a presentation or something like that and I know a lot about it or I'm very informed….the way that I view it is that people don't either take it seriously or have a harder time following along or understanding it because of stuttering.
In this example, there was an “uncomfortable” disconnect between how competent Joe perceived himself to be compared to how competent others perceived him to be. He added that it felt like a “judgement on [his] knowledge,” “preparation,” and “intelligence.” Joe experienced this as identity conflict because he knew “what he was saying” and that he was prepared and intelligent, but recognition of these attributes was undermined by stigma associated with the way he spoke.

Rather than being perceived in an inaccurate way because of stuttering openly, Scott Thompson described feeling as though he was misperceived as a result of his attempts to conceal stuttering. Scott Thompson shared that to avoid stuttering or “work around” a moment of stuttering, he inserts a “five second delay” before responding in conversations. He shared that he felt as though this particular concealment technique made him come across as “not particularly friendly,” “cold,” or “uninterested” in conversation, which he described as incongruent with his inner sense of self.

Hilton Silver and Bill provided similar examples of identity conflict stemming from instances of concealing stuttering, particularly when they pass as a fluent speaker. Bill and Hilton Silver described that when they pass as fluent, they are perceived as fluent speakers which is incongruent with their identity as a PWS. Bill shared that he experiences this type of identity conflict in particular at work stating: “I portray at work someone who is fluent...I am not prepared to kind of drop the concealment. And the price for that is my career stagnated.” Here Bill described not only the identity conflict he experienced but also the consequences of it. For Hilton Silver, passing as fluent required him to speak less: “I didn’t see myself as someone who spoke up, for a variety of reasons, but stuttering was a big contributing factor. I wasn’t as verbal as I think I could have been.” For Hilton Silver, the consequence of passing as fluent was that he felt as though he was not participating as much as his inner self desired, which was conflicting
for him. For both Bill and Hilton Silver, when they passed as fluent speakers, their true identity as a PWS went unseen and this was described as a form of identity conflict.

4.2 Research question 2: How does living with stuttering facilitate or pose challenges to feeling authentic in day-to-day interactions?

4.2.1 Theme 2a: Concealment poses challenges to authenticity

Similar to how concealment fueled identity conflict, concealing stuttering also posed challenges to living authentically. It was difficult to tease out descriptions of feeling inauthentic from experiencing role-conflict because they often were described as going hand in hand. Many participants shared that concealing stuttering and passing as fluent had an impact on how authentic or inauthentic they felt, specifically that concealment stuttering made them feel inauthentic. Participants shared that when they concealed stuttering, they felt “inauthentic” (Bill), “fake” (Lily), or like “a rip off or a copy of a Van Gough” (Hilton Silver). Hilton Silver shared that just the opportunity for concealment can make it difficult to be authentic, because opportunities to conceal are like “catnip” and “you have to resist that in order to be authentic.” For these participants, feelings of inauthenticity manifested in two ways. One way was an inner mismatch in that the way they chose to present themselves did not match their inner feelings. A second way was that specific concealment techniques they used results in feelings of inauthenticity. Although the first example reads similar to that of identity conflict, it is slightly different in that identity conflict had more so to do with a discrepancy between the listener’s perception of the participant and their own perception of themselves. Here, the conflict is between participants choosing to present themselves in a way they know does not match who they are on the inside.

Bill and Scott both experienced an inner mismatch in that when they conceal, they feel inauthentic because the way they chose to present themselves does not match how they are really
feeling or who they really are on the inside. Bill shared: “On the outside, I come across as being a quiet, laid-back kind of person, but on the inside, I’m riddled with anxiety and fear because I want to talk. It's a complete act. Completely inauthentic.” For Bill, when he is in a situation in which he conceals and does not talk he shared that he feels like he is “not living the way [he] wants to.” Similarly, Scott Thompson shared: “I'm very inauthentic because the way I am is very much a struggle. I always try to project a persona of looking like I'm fluent...trying not to look like a stutterer.” For Bill and Scott Thompson, the more they concealed their inner identity of being a stutterer, the more inauthentic they felt because they were not outwardly portraying who they really are and how they really felt.

Many participants also shared that specific techniques they used to conceal resulted in feelings of inauthenticity. These techniques included “forcing my way out of stuttering” (Hilton Silver), “switch[ing] words” (Joe), “techniques I learned to sound fluent” (Lily), and “talk[ing] kind of slowly” or speaking with a “five second delay” (Scott Thompson). Participants each shared examples of a time they concealed stuttering and how it made them feel inauthentic. Lily shared that she uses her techniques to sound fluent when speaking to doctors to make sure the y clearly understand what she is saying. In these situations, Lily somewhat sarcastically shared: “I have to neglect my being authentic to make sure I don’t die.” For Lily, the experience of having to use speaking techniques to pass as a fluent speaker made her feel as though she was not being her authentic self. Hilton also shared feeling this in that when he is “not being truly open about who [he is].”

Joe shared a specific time in which he concealed by giving a fake name (i.e., his middle name) to avoid stuttering on his real name, and it resulted in feelings of inauthenticity. This experience for Joe was one in which he stated: “That wasn't being very authentic and that kind of
came back to bite me.” In this situation Joe shared that he eventually ended up having to say his first name anyway, and it would have been better for him to be open and authentic by sharing his true name in the first place to avoid any hassle. Similarly, when Scott Thompson used concealment techniques in conversations and interactions, it made him feel inauthentic. When Scott Thompson concealed and spoke slower in conversation or delayed his responses, he felt as though it impacted his authenticity in those specific interactions. Scott Thompson shared: “I feel like sometimes I don’t have authentic reactions, or at least not reactions that most people would see as authentic because of the delay.” For each of these participants, concealment resulted in feelings of inauthenticity, and although participants all concealed in different ways, the outcome was similar.

4.2.2 Theme 2b: Openness facilitates authenticity

Across all six interviews, participants shared that openness related to stuttering increased feelings of authenticity, whether it be openly stuttering, openly talking about stuttering, disclosing stuttering, or a combination. For some participants, living authentically meant that they were being themselves, and part of that meant being open about their stuttering. Bill described living authentically as: “be[ing] myself and not employ[ing] tricks and avoidance or hid[ing] who I am because I’m afraid of judgments from others.” Bill also added that “openly stuttering would make [him] feel authentic.” Hilton shared that if he were being authentic, he would be “presenting [his] native self to people,” which would include stuttering. Hilton gave an example of this stating: “In these [stuttering support group] meetings, I’m totally myself.” Lily also shared that being herself involves openly stuttering. She shared that at times people will question why she doesn’t use tricks to sound fluent more often and she responds, “because it’s not me, it’s not authentic.”
Participants also described living authentically as “being truthful” (Chuck), and “not trying to pretend to be something you’re not” (Hilton Silver). For Hilton Silver, this definition of living authentically fits with his views on stuttering in that: “To be authentically myself, I would like to get back to [openly stuttering].” For Chuck, “authentically speaking” and “being truthful” about stuttering fit with his idea of living authentically as a person who stutters. Lily had similar views on openly stuttering and authenticity in that for her, using techniques to sound fluent felt “fake” to her, and that a more authentic version of herself would be one in which she openly stutters without hiding.

Multiple participants also discussed the role of disclosure, or telling others about stuttering, in living more authentically. Participants shared the ways in which they feel disclosure and authenticity are linked. Chuck shared that when you disclose you are “hiding less,” “avoiding less,” and “you’re real” which are all things that, for him, align with being authentic. Bill felt that disclosing stuttering was “one step on the journey towards being authentic,” and the next step on that journey would be openly stuttering. On a related note, participants shared that they were more willing to be authentic with people who were aware of their stuttering. Chuck shared: “As far as authenticity, you know I probably wouldn’t be authentic with anyone other than a close family member who knows I stutter.” For Scott Thompson, there was a long period of his life in which no one knew that he stuttered. He shared: “I never had a chance to be authentic with my stuttering with anyone.” Scott Thompson continued to state that he had begun disclosing his stuttering to people and that it has been “super helpful.”

4.2.3 Theme 2c: Factors within the social environment (e.g., threat, familiarity, acceptance) affect how authentic people who stutter can be

Factors within the social environment affected how authentic participants felt they could be. The level of perceived threat in the environment was one such factor. For participants,
perceived threat included the amount of pressure in a situation or an inherent fear of judgement. When participants felt that there was more threat in a situation, they felt less safe to be authentic. Bill shared, “I have a radar for safe and unsafe people...If I feel like I'm intimidated by someone, or I feel threatened by someone...I avoid them.” For Bill, this avoidance inhibited his feelings of authenticity because it was a form of concealment. Hilton Silver shared a similar experience, stating “the threat of listener reaction...being made fun of...or feeling embarrassed” inhibited his authenticity in situations. Joe also shared that the fear of judgment inhibited his ability to express himself authentically, stating: “When there's sort of a maybe inherent kind of judgment going on or if there’s authority involved...I'm most likely to feel uncomfortable and most likely to try to conceal.”

Participants discussed that different types of situations affected their ability to be authentic because different situations carry different levels of threat. Participants shared that in situations in which there was minimal pressure or “no expectations” (Chuck), it was easier and safer to be authentic. Bill, Chuck and Lily all shared that in one-on-one situations, they felt safer to be authentic and more “relaxed” (Bill). For Chuck, one on one situations increased his ability to be authentic because he found them “easier to open up” in. Chuck shared that in these situations he had “less anxiety” which made it easier to be open and authentic. Chuck shared a specific time in which he felt there was no pressure in a situation:

> My wife will introduce me to somebody, maybe somebody that she works out with at the gym, [and] there is no pressure there, that’s for sure. And if I happen to block or go into repetitious speech pattern, that's not a big deal for me and so I remain comfortable with that person, the new person I'm meeting.

On the other hand, some participants shared that group settings pose challenges to being authentic, because they experience more perceived threat or pressure and are more likely to conceal. Bill stated that he “avoids talking” in group situations. Joe stated that he would be “less
likely to engage in certain situations [including group settings]” because “if I don't engage then I'm not going to stutter… I’m not going to get into this whole embarrassing situation.” Chuck and Scott both shared that they have more difficulty being authentic in group situations, as well. Chuck shared that he is “more reluctant” to speak in group settings because there are “so many different expectations.”

Participants shared that a second common factor that impacted their ability to express themselves authentically was their familiarity or comfort level with a person or group of people. Many participants shared that the people that they were more authentic with people who they were more familiar with. “I would only [be authentic] once I become comfortable with everybody in the group... then you can be more yourself, more authentic.” Scott shared that he feels the most comfortable around his family members. Hilton also shared that he would be more comfortable and able to be authentic around his family as well stating: “People that I’m closer to, like the closer I am, like people in my family, I could do more things to be open about the fact that I stutter.” In these situations, Hilton shared he could be more authentic and open about stuttering because, “[his] family is not going to make fun of [him], but a distant person at work might.” For Joe, when he is around people who know he stutters, he feels more comfortable and is more open to being authentic and “letting whatever happens, happen.”

A third environmental factor that participants identified as affecting how authentic they felt they could be was the perceived level of acceptance within the environment. For many participants, being a part of a community that was accepting of, familiar with, or comfortable with stuttering allowed them to be more authentic. Many participants shared that they feel they can be authentic with fellow members of a stuttering support group. Chuck shared: “It was at a [stuttering support group] meeting years ago that I met my wife. She's a person who stutters as
well and so I could be authentic with her, and I could be authentic with the organization.” Hilton shared that with his stuttering groups he feels “totally lined up,” and he does not have to worry about how the situation will play out in terms of speaking and stuttering because “there's eternal acceptance at a [stuttering support group] meeting.” Hilton also shared that he feels more authentic with people who are accepting of and comfortable with stuttering because he can openly stutter and does not have feel pressure to abide by social norms for speaking.

In the same way that familiarity, comfort, and acceptance increased authenticity for participants, a lack of any of these things made it more difficult for participants to be authentic. Scott stated that when he is around less familiar people, he feels a sense of “vigilance” that he does not feel when he is around people he is more comfortable with. Hilton shared that when he is around people who “don't understand stuttering” he feels less authentic in that how he feels on the inside does not match how he is presenting himself on the outside. Hilton shared:

When I'm around people who don't understand stuttering, depending on the nature of this situation, that's when I’m like, “how's this going to go?” And I'm thinking more [about] how do I want to be talking here? And all those thoughts come in, which is not really creating that straight channel from, you know, in my heart to out of my mouth.

Joe also shared that it is more difficult for him to be authentic around people that he doesn’t know because he is more “uncomfortable” and “more likely to try to conceal.”

For all participants, at least one factor in the social environment impacted their ability to be authentic whether it be perceived threat, familiarity, or acceptance. In general, participants shared that these factors made it either safer or more difficult to be authentic. When participants felt safer to be authentic, they shared that they openly stuttered more and were able to be themselves with less fear of judgement.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the preliminary qualitative study was to explore lived experiences with identity conflict and (in)authenticity among a small sample of adults who conceal stuttering. Participants expressed and provided examples of the relevance of identity conflict and authenticity to the experience of stuttering. Two specific types of identity conflict were reported, including: 1) conflict resulting from discordance between the stuttering identity and desired personal and professional identities, and 2) conflict from a mismatch between how adults who stutter perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Both types of identity conflict were described as fueled by stigma to at least some extent and were painful or burdensome. Participants also expressed that the extent they concealed or were open about stuttering affected how authentic they felt, with concealment promoting feelings of inauthenticity and openness associated with feeling more authentic among participants. Additionally, environmental factors, including threat, familiarity, and acceptance, played a role in participants' willingness to express themselves authentically. The results from this study are the first to examine perceptions of authentic living among adults who conceal or have concealed stuttering. Because this is a preliminary qualitative study with a small sample of adults who conceal stuttering, further research is warranted to further explore the constructs of identity conflict and authenticity within the stuttering community.

This chapter is organized into five sections. The first section compares the types of identity conflict participants shared in the current study to types of identity conflict documented in the existing literature. In the second section, I discuss how concealing stuttering related to feelings of authenticity and compare this relationship to relevant literature on concealment and
authenticity among other communities with concealable stigmatized identities. The third section discusses the role of stigma in the environment and how this impacted the extent participants felt they could be authentic. In the fourth section, I describe the relevance of the social model of disability given that stigma was implicated as contributing to both identity conflict and feelings of inauthenticity. Finally, the limitations of the study and future research directions are discussed in the fifth section.

5.1 Comparing forms of identity conflict identified in the current study to the existing stuttering literature

The most prevalent form of identity conflict discussed among participants was characterized by feeling as though being a stutterer was incompatible with other desired personal and professional identities. In other words, participants expressed the view that they could perhaps be more of who they wanted to be if they did not stutter. Participants described feeling as though stuttering and the stigma associated with it was holding them back from reaching their potential. The stigma at play here was both internalized self-stigma and public stigma. Internalized self-stigma was present in that participants viewed themselves as being unable to do certain things because they were a stutterer. Public stigma was present in that participants were discriminated against and looked at as less qualified for certain jobs because they were a stutterer.

Although this was the most frequently mentioned form of identity conflict among participants in the current study, this specific type of identity conflict has not been described in the literature. However, it is somewhat consistent with Kathard et al.’s (2010) discussion of competing self-identity formations among stutterers. Kathard et al., (2010) discussed that some PWS have competing dialogues (one positive and one negative) surrounding their identity as a stutterer and it can result in struggle or conflict. For participants in Kathard et al.’s (2010)
qualitative study on identity-related issues, the ways in which these dialogues were competing for prominence resulted in participants wrestling with the question “Who am I?” Some participants in the current study also experienced competing dialogues as they viewed themselves as people who could be a certain thing, but also could not (i.e., secretary, lawyer, talk show host). Kathard et al., (2010) wrote “this ‘unstable equilibrium’ is an emotionally draining experience, and therefore people must find ways to resolve this instability.” One way the PWS in this sample resolved this feeling of instability was by settling for jobs they were overqualified for. This is consistent with the literature on occupational inequity associated with stuttering, which has shown that PWS are more likely than PWNS to be working in jobs they are overqualified for (Gerlach et al., 2018).

The second type of identity conflict discussed was less prevalent than the first but was still referenced by over half of the participants. This conflict was characterized by a mismatch between how participants feel as though they are perceived by others compared to how they perceive themselves. This type of conflict has similarities to Sheehan’s (1970) role-conflict previously discussed in the literature. Sheehan (1970) described identity conflict among PWS as an inconsistency between how a person feels on the inside and presents to others on the outside. Participants also discussed how identity conflict gave rise to negative emotions including feelings of worry, discomfort, sadness, self-pity, hurt, and hardship. This is consistent with hypotheses that identity-related issues can affect mental health among people who stutter (Sheehan, 1970). Daniels and Gabel (2004) further emphasize this point as they proposed that identity-related issues may be at the core of feelings of shame, guilt, and anger experienced by PWS.
In both Shehan’s (1970) Theory of Role-Conflict and the current study, the role of the listener is described as contributing to the experience of identity conflict, but not to the same extent. Shehan’s theory discussed internal struggle as largely localized within the individual who stutters, whereas in the current study the listener plays a more central role. Although Sheehan (1970) acknowledged the role of the listener, the role of the speaker is emphasized most in terms of why people who stutter experience identity conflict and how it can be resolved. In the current study, participants describe listeners and social environments as playing an active role in their experiences of identity conflict. From the participants’ descriptions, it seems as though stigma is inseparable from the experience of identity conflict. This is consistent with growing literature indicating that stigma is widely experienced by people who stutter and is influential in their mental health (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle, 2018; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Connery et al., 2020; Corrigan & Watson 2002; Ham, 1990; Kalinowski, Stuart, & Armson, 1996; Plexico et al., 2009a; Plexico et al., 2009b; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). The environment played a role in participants’ experience of identity conflict, as it influenced the ways they expressed themselves and were perceived. Participants felt they either could not fit into their environment or that the environment was not allowing them to be perceived in the way they wished to. Participants wished to be perceived in ways they felt were consistent with who they were (i.e., intelligent, friendly, stutterer), but this was not always possible due to hostility, uncertainty, or misunderstandings in the social environment. Because the environment appears to play a role in identity conflict, modifying the environment to be more accepting of PWS could be a potential first step to reduce feelings of identity conflict among PWS.
5.2 Relationship between concealment and authenticity

Participants described that in general, concealing stuttering made them feel inauthentic and openness promoted authenticity. These findings mirror Crabtree & Pillow’s (2020) findings that concealment of stigmatized identities results in feelings of inauthenticity and enactment of stigmatized identities results in increased felt authenticity. This is a relevant comparison because stuttering is a stigmatized trait that is often concealed (Boyle et al., 2018; Boyle & Gable, 2020; Constantino et al., 2017; Douglass et al., 2018; Douglass et al., 2019), as was the case for participants in this study. The parallels between the findings from the current study and the results from Crabtree & Pillow (2020) suggest that there could be similarities in how concealment affects feelings of authenticity, regardless of the attribute being concealed. It also highlights the potential value of interdisciplinary research in that we can perhaps learn more about concealment of stuttering by looking to the related literature on concealment of other attributes.

It is worthwhile to investigate experiences with authenticity among stutterers because authenticity has shown to be associated with increased wellbeing and decreased negative mental health outcomes among other communities (Grijak, 2017; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson 2012). Given that adults who stutter are vulnerable to health inequities (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Connery et al., 2020; Plexico et al., 2009a; Plexico et al., 2009b; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006), more research is needed to understand relationships between authenticity and mental health in this community. Perhaps future research might suggest that a role of speech therapy could be to assist adults who stutter in navigating identity complexities and maximize feelings of authenticity.
5.3 Role of stigma and the environment in authenticity

All participants discussed at least one way that the environment affected their ability to be authentic. For many participants, the fear of judgement or the fear of not being accepted by others because of stuttering were two outstanding factors that negatively impacted the extent they could be authentic. This speaks to the documented stigma experienced by PWS and its negative effects on wellbeing (Alqhazo et al., 2017; Boyle, 2013; Boyle, 2015; Boyle, 2016; Boyle, 2018; Boyle & Fearon, 2018; Connery et al., 2020; Corrigan & Watson 2002; Ham, 1990; Kalinowski, Stuart, & Armson, 1996; Plexico et al., 2009a; Plexico et al., 2009b; Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019; Yaruss & Quesal, 2004; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). Stigma surrounding stuttering includes inaccurate negative assumptions about PWS, so it is logical that the participants in this study did not feel that their environment was a safe place to be authentic as a stutterer. Participants also shared that when there was a lack of threat or fear of judgement and increased familiarity, comfort, or acceptance within their environment, they felt safer to express themselves authentically. These findings suggest that the environment could have an impact on PWS’s ability to be authentic and that PWS need a safe environment to feel like they can be themselves.

5.4 Relevance of the social model of disability

The social model of disability has relevance to the findings of this study, as it highlights the ways in which the social environment hinders and facilitates participation for disabled people (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). The social model of disability is relevant to this study because the environment influenced participants’ experiences with identity conflict and authenticity. The relevance of the social model to stuttering has also been discussed by Constantino et al., (2022). Constantino discusses society’s expectation of able-bodiedness and how it is “desirable and
mandatory for participation.” The expectation of able-bodiedness could explain why participants felt that stuttering interfered with their ability to pursue desired personal and professional identities. Participants shared feeling that they did not fit in or were not perceived as capable of holding these identities because they were a person who stuttered. This experience of feeling incapable because of stuttering could potentially be the result of feeling as though they did not fit in with society’s able-bodied standards for speaking (i.e., fluency).

The ways in which participants discussed how the environment can impede their ability to be authentic (i.e., fear of judgement, threat, lack of acceptance) also has relevance to the social model of disability. Constantino et al., (2022) explained that the difficulties that accompany stuttering have less to do with the actual disfluencies present in speech and more to do with the impacts of “living with a socially stigmatized trait that is not accommodated by society.” This point helps to explain why participants felt fear of judgement, threat, and a lack of acceptance in their environment. The stigma surrounding stuttering, when internalized, can lead PWS to feel as though it is not okay to stutter. With this internalized stigma at play it is understandable that participants were not always comfortable expressing themselves authentically as a stutterer.

5.5 Limitations and future directions

One limitation of this study was a lack of clearly defined and differentiated definitions of identity conflict and authenticity. During each interview, participants were asked to discuss the topics of identity conflict and authenticity as their own liberty and were not given clear guidelines as to what specifically the researcher meant by each term. When writing the results, it was noted that experiences of identity conflict and authenticity conflict were very similar and at times difficult to tease apart.
A second limitation had to do with the sample obtained for the study. The sample consisted of six participants, all of whom were white and college-educated and five of which were men. The homogeneity of the sample was an artifact of time constraints, but is a significant limitation given lack of representation. This sample also only represented people who conceal stuttering and does not represent or apply to the stuttering community as a whole. For future research, it would be beneficial to explore the topics of identity conflict and authenticity among a larger, more diverse sample of adults who stutter.

Given that there is limited existing literature on the topics of identity conflict and authenticity among PWS, a third limitation was that this was a preliminary study. The results of the study suggest that, for this small sample, role-conflict and feelings of inauthenticity were distressing or uncomfortable. More research is needed to know if role conflict and authenticity contribute to mental health disparities among people who stutter.

The experiences shared by participants give rise to future directions in research and a need to change society’s views on stuttering. It was apparent that society's views on stuttering negatively influenced participants in the study and this seemed to have contributed to identity conflict and feelings of inauthenticity. There is an urgent need to reduce societal stigma, and one potential first step in this could be pushing for more accepting and accommodating workplace environments for people who stutter. This is important because we know from the literature and from experiences shared by participants that PWS experience discrimination and the negative effects of stigma in the workplace (Gerlach et al., 2018). Accommodations could be enacted in the interview process (e.g., options for the interview platform, no time constraints, increased response time on questions) and day to day job activities (e.g., increased speaking time for
presentations or during meetings). A potential direction for future research in this area could be to investigate what current accommodations exist in the workplace for PWS.

Another future research direction is to investigate how society’s expectations for able-bodiedness can be modified. Society currently functions with the expectation that people should speak fluently, and this expectation is potentially the root of participants' experiences of identity conflict and feelings of inauthenticity in social situations. Participants shared a few specific factors that made it feel safer or more difficult for them to be authentic in their environment. Further research should explore more in-depth the factors that make it safer for PWS to be authentic. This research could potentially provide more insight into how PWS experience the environment and ways the environment could be modified to begin the process of promoting safer spaces for PWS to be authentic.
Appendix A
Recruitment Email Script

Are you an adult who stutters who has ever tried to get by or pass as a fluent speaker? Do you try to hide your stuttering now or have you ever in the past? If so, I would love to hear about your experiences. My name is Sarah Musilli and I am a student at Western Michigan University conducting a master’s thesis research study. The purpose of my study is to explore identity and authentic self-expression among PWS who currently or formerly have attempted to pass as a fluent speaker in at least some contexts. This study involves participation in a one-time virtual interview and completion of an online survey. Completion of this study will take approximately 1.5-2 hours. If you are eligible to participate in our study, you will receive a $20 e-gift card. Please contact us at sarah.j.musilli@wmich.edu to learn more about the study or set up a time to meet.

To participate in this study participants must be a person who stutters who currently or formerly has attempted to pass as a fluent speaker in one or more settings, report that their stuttering began in childhood, and be a resident of the United States or Canada.
Appendix B
Scheduling Email

Dear [insert participant’s name],

Thank you for your interest in our study. This study involves a one-time interview over Webex and a brief survey about authenticity, concealment, and wellbeing. There are a few criteria that must be met in order to participate in this study. Specifically, participants must report:

1) Identifying as a PWS who currently or formerly has attempted to pass as a fluent speaker in one or more settings.
2) Report that stuttering began in childhood.
3) Be a resident of the United States or Canada.

If you think you meet these criteria, we would love to meet with you in a one-on-one virtual interview to discuss your experience of living with stuttering and passing as fluent. If you are still interested in completing the study, please send your availability over the next two weeks and I will email to confirm a time. If you complete the interview and survey, you will receive a $20 gift card for your participation.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!
Sarah Musilli
Appendix C
Online consent Form

Western Michigan University
Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences

Principal Investigator: Hope Gerlach, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Student Investigator: Sarah Musilli, B.S.

Title of Study: Living with Stuttering: Authenticity, Identity, and Mental Health

You are invited to participate in this research project titled: “Living with Stuttering: Authenticity, Identity, and Mental Health”

STUDY SUMMARY:

This consent form is part of the informed consent process for a research study. This form will provide information to help make your decision as to whether you want to voluntarily participate in this study. The aim of this research project is to explore potential factors that may explain the link between stuttering concealment, specifically in the form of passing as fluent, and increased distress among AWS. This project serves as Sarah Musilli’s thesis project as part of her fulfillment of the Master’s in Speech-Language Pathology. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-time virtual interview via Webex and fill out an online survey via Qualtrics. Possible risks to participating in this study include discomfort in answering interview and survey questions. A potential benefit of participating in this study is the $20 e-gift card provided as compensation for participating.

The following information provides further information related to your participation in the research study. Please ask any questions if more clarification is needed. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by agreeing to take part in this research or by signing this consent form. After all of your questions have been answered and the consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, participation will be used in lieu of signing this consent form.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

In this study we are exploring the lived experiences of authenticity and identity among participants who currently or formerly have passed as a fluent speaker.

Who can participate in this study?

The inclusion criteria for this study are as follows: 1) are a person who stutters who currently or formerly have attempted to pass as a fluent speaker in one or more settings, 2) stuttering that reportedly began in childhood, and 3) a resident of the United States or Canada.

Where will this study take place?

The qualitative interviews for this study will take place virtually via the Webex platform. The supplemental quantitative data will be collected via a Qualtrics survey.
What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

The time commitment for participating in this study will include participation in a 1-hour interview and completion of a Qualtrics survey (~30 minutes).

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 1-hour interview via the Webex platform and fill out a Qualtrics survey. Completing the Qualtrics survey should take approximately 30 minutes.

What information is being measured during the study?

Interviews will collect information related to participants' lived experiences with stuttering, identity, authenticity, and concealment of stuttering. The Qualtrics survey will collect information on felt authenticity, level of stuttering concealment, and psychological wellbeing.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

The risk for participating in this study includes potential discomfort that may be associated with interview questions or survey components. Risks will be minimized by allowing breaks during interviews and allowing for interview questions to be skipped upon participants' request.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

There are no explicit benefits associated with participating in this study.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

A $20.00 e-gift card will be provided electronically to each participant.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

All information in this study will be de-identified for confidentiality purposes. The principal investigator, the student investigator, and an undergraduate assistant will have access to the information collected during this study. The data collected in this study will also be presented at a thesis defense.

What will happen to my information or biospecimens collected for this research project after the study is over?

Any identifying information collected in this study will be removed. Additional de-identified information collected in this study may be used or distributed to investigator for other research without obtaining any additional informed consent.
What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact principal investigator, Hope Gerlach, at hope.gerlach@wmich.edu or the student investigator, Sarah Musilli, at sarah.j.musilli@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This study was approved by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) on December 23, 2021.

Participating in this interview and survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply for research purposes.
Appendix D
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

General Questions:
In the email advertisement for this study, we mentioned that we are interested in learning more about identity and authenticity as they relate to the experience of stuttering. Can you start by telling me what your initial thoughts were on these topics and why you were interested in taking part?

When you think of stuttering and identity, what comes to mind from your experience as a person who stutters, if anything at all?

Again, thinking of your experiences as a person who stutters, what comes up for you when you think about your ability or willingness to express yourself authentically?

As we mentioned in our email advertisement, we are most interested in talking with people who currently or formerly have tried to hide their stuttering or pass as a fluent speaker in at least some situations.

- Can you tell us a little bit about your history with concealing stuttering?
- Can you tell us a little bit about how you conceal or pass as fluent in at least some situations currently, if at all?

Concealment questions:
Following up on the topic of concealment…
- Can you tell me about different ways that you conceal stuttering either now or in the past?
- Where, with whom, and in what situations do or did you conceal stuttering?
- How often or to what extent would you say that you conceal stuttering or try to pass as a fluent speaker?
- Are there contexts or certain situations that people don’t know you stutter at all? Tell me about some of those contexts or situations.
- Can you tell me about a specific memorable time that you hid stuttering and what that was like for you.

Identity conflict questions:
Ok, now moving on a little to the topic of stuttering and identity…
- Generally, how would you describe if and how stuttering intertwines with your identity?
- Would you say that being a person who stutters is or is not a part of your identity?
  - Why or why not?
- Tell me more about that. Do you think you have ever experienced any type of identity conflict as it relates to stuttering? [If yes…]
  - How would you describe this identity conflict?
  - Can you tell us about a time that the feeling of identity conflict was really strong?
  - Are there times when you don’t feel a sense of identity conflict? What do you think is special or different about those times?
  - How often do you think you wrestle with a feeling of identity conflict?
Where do you think these feelings of identity conflict came from?
How do you handle or cope when you’re feeling as though you’re experiencing identity conflict?
In your experience do you think there is any relationships between concealing stuttering and identity conflict? Why or why not?

- If no,
  - How would you describe your relationship with stuttering?
  - Do you have a positive, negative, or neutral relationship with stuttering? Or a combination of multiple?
    - [If combination] How do you manage having multiple relationships with stuttering?

**Authenticity questions:**
- How would you define authenticity?
- [For participants requesting a definition or are unsure of how to define authenticity] For the purposes of this study, authenticity is being defined as an honest representation of who a person truly is. Who a person is truly is could be related to their values, beliefs, characteristics, etc.
- Thinking generally here, what would you say that living authentically means to you?
- In your personal experience, how does stuttering fit or not fit with living authentically?
- How does concealing stuttering or passing as fluent impact how authentic or inauthentic you feel?
- Can you think of any ways that living with stuttering makes it easier to be authentic in social interactions?
- Can you think of any ways that living with stuttering makes it harder to be authentic in social interactions?
- As it relates to living with stuttering, can you elaborate on if there are ever times when you…
  - feel like how you present yourself on the outside does not match how you feel or who you think you are on the inside?
  - feel like how you present yourself on the outside does match how you feel or who you think you are on the inside?
- As it relates to living with stuttering, can you elaborate on if there ever times when you…
  - feel there is a disconnect between who you are on the inside and how you interact with the world on a daily basis?
  - Feel you are in sync between who you are on the inside and how you interact with the world on a daily basis?
- Thinking of the social environment…
  - what factors would you say make it feel safer to be your authentic self as a person who stutters?
  - what factors would you say hold you back from expressing yourself authentically?

**Closing Questions:**
- Is there anything else important you think I should know as it relates to the topics we have discussed?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?
• To protect your privacy, would you provide a fake name that can be used in the study?
• What email should the Qualtrics survey and Amazon gift card be sent to upon completion of the survey?
Appendix E
Modified Authenticity Scale
(Wood et al., 2008)

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements describe you. Please answer these questions as they pertain to living with stuttering. (1= does not describe me at all to 7= describes me very well)

1. I think it is better to be yourself than to be popular.
2. I don’t know how I really feel inside.
3. I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others.
4. I usually do what other people tell me to do.
5. I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do.
6. Other people influence me greatly.
7. I feel as if I don’t know myself very well.
8. I always stand by what I believe in.
9. I am true to myself in most situations.
10. I feel out of touch with the ‘real me’.
11. I live in accordance with my values and beliefs.
12. I feel alienated from myself.
Appendix F
Stuttering Concealment Scale
(Gerlach et al., 2021)

Please indicate that extent that you agree with each of the following statements using the scale:
(1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. I haven’t shared that I stutter with anyone.
2. If I shared that I stutter with my friends, they'd like me less.
3. There are lots of things about my stuttering that I keep to myself.
4. Some of my secrets about my stuttering have really tormented me.
5. When something bad related to my stuttering happens, I tend to keep it to myself.
6. I’m often afraid I’ll reveal that I stutter even though I don’t want to.
7. Telling someone that I stutter often backfires and I wish I hadn’t told them.
8. My stuttering is so private I would lie if anybody asked me about it.
9. The fact that I stutter is too embarrassing to share with others.
10. I have negative thoughts about my stuttering that I never share with anyone.
Appendix G
Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale
(Ryff & Keyes 1995)

Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements:
(1= strongly agree to 7= strongly disagree)
1. I like most parts of my personality.
2. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.
3. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.
4. The demands of everyday life often get me down.
5. In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.
6. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.
7. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.
8. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.
9. I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life.
10. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.
11. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.
12. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world.
13. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.
14. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.
15. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.
16. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.
17. I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.
18. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.
Appendix H
Qualtrics Survey

Western Michigan University
Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences
Principal Investigator: Hope Gerlach, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Student Investigator: Sarah Musilli, B.S.
Title of Study: Living with Stuttering: Authenticity, Identity, and Mental Health

You are invited to participate in this research project titled: “Living with Stuttering: Authenticity, Identity, and Mental Health”

STUDY SUMMARY:
This consent form is part of the informed consent process for a research study. This form will provide information to help make your decision as to whether you want to voluntarily participate in this study. The aim of this research project is to explore potential factors that may explain the link between stuttering concealment, specifically in the form of passing as fluent, and increased distress among AWS.

See Appendix C for full online consent form

Do you consent to participate in this study?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Pseudonym (provide the same pseudonym you provided in the interview):

Please provide your age.

Please provide your gender.
Please provide your race/ethnicity.


Please provide your occupation.


What is your highest attained educational level?

○ Some high school

○ High school graduate

○ Some college (1-3 years)

○ College undergraduate (4 or more years)

○ Graduate degree

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements describe you. Please answer the questions as they pertain to living with stuttering.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 = does not describe me at all</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 = describes me very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s better to be yourself than to be popular.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know how I really feel inside.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually do what other people tell me to do.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people influence me greatly.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel as if I don’t know myself very well.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I always stand by what I believe in.  
I am true to myself in most situations.  
I feel out of touch with the 'real me'.  
I live in accordance with my values and beliefs.  
I feel alienated from myself.

Please indicate that extent that you agree with each of the following statements using the scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 = Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 = Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I haven't shared that I stutter with anyone.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I shared that I stutter with my friends, they'd like me less.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are lots of things about my stuttering that I keep to myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of my secrets about my stuttering have really tormented me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When something bad related to my stuttering happens, I tend to keep it to myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm often afraid I'll reveal that I stutter even though I don't want to.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling someone that I stutter often backfires and I wish I hadn't told them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My stuttering is so private I would lie if anybody asked me about it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fact that I stutter is too embarrassing to share with others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have negative thoughts about my stuttering that I never share with anyone.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 = Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 = Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like most parts of my personality.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The demands of everyday life often get me down.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live life one day at a time and don’t really think about the future.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes feel as if I’ve done all there is to do in life.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.

I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.

I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.

I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.
## Appendix I
### Initial Codes Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theme 1a: Conflict between stuttering identity and desired personal and professional identities                                                                                           | • Identity conflict between stuttering identity and other identities’  
• Identity conflict when stuttering holds you back  
• No identity conflict, stuttering not stop from pursuing things  
• Being PWS is part of identity  
• Negative stuttering identity  
• Negative effects of stuttering identity  
• Coping with identity conflict  
• Feeling of identity conflict comes and goes  
• Identity conflict and negative emotions |


Appendix J
Member Checking Email and Results Table

Member Checking Email

Hello [insert participant name],
This winter you participated in my study exploring the potential ways in which adults who stutter who conceal stuttering experience identity conflict and authenticity. As part of the conversation we had, you reflected on the experiences that you’ve had related to these topics, as well as the topic of concealment.
I have completed the analysis of each of the interviews and surveys that were completed for my graduate thesis. Now I hope to circle back to get your feedback on the themes that I interpreted from what you and others shared. I have attached a summary of the research questions from the study as well as a description of each of the themes that answer each question. **I’m asking that you consider reading the themes outlined in the attached document and provide a rating of how much you agree with or do not agree with the interpretation of the topics shared.** The themes may not fit your experience exactly as they are intended to represent the experiences of all six participants in the study collectively. I would greatly appreciate your feedback and will attempt to incorporate any suggestions into the final copy of my thesis and any subsequent publications. I would also welcome any comments you may have in addition to the ratings.
If you’re willing, please reply with a rating of the extent that you feel each theme fits for each of the five themes listed in the attached document.
Please use the following scale from 1-10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 = I strongly disagree that the lived experience of stuttering represents the themes</td>
<td>5 = neither agree or disagree that the themes represent the lived experience of stuttering</td>
<td>10 = I strongly agree that the themes represent the lived experience of stuttering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Please do not share the document or results with anyone at this time as the study has not been published, and sharing may jeopardize publication.** When my thesis has been finalized in the coming months I will share the link if you’re interested in reading the full study (please indicate if you are interested in your reply as well).
Thanks so much,
Sarah
# Member Checking Results Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Scale Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Theme 1a: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 1b: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2a: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2b: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2c: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilton Silver</td>
<td>Theme 1a: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 1b: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2a: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2b: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2c: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Thompson</td>
<td>Theme 1a: 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 1b: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2a: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2b: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2c: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Theme 1a: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 1b: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2a: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2b: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2c: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Theme 1a: 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 1b: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2a: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2b: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2c: 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K
Signed Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Form

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: December 23, 2021

To: Hope Gerlach, Principal Investigator
   Sarah Musili, Student Investigator

Re: Initial - IRB-2021-72
Living with stuttering: Authenticity, identity, and, mental health

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Living with stuttering: Authenticity, identity, and, mental health" has been reviewed by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) and approved under the Expedited 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB or the Associate Director Research for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Sincerely,

Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair
WMU IRB
REFERENCES


