



# Self-Disclosure of Stuttering to Various Social Referent Groups and its Relationships with Psychological Distress

Katrina Rourke

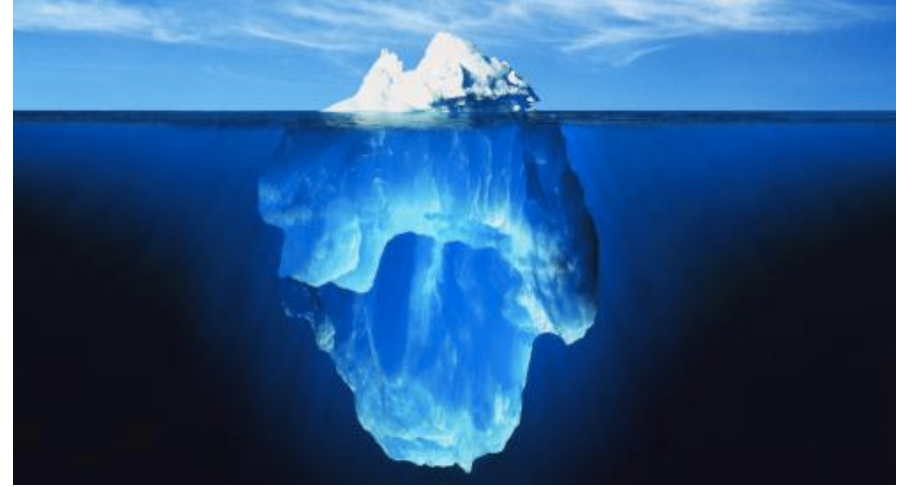
Western Michigan University

Lee Honors College Thesis Defense

Thesis Chair: Hope Gerlach

# Background Information

## The Nature of Stuttering



- Commonly characterized by overt disfluencies
- There are also parts of stuttering that are not easily seen
  - Negative thoughts and feelings
- Stuttering is a variable behavior

# Background Information

## Stuttering is a Stigmatized Identity

- Stigma is thought to fuel these negative thoughts and feelings<sup>1</sup>
  - Workplace and romantic discrimination<sup>2</sup>
- Disclosure is one way that people who stutter can manage the stigma associated with stuttering and try to control the narrative around stuttering.
- Verbal stuttering disclosure refers to informing the disclosure confidant, or listener, that you are a person who stutters

# Background Information

## Stuttering and Disclosure: Listener-focused outcomes

- Disclosing stuttering has positive effects on listener perceptions of people who stutter<sup>1</sup>
- Certain conditions within disclosure have shown to evoke more positive perceptions from disclosure confidants
  - Disclosing at the beginning of an interaction<sup>2</sup>
  - Informative disclosure statements<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Byrd, McGill, Gkalitsiou, and Cappellini (2017); <sup>2</sup>Healey, Gabel, Daniels, and Kawai (2007) and Lincoln and Bricker-Katz (2008) ; <sup>3</sup>Byrd, Croft, Gkalitsiou, and Hampton (2017)

# Background Information

## Stuttering and Disclosure: Speaker-focused outcomes

- The literature on speaker-focused outcomes is limited, but slowly growing
- What we do know about speaker-focused outcomes of disclosure...
  - People who stutter prefer to disclose at the beginning of the interaction with an informative statement<sup>1</sup>
  - Qualitatively, PWS reported that they are most likely to disclose in job interviews, when meeting potential new friends, and on the phone<sup>1</sup>
- The evidence is mixed as to if disclosure is beneficial to speakers who stutter
  - In a qualitative study, PWS reported multiple benefits of disclosure<sup>2</sup>
    - Feeling they have more control, reduced fear, increased self-respect, and more
  - In an experimental study, there were no benefits of disclosure<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mcgill, Siegel, Nguyen, and Rodriguez (2018); <sup>2</sup>Boyle & Gabel (2020); <sup>3</sup>Mancinelli (2019)



# Purpose

## The Current Study

The purpose of this online survey study was to investigate

- 1) *who* people who stutter verbally disclose the most to and
- 2) if relationships between extent of disclosure and distress vary depending on the confidants' social referent group

# Research Questions

- 1) Are there differences in the extent that adults who stutter disclose their stuttering to various social referent groups?
- 2) Is the extent of disclosure of stuttering to certain social referent groups predictive of psychological distress among adults who stutter after controlling for relevant demographics?

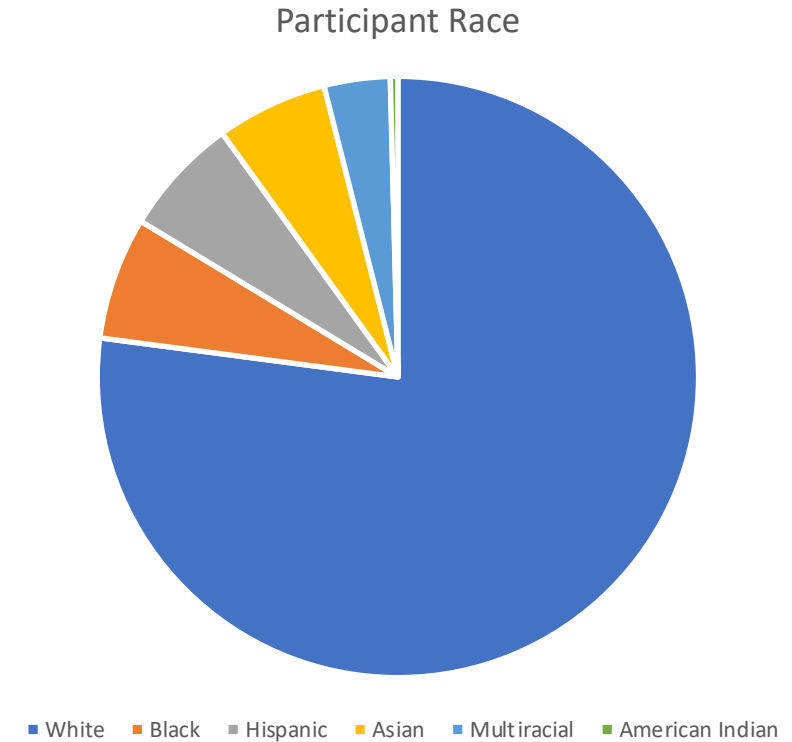
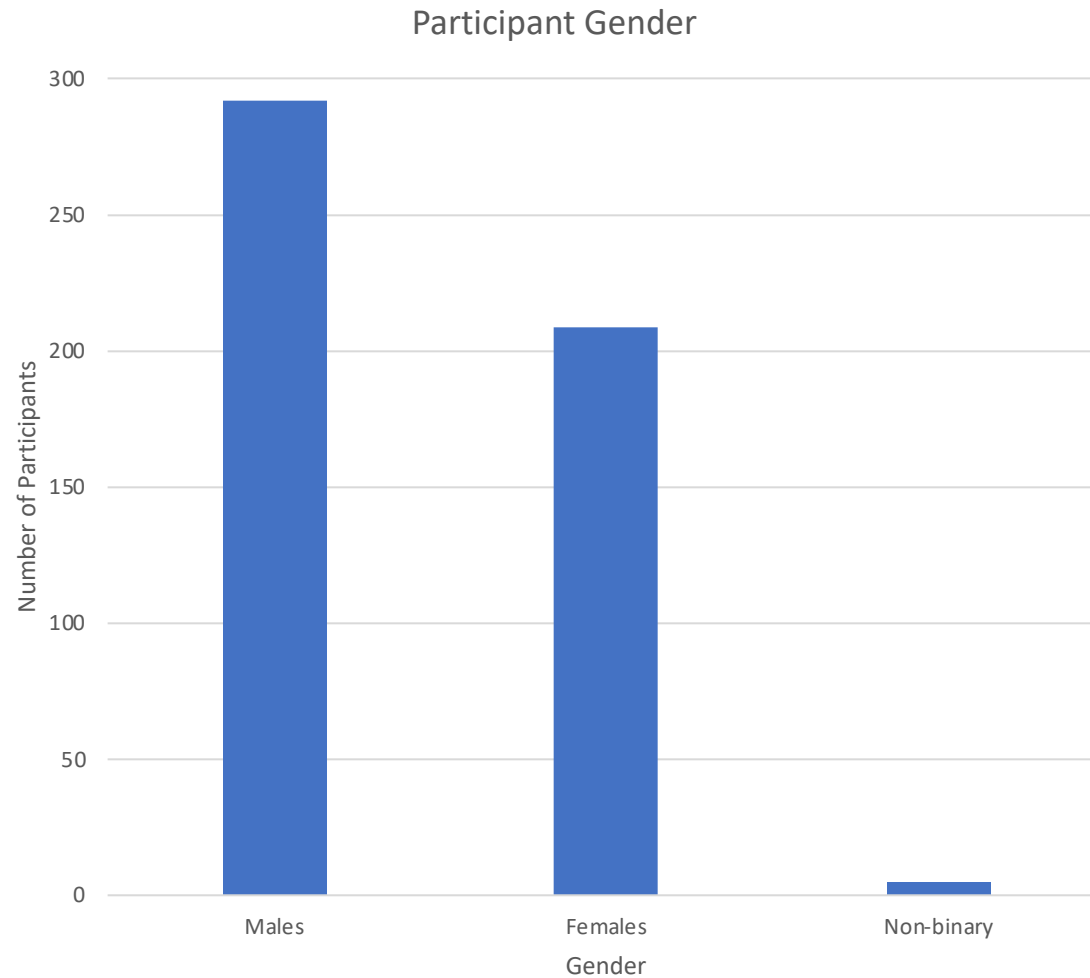
# Methods

## Participants

- Subset of a larger sample ( $n = 506$ ) of 629 adults who stutter from Gerlach (2019)
- Inclusion criteria
  - At least 18 years of age
  - Lived in the United States or Canada
  - Identified as a person who stutters
- Recruited by emailing speech-language pathologists, stuttering organizations, and online groups

# Methods

## Participants (n = 506)



# Methods

## Procedures

- 25-minute online Qualtrics survey
- Raffle compensation
- Two additional emails sent, following the initial outreach, as a reminder

# Methods

## Relevant Survey Items - Demographics

- Age

*“How old are you?”*

- Gender

*“What is your gender– Male, Female, Non-binary, Another gender identity not listed above”*

- Income

*“Do you currently earn money through employment?”*

*And If so, please indicate your personal income level – N/A or less than \$10,000 per year, between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per year, between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per year, More than \$50,000 per year”*

# Methods

## Relevant Survey Items – Extent of Verbal Disclosure

1. To what extent have you told friends about your stuttering?
2. To what extent have you told family about your stuttering?
3. To what extent have you told romantic partners about your stuttering?
4. To what extent have you told health care providers about your stuttering?
5. To what extent have you told people in the workplace about your stuttering?
6. To what extent have you told neighbors about your stuttering?
7. To what extent have you told others in the community about your stuttering?

1 2 3 4 5  
None of them All of them

# Methods

## Relevant Survey Items – Psychological Distress

### Anxiety

Used the Spielberger Trait Anxiety Scale (STAI-T)- *20 items*

e.g. "I feel satisfied with myself"

1	2	3	4
<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost always</i>

### Depression

Used the Center for Epidemiological Studies – Depression Scale (CES-D)- *20 items*

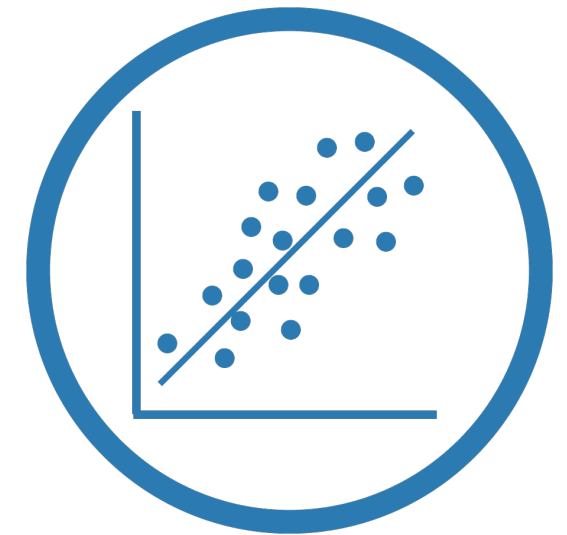
e.g. "I thought my life had been a failure"

1	2	3	4
<i>Rarely or none of the time</i>	<i>Some or a little of the time</i>	<i>Occasionally or a moderate amount of time</i>	<i>Most or all of the time</i>

# Methods

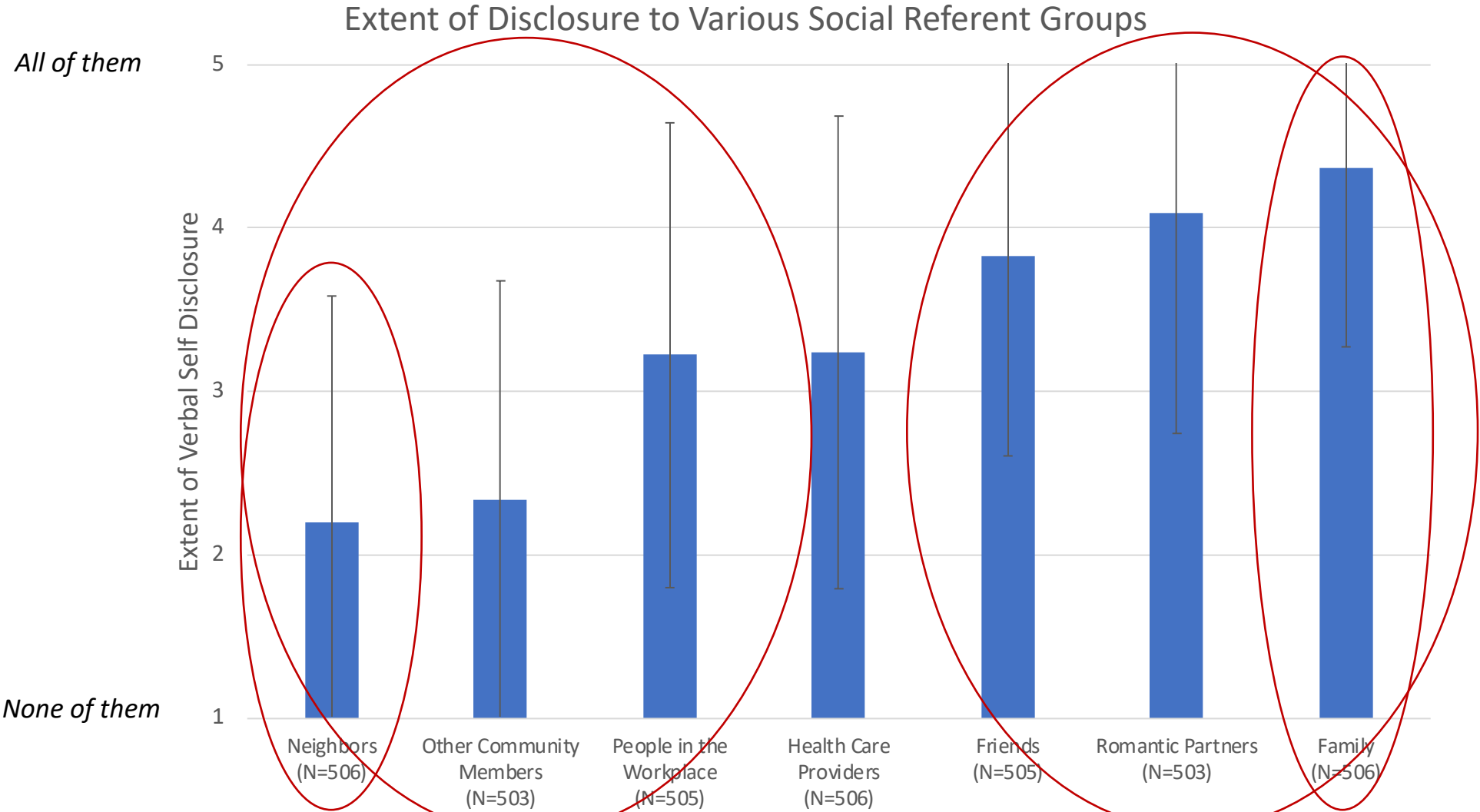
## Statistical Analyses

- 1) Are there differences in the extent that adults who stutter disclose their stuttering to various social referent groups?
- 2) Is the extent of disclosure of stuttering to certain social referent groups predictive of psychological distress among adults who stutter after controlling for relevant demographics?



# Results

RQ 1: *Are there differences in the extent that adults who stutter disclose their stuttering to various social referent groups?*



# Results

*RQ 2: Is the extent of disclosure of stuttering to certain social referent groups predictive of psychological distress among adults who stutter after controlling for relevant demographics?*

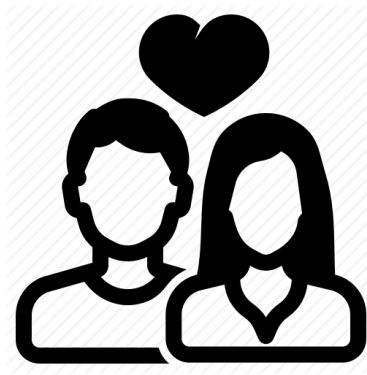
- Conducted seven separate hierarchical linear regressions
  - Step 1: Controls for age, gender, income
  - Step 2: Extent of verbal disclosure to one social referent group (e.g., family)
- Extent of disclosure to **romantic partners** was the only social referent group that significantly predicted distress ( $F(4, 404) = 13.21, \beta = -.026, p < 0.05$ )
- Extent of disclosure to other **intimate groups** approached significance
  - Family ( $F(4, 406) = 11.98, \beta = -.02, p = 0.055$ )
  - Friends ( $F(4, 406) = 11.75, \beta = -.016, p = 0.091$ )
- Distress was not predicted by any of the “distant” social referent groups

# Discussion

**There were not significant differences in extent of disclosure to various social referent groups, but people disclosed most often to more intimate groups, descriptively.**

This could be because...

- PWS are more likely to get positive reactions from these groups
- More intimate social referent groups could provide a better support system following disclosure of stuttering
- Not disclosing to these groups could have very costly effects on quality of life



# Discussion



**Extent of disclosure to romantic partners significantly predicted distress.**

Why is more disclosure to romantic partners linked with less distress?

- Disclosing can lead to a support system that can foster healthy coping
- Social support can offset the possible psychological distress that can accompany living with stuttering
- Less cognitive effort when not hiding their stuttering identity

Why is less disclosure to romantic partners linked with more distress?

- Feelings of hiding, shame, and fraudulence

# Discussion

Friends and family – approached significance

- More research needed to verify significance in predicting distress of stuttering disclosure to these two intimate groups and its effect on psychological distress
- Positive associations are possible

# Preliminary Clinical Implications

When SLPS encourage disclosure, they should consider WHO their clients are disclosing to. Increasing disclosure within their more intimate relationships may have the best associations with better mental health.

It is also important to consider HOW the person discloses stuttering. In order to increase both benefits to the client and the listener, an informative statement at the beginning of the interaction will yield the best outcomes.

# Limitations

- Scales may not have been sensitive enough to distinguish the subtle differences in disclosure behaviors
- Recommended to move from a 5-point scale to a 7-point scale
- Our sample was highly educated and white. A more diverse population would have yielded more representative results.
- Other forms of disclosure (other than the verbal stuttering disclosure we assessed) should be studied

Thank you for listening!

Any questions?



# References

- Boyle, M. P. (2013). Assessment of stigma associated with stuttering: Development and evaluation of the self-stigma of stuttering scale (4S). *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*.
- Boyle, M. P., & Gabel, R. (2020). Toward a better understanding of the process of disclosure events among people who stutter. *Journal of Fluency Disorders*, 105746.
- Byrd, C. T., Croft, R., Gkalitsiou, Z., & Hampton, E. (2017). Clinical utility of self- disclosure for adults who stutter: Apologetic versus informative statements. *Journal of fluency disorders*, 54, 1-13.
- Byrd, C. T., McGill, M., Gkalitsiou, Z., & Cappellini, C. (2017). The effects of self- disclosure on male and female perceptions of individuals who stutter. *American Journal of Speech Language Pathology*, 26(1), 69-80.
- Gerlach, H. (2019). *The Role of Stigma-Identity Constructs in Psychological Health Outcomes Among Adults Who Stutter* (Publication No. 22583662) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Healey, E. C., Gabel, R. M., Daniels, D. E., & Kawai, N. (2007). The effects of self-disclosure and non self-disclosure of stuttering on listeners' perceptions of a person who stutters. *Journal of Fluency Disorders*, 32(1), 51-69.
- Lincoln, M., & Bricker-Katz, G. (2008). Self-disclosure of stuttering at the beginning of interactions may improve listeners' perceptions of people who stutter. *Evidence-Based Communication Assessment and Intervention*, 2(2), 87-89.
- Mancinelli, J. (2019). The effects of self-disclosure on the communicative interaction between a person who stutters and a normally fluent speaker. *Journal of Fluency Disorders*, 59, 1-20.
- Mcgill, M., Siegel, J., Nguyen, D., & Rodriguez, S. (2018). Self-report of self-disclosure statements for stuttering. *Journal of Fluency Disorders*, 58, 22-34.
- Van Borsel, J., Brepoels, M., & De Coene, J. (2011). Stuttering, attractiveness and romantic relationships: The perception of adolescents and young adults. *Journal of fluency disorders*, 36(1), 41-50.