

THE EFFECT OF DISCLOSURE ON PERCEPTIONS OF RETAIL EMPLOYERS TOWARD
STUTTERING

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ABSTRACT

Charles D. Hughes, Advisor

Stuttering is a developmental communication disorder characterized by atypical interruptions in the forward flow of speech. Although stuttering-like disfluencies can be the most overt characteristic of stuttering, people who stutter (PWS) can also be affected by the perceptions of others. For this reason, it is important to study typical speakers' reactions to stuttering and to investigate techniques that can be used to influence perceptions. The purpose of the current study was to assess employer reactions to the use of varying stuttering disclosure statements in the context of a cover letter for a job application. A mixed-methods approach using Likert scales and open-ended questions was employed to assess the reactions of retail managers to various randomly assigned cover letters. Cover letter conditions included no disclosure statement, a general disclosure statement, a disclosure statement containing mention of speech therapy, and a positive disclosure statement. Quantitative data analysis did not indicate a significant difference between conditions. However, qualitative analysis revealed that the general disclosure statement and the positive disclosure statement were overall more positive compared to the disclosure plus speech therapy condition. Participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition and the positive disclosure condition were more likely to indicate they would ask the applicant further questions about stuttering. Results from this study indicate that general or positive disclosure of stuttering on a cover letter prior to a job interview may be beneficial to an applicant who stutters.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Although stuttering-like disfluencies can be the most overt characteristics of stuttering, emotional and psychosocial effects are also a large part of the disorder (Guitar, 2013). The *International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health* is a framework created by the World Health Organization intended to describe an individual's disability among several dimensions, including deficits in body function and impact of the disability on a person's ability to participate in life activities (World Health Organization, 2013). The model also takes into account how environmental factors impact the life of a person with a disability. Environmental factors are defined as "...the physical, social and attitudinal environment in which people live and conduct their lives. These are either barriers or facilitators of the person's functioning" (World Health Organization, 2013, p. 8). Yaruss and Quesal (2004) applied this framework to stuttering to explain how stuttering affects more than just the person's ability to speak. Using this classification, stuttering is seen to affect all areas of a person's life. Yaruss and Quesal (2004) further state that environmental factors include societal attitudes, reactions of friends and family members, and discrimination in the workplace by employers which can impact the experience of stuttering. Yaruss and Quesal state that "...ridicule or discrimination because of inaccurate stereotypes about stuttering...could be classified as a negative influence of societal attitudes" (2004, p. 46).

Environmental factors such as societal attitudes and discrimination are a concern for people who stutter (PWS), as the general public has been found to have negative attitudes toward stuttering (Evans, Healey, Kawai, & Rowland, 2008; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel, & Greenwood, 2003; Ruscello, Las, & Brown, 1988; Silverman & Paynter, 1990; Van Borsel et al., 2011).

These negative perceptions of stuttering may lead to issues like bullying in schools (Blood,

Blood, Tramontana, Sylvia, Boyle, & Motzko, 2011) and difficulty securing a job as employers have demonstrated negative attitudes toward stuttering (Hurst & Cooper, 1983).

Disclosure of stuttering is one tactic that has been suggested to mitigate negative perceptions of stuttering (Collins & Blood, 1990; Healey, Gabel, Daniels, & Kawai, 2007; Lee & Manning, 2010). In addition to general disclosure of stuttering, acknowledgement of participating in speech therapy has also been suggested as a way to offset negative perceptions toward stuttering (Gabel, 2006). As the majority of these studies have been conducted in a laboratory setting with college students, the next step would involve testing in a broader context. As a possible focus, managers have been found to have negative perceptions of stuttering (Hurst & Cooper, 1983). The variable of disclosure could be studied as a way to improve perceptions toward stuttering in an employment situation. The following is a review of literature relevant to attitudes of stuttering, employment and stuttering, and use of disclosure as a variable to improve perceptions toward stuttering.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitudes toward People Who Stutter

The general public views stuttering negatively (Evans, Healey, Kawai, & Rowland, 2008; Franck, Jackson, Pimentel, & Greenwood, 2003; Ruscello, Las, & Brown, 1988; Silverman & Paynter, 1990; Van Borsel et al., 2011). Populations which have been found to negatively stereotype PWS include college students (Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004; Gabel, Hughes, & Daniels, 2008; Silverman, 1982; Silverman & Paynter, 1990), teachers (Ruscello, Lass, Schmitt, & Pannbacker, 1994), health care professionals (Silverman & Bongey, 1997), and speech-language pathologists (Lass, Ruscello, Pannbacker, Schmitt, & Everly-Myers, 1989; Silverman, 1982). Negative stereotypes are concerning because these attitudes are related to tendencies of discrimination (Myers, 2011). In the workplace, PWS may be discriminated against when promotion opportunities arise (Hurst & Cooper, 1983; Klein & Hood, 2004; Rice & Kroll, 2006) or when they are searching for employment (Butler, 2014; Hurst & Cooper, 1983; Klein & Hood, 2004).

College students tend to vocationally stereotype PWS (Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004; Gabel, Hughes, & Daniels, 2008; Silverman & Paynter, 1990). Silverman and Paynter (1990) found that undergraduates rated a typically-fluent lawyer and a typically-fluent factory worker as more competent than their counterparts who stutter on semantic differential scales. The students also rated a lawyer who stutters more negatively than a factory worker who stutters. This could indicate that students believed that PWS were more suited for a manual labor job than one that relies more heavily on communication. Gabel et al. (2004) found that college students were more likely to advise PWS to seek careers that appear to have less communicative demand based on author judgement, such as a computer programmer or biologist, than jobs that appear to

have more communicative demand, such as an attorney or parole officer. In a later study which utilized the same methodology, Gabel et al. (2008) found that college students thought PWS should seek jobs in science, technology, and other areas that do not have high communication demands.

Employer's Attitudes toward Stuttering

Hurst and Cooper (1983) mailed the Employer Attitudes Toward Stuttering (EATS) Inventory to employers to directly examine employers' attitudes concerning employees who stutter. The EATS Inventory asks employers to rate how strongly they agree that stuttering affects job performance and promotion potential, as well as how much they feel stuttering decreases employability and makes them feel uncomfortable (Hurst & Cooper, 1983). Of the 644 employers who participated, 85% believed that stuttering made someone less employable. Forty-four percent of employers agreed that PWS should search for jobs that do not rely on verbal communication. Nearly 30% of the employers believed that stuttering affected performance in the workplace and 62% of the participants disagreed that a person who stutters should be hired for a position when they are as qualified as a typically-fluent person. In addition, Hurst and Cooper found that 40% of surveyed employers agreed that being a person who stutters affected potential for promotion. Overall, the findings from Hurst and Cooper (1983) suggest a need for research concerning how to influence employers' perceptions of PWS.

Experiences of PWS in the Workplace

Research in the field of employment suggests that unemployment and unsatisfactory employment can have a negative impact on an individual's mental health (Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggemann, & Goldney, 1991). PWS have reported in

multiple studies that they are not completely satisfied with their work environment (Bricker-Katz, Lincoln, & Cumming, 2013; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Klein & Hood, 2004; Klompas & Ross, 2004; Rice & Kroll, 2006). Common themes found among these studies include the impact of stuttering on career choice (Bricker-Katz et al., 2013; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hayhow et al., 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004), receiving a promotion (Bricker-Katz et al., 2013; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hayhow et al., 2002; Klein & Hood, 2004; Klompas & Ross, 2004; Rice & Kroll, 2006), and negative experiences and beliefs about obtaining employment (Bricker-Katz et al., 2013; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Klein & Hood, 2004; Klompas & Ross, 2004).

Career Choices

In regard to career choices of PWS, Klompas and Ross (2004) found in their qualitative study that PWS felt that stuttering had affected their career choice, with four of the 16 South African adults in their study reporting that their occupational choice was influenced by stuttering. From their qualitative reports, it appears these four adults chose an occupation based on the amount of communication required for the job. These same adults also cited fear and anticipation of unsympathetic people in their work environment as elements that affected their career choice (Klompas & Ross, 2004). The impact of stuttering on career choice is found in several other studies. For example, Crichton-Smith (2002) interviewed 14 adults who stutter and found that their participants felt that stuttering had placed limits on employment and educational opportunities. One of their participants spoke about stuttering being a limitation on career choice, stating “I was the geography expert and of course if you stammer you are never going to teach, are you?” (Crichton-Smith, 2002, p. 399). Additionally, Bricker-Katz et al. (2013) reported that adults in their study felt that stuttering had influenced their career choice, and two

participants recounted abandoning their dream jobs of becoming a pilot and of joining the military due to their stuttering. In another study, Hayhow et al. (2002) mailed questionnaires to older adolescents and adults who stutter and found that the majority of these individuals reported not pursuing their preferred career and avoiding jobs with heavy speaking demands such as presentations and phone calls. Finally, Klein and Hood (2004) found similar results in their survey study of 232 adults who stutter which examined the effect of stuttering on performance at work and ability to be employed from the perspective of the person who stutters. Specifically, Klein and Hood found that 50% of the surveyed adults reported seeking a job with small speaking demands.

Promotion

Another aspect of employment that PWS feel is affected by their stuttering is promotion. Participants in multiple studies have reported that they felt promotion potential was affected by both internal and external factors. Klein and Hood (2004) found that 70% of the 232 adults who stutter who completed their survey reported that their stuttering affected promotion potential in their workplace. Furthermore, 20% of these participants reported turning down a job or promotion offer due to their stuttering. In another study, Bricker-Katz et al. (2013) reported that participants in their study believed that internal factors related to stuttering limited their promotion potential. These participants reported fear of leaving their comfort zone due to promotion and fear of increased communication due to promotion. Additionally, Rice and Kroll (2006) reported that their participants believed that stuttering had affected their promotion potential. Of the 412 people world-wide who completed their online survey, 28% believed they had been overlooked for a promotion as a consequence of their stuttering. Two-thirds of their participants (67.6%) believed that their supervisors had misjudged their abilities (Rice & Kroll,

2006). Finally, Hayhow et al. (2002) reported that individuals they interviewed shared that employers had told them that they would not be promoted. One participant shared that “on [their] last 3 years annual appraisals at work [they] had been told that [they] would not be considered for promotion because of [their] stammer” (Hayhow et al., 2002, p. 6).

Job Interviews

Some PWS have reported negative feelings about the interview process (Bricker-Katz et al., 2013; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Klein & Hood, 2004; Klompas & Ross, 2004). Klompas and Ross (2004) reported that participants in their study expressed problems with job interviews. Klein and Hood (2004) found that 71% of the participants who responded to their survey felt that their stutter negatively influenced their potential for hire. Bricker-Katz et al. (2013) reported that one of their participants shared that a military recruiter had turned him down during an interview solely for being a person who stutters. Crichton-Smith (2002) reported that one of their participants shared that an interviewer had told them directly that they would not hire them because of their stutter.

Butler (2014) recorded occupational experiences of PWS, including employment obtainment. Many of the participants in the study had difficulty with job interviews, and one participant expressed that being a person who stutters does not fit in with what employers are looking for in a job interview. Several of the participants felt that they were “given a job” (p. 732) by someone they knew or that the company that hired them was “being generous” or “taking a chance” (p. 723). Many of the jobs obtained by the participants in the study involved limited direct contact with customers. All of the participants in the study felt that their job search or interview process had been affected by being a person who stutters. Several employers told

participants that they could not be hired because they would not fit in with coworkers or make a good impression on customers due to their stutter (Butler, 2014).

Disclosure and Stuttering

The “acknowledgement tactic,” or disclosure, has been suggested as a way to offset negative perceptions of handicaps (Blood & Blood, 1982; Hastorf, Wildfogel, & Cassman, 1979). Several studies have investigated the use of disclosure, or acknowledging, for PWS (Byrd, Gkalistisou, McGill, Reed, & Kelly, 2016; Collins & Blood, 1990; Healey, Gabel, Daniels, & Kawai, 2007; Lee & Manning, 2010). Collins and Blood (1990) was one of the first studies to examine the use of disclosure to offset unfamiliar listeners’ negative perceptions of stuttering. In their study, female college students who did not stutter viewed two video tapes. In one tape, a man with moderate or severe stuttering disclosed his stutter at the end of the video. In the other, another man with a similar stuttering severity did not. Collins and Blood found that college students chose to collaborate with the male who disclosed their stuttering over the male who did not. Furthermore, participants rated the acknowledgement condition more favorably than the non-acknowledgment condition by rating the person who acknowledged their stuttering as more intelligent and personable than the person who did not acknowledge stuttering.

Although this study was the first to explore disclosure, the conclusion may have exaggerated the impact of acknowledgment due to the methodology. The participants who viewed the disclosure video first were aware of the lack of disclosure in the second video they watched. Therefore, it is possible their responses were influenced by this awareness. The participants who viewed the nondisclosure video first were not aware of the lack of disclosure in the video until after they had finished rating it and had watched the second video. This could

create a discontinuity between participant groups in the study based on the order in which they viewed the videos.

Healey, Gabel, Daniels, & Kawai (2007) conducted a study that aimed to determine how listeners perceive someone who stutters and discloses their stutter as opposed to someone who stutters and does not disclose their stutter. Three video conditions were used in the study: a condition in which a person who stutters disclosed his stuttering at the beginning of the interaction shown in the tape, one in which he disclosed his stutter at the end of the interaction, and one in which he did not disclose his stutter. After watching one of the videos, participants rated Likert scales and responded to several open-ended questions. The results from the Likert scales were not significantly different; however, participants gave significantly more positive responses to the open-ended questions for the condition in which disclosure occurred at the beginning of the interaction. This study is more applicable to a real-life interaction because participants only viewed one of the conditions.

Lee and Manning (2010) examined unfamiliar listener reactions to disclosure and fluency modification techniques. Their study consisted of two different experiments. In the first experiment, each participant watched one of four video conditions: one in which a person who stutters did not disclose stuttering, one in which he disclosed stuttering, one in which he used modification techniques, or one in which he both disclosed and used modification techniques. Differences between semantic differential scale ratings for these videos were nonsignificant across participants and conditions. In the second experiment, participants listened to two audio recordings, one in which a person who stutters discloses and one in which he does not. Participants in this experiment rated the disclosure condition significantly more favorably than the nondisclosure condition (Lee & Manning, 2010). Similar to Collins and Blood (1990), the

differences between these two findings could be the result of the manner in which the stimuli were presented. Since the audio recordings were presented in a random order and participants rated each recording immediately after hearing it, being exposed to the disclosure condition first may have had an effect on ratings of the nondisclosure condition.

Disclosure of Speech Therapy and Stuttering

Studies that have analyzed the effect of disclosing stuttering with mention of participation in speech therapy services have produced inconsistent results (Gabel, 2006; Gabel et. al, 2008). Gabel (2006) found that college students perceived descriptions of PWS who attended speech therapy more favorably than descriptions of PWS who did not attend speech therapy. In this study, 260 students rated one of four descriptions of a person who stutters using a 7-point semantic differential scale designed to measure attitudes toward PWS. The four descriptions were a man who has a severe stutter who attends speech therapy, a man who has a mild stutter who attends speech therapy, a man who has a severe stutter who does not attend speech therapy, and a man who has a mild stutter who does not attend speech therapy. Gabel (2006) found the college students rated the descriptions of PWS who attended speech therapy as friendlier, more confident, more pleasant, and more flexible. The participants also rated the man who had a mild stutter more positively than the man who had a severe stutter.

Gabel, Hughes, & Daniels (2008) explored whether college students report occupational stereotyping of PWS and if mention of therapy involvement and severity of stuttering had an impact on the students' perceptions of this role entrapment. Two-hundred-sixty students completed the Vocational Advice Scale for one of four written descriptions of a person who stutters. Similar to Gabel (2006), the four written descriptions were a man who has a severe stutter who attends speech therapy, a man who has a mild stutter who attends speech therapy, a

man who has a severe stutter who does not attend speech therapy, and a man who has a mild stutter who does not attend speech therapy. Gabel et al. (2008) found that college students did not rate descriptions of PWS who acknowledge their speech therapy as more suitable for a career, with the exception of training to become a speech pathologist.

Types of Disclosure Statements

Disclosure of stuttering can be framed in several different ways. A recent study examined reactions to apologetic and informative disclosure statements (Byrd, Croft, Gkalitsiou, & Hampton, 2017). Byrd et al. had 338 adult participants view a short video of a person who stutters. In the short video, the person who stutters disclosed their stuttering using an informative statement (e.g., “Before we get started, I want to let you know that I stutter. You may hear me repeat sounds or phrases, but if there is anything that I say that you do not understand, please don’t hesitate to ask me” (p. 3)), an apologetic disclosure statement (e.g., “Before we get started, I should let you know that I stutter, so this might be hard in spots, so bear with me” (p. 3)), or no disclosure statement at all. Following viewing the video, the participants responded to Likert scales to assess their perceptions of the interviewee’s qualities. The informative self-disclosure condition was found to have more positive ratings than the apologetic self-disclosure condition or the no disclosure condition. Apologetic self-disclosure was not found to be significantly different from the no disclosure condition (Byrd et al., 2017).

Disclosure of Stuttering in the Workplace

Disclosure in the workplace and during job interviews has been a common theme in several qualitative studies (Bricker-Katz et al., 2013; Butler, 2014; Crichton-Smith, 2002). For instance, Bricker-Katz et al. (2013) found that several of the participants in their study described

experiences when disclosure of their stutter made situations less awkward for their conversation partner. One participant noted, “Now I’ve got to the stage where now I admit if it happens...and it tends to calm me down. I feel if the other person knows about it, it’s less of a problem” (Bricker-Katz et al., 2013, p. 345). In addition, Klompas and Ross (2004) found that disclosure of stuttering during a job interview setting was helpful for one of the participants in their study. Although disclosure of stuttering in the work and job interview setting may be helpful for some PWS, others report negative experiences. For example, Butler (2014) reported that two of the participants in their study shared that when they acknowledged their stutter on their applications, they were not called for an interview. For this reason, it is important to further explore the effects of disclosure on interactions with potential employers during the job search process.

Disclosure of Disability as a Strength

Pearson et al. (2003) found that hiring personnel for clerical positions in Hong Kong, China were more likely to offer a job interview to applicants who did not disclose a disability in their application letter when compared to applicants who disclosed their disability in their letter. Framing the disability as a strength or challenge that the applicant has overcome has been suggested as a way to offset potential employers’ negative perceptions of an applicant who has a disability (Office of Disability Employment Policy, n.d.). Jans, Kaye, & Jones (2012) interviewed 41 employed adults who had disabilities to examine how they chose to discuss their disability with potential employers during the job search process. Several participants in this study reported using their unique experiences of having a disability as a strength while searching for a job (Jans et al., 2012).

Few studies have explored the effects of framing stuttering as a strength in the context of a cover letter or job interview; however, multiple sources recommend that PWS disclose their

stutter in a positive manner (Mertz, 2012; Roach, 2005; Rossi, 2012). These sources advise talking about stuttering as a challenge that the applicant has overcome, educating the potential employer about stuttering, and mentioning that the applicant is working on their speech. For example, Mertz (2012) suggests that PWS mention positive qualities related to their stutter, such as their desire to always prepare thoroughly for activities that require speaking, when disclosing their stutter to a potential employer. Rossi (2012) tells PWS to “always let [employers] see that you see [stuttering] in yourself as a strength and not a weakness” (n.p.).

Purpose

Very few studies have looked specifically at potential employers’ reactions to disclosure of stuttering in a job-seeking context (Gabel, 2015). Despite this lack of evidence, several sources recommend disclosing stuttering to potential employers (Roach, 2005; Schloss, Espin, Smith, & Suffolk, 1987; The Stuttering Foundation, 2016). Therefore, the purpose of the proposed study is to investigate the extent to which disclosure of stuttering affects the attitudes of potential employers toward PWS, particularly in the context of a cover letter. Using these results, speech-language pathologists and other career counseling professionals can provide better recommendations regarding the manner in which stuttering is disclosed as PWS move through the job search process. The following are research questions for this study:

1. Does the type of disclosure statement (general, speech therapy, speech therapy plus positive influence) have an effect on the perceptions of retail employers toward a job applicant?
2. What questions, if any, do retail employers have for potential employees based upon the different types of disclosure in a cover letter?

CHAPTER III. METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a concurrent mixed methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then compared to determine if the findings support each other (Creswell, 2014). The design of this study was influenced and incorporated aspects of previous studies that have explored the topics of disclosure of stuttering or occupational stereotyping of PWS (Collins & Blood, 1990; Gabel, 2006; Gabel et al., 2008; Healey et al., 2007; Lee & Manning, 2010).

Development of the Survey Instrument

A survey instrument was designed for this study which asked participants to rate four qualities of a fictitious job applicant based on a cover letter. Participants rated the applicant on a 7-point Likert scales combined with an open-ended prompt asking the participant to explain their rating (Appendices B and C). The following section provides information concerning the development of the cover letters and survey instrument, participant recruitment and demographic information, survey procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Development of the Cover Letters

The Bowling Green State University Career Center assisted in development of the cover letters used in this study. The Career Center provided an outline, as well as general advice, for development of the cover letter. Following career center recommendations, the disclosure statements were placed at the end of the cover letter as opposed to the beginning of the cover letter. Readability level was tested using the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test in Microsoft Word, which found the letters were rated approximately at the 12th grade reading level.

Four separate cover letters were designed for use in this study. These cover letters were brief and consisted of basic information applicable to many job positions in order to accommodate participants from a wide range of occupational settings. The cover letters were identical with the exception of disclosure statements and acknowledgements of therapy. The first cover letter, the control condition, did not have a disclosure statement or an acknowledgement of therapy. The second cover letter contained a neutral disclosure statement at the end of the letter (e.g., “Something that sets me apart from other candidates is that I am a person who stutters”). The third cover letter contained a neutral disclosure statement at the end of the letter followed by an acknowledgment of therapy (e.g., “Something that sets me apart from other candidates is that I am a person who stutters. I am in speech therapy to work on my speech and I am able to successfully manage my stuttering when necessary”). The final cover letter contained a positive disclosure statement at the end of the letter followed by an acknowledgement of therapy (e.g., “Something that sets me apart from other candidates is that I am a person who stutters. I am the type of person who sets goals for myself in all aspects of my life, including my speech fluency. I am currently in speech therapy to work on my speech because I do not let any of the challenges in my life negatively affect my ability to succeed in any environment. My involvement in speech therapy as well as my commitment to self-improvement has shaped me into an excellent communicator. I am able to successfully manage my stuttering when necessary”).

Survey instructions and questions concerning general demographic information were included on the same page as the cover letter. Three separate sets of survey instructions were written for each general type of establishment to ensure that all participants responded to the survey questions as if they were considering hiring the fictional job applicant for a position that has significant communicative demands. A form instructing the participant to respond to the

scales as if the job applicant was applying for a cashier position was used at fast food restaurants, grocery stores, convenient stores, and department stores. A form instructing the participant to respond to the scales as if the person was applying for a waiter position was used at sit down restaurants. A final form instructing participants to respond as if the applicant was applying for a sales associate position was used at specialty store settings.

Development of Survey Questions

Although the survey was designed specifically for this study, it incorporated aspects previously used to explore the attitudes of employers toward employees who stutter and the topic of disclosure (Healey et al., 2007; Hurst & Cooper, 1983). Similar to Healey et al. (2007) and Hurst and Cooper (1983), this survey utilized Likert scales which instructed the participants to indicate the level to which they agree with statements. The four statements associated with the Likert scales in this study concern the fictional job applicant's employability and likelihood of success with interactions in the work environment. These statements were written specifically for use in this study. The Likert scale consisted of 7 points, with 1 corresponding to "strongly disagree" and 7 corresponding to "strongly agree." The four statements used in the study were:

- 1) This person is employable.
- 2) This person would be successful in a work environment in my establishment.
- 3) This person would have successful customer interactions.
- 4) This person would have successful interactions with coworkers.

Participants were then asked to describe their responses to each of the Likert scales as well as respond in writing to the following question:

- 1) If you were interviewing this person for a job, what additional questions would you ask them?

Participants

Participant Recruitment

Management personnel from retail businesses in Northwest Ohio were recruited to participate in the study. Only retail businesses that hire at entry-level were included in the study. For the purposes of this study, retail businesses were defined as businesses that sell "...new and used goods mainly to the general public for personal or household consumption or utilization ...” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2008, p. 179). Types of retail stores targeted in this study included department stores, supermarkets, grocery stores, casual dining restaurants, fast food restaurants, electronic device retailers, gas stations, and other non-food retailers.

General Procedures

The following general procedures were used in completion of this study:

1. The researcher approached public businesses in Northwest Ohio during regular business hours.
2. Upon entering the establishment, the researcher asked to speak to a manager. The researcher used the included verbal script in Appendix D to explain the study and the brief time commitment required. The manager was then asked to participate in the study.
3. If the manager agreed to participate, they were given a copy of the survey instrument as well as one of the four cover letter conditions determined by random assignment.

The manager was asked to complete the demographic information, read the cover letter, and then respond to the survey questions.

4. Following completion of the survey, the participant sealed the survey documents into an envelope and returned them to the researcher.

Demographic Information

Demographic information collected for the study included the participants' gender and age. Questions were also included to ensure that the participant was employed in some type of management position and to ensure that they were able to comprehend reading material at the 12th grade level. Information concerning the participants' level of familiarity with people who stutter was also collected. Detailed information about the business was not collected.

A total of 32 participants were recruited for this study. All participants reported being in a management position and indicated that they were able to comprehend reading material at the 12th grade level. Of the total participants, 23 were identified by the researcher as being in an establishment that would hire a cashier (survey type A), eight participants were identified as being in an establishment that would hire a sales associate (survey type C), and one of the participants was identified as being in an establishment that would hire a waiter (survey type B). A total of 20 of the participants were female and 12 were male. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 70 years, with an average of 36.38 years ($SD = 13.62$). Nineteen participants indicated that they knew someone who stutters, while ten participants indicated that they do not know someone who stutters. Three participants did not respond to this question. The 19 participants who knew someone who stutters had a range of familiarity with the person who stutters, with participants indicating that they knew the person who stutters "not at all well" to "very well" on the 7-point Likert scale. Mean familiarity with the person who stutters was rated as 4.79 ($SD = 2.04$).

Excluded from Quantitative Data Analysis

Three participants were excluded from quantitative data analysis due to failure to follow survey instructions. Participants were excluded from quantitative data analysis if their quantitative responses were in stark contrast to their qualitative responses, indicating they may have misinterpreted the Likert scale system. These participants were included in qualitative data analysis as their written responses were relevant to the prompt. A table detailing the number of participants for each quantitative survey item grouped by condition is as follows:

Table 1.

Number of Participants for Each Quantitative Survey Item.

Condition	Survey Question			
	“This person is employable.”	“This person would be successful in a work environment in my establishment.”	“This person would have successful customer interactions.”	“This person would have successful interactions with coworkers.”
Condition 1: No disclosure.	7	7	7	7
Condition 2: General disclosure.	8	8	8	8
Condition 3: Disclosure + speech therapy.	7	7	8	7
Condition 4: Positive Disclosure.	7	7	7	7

Data Analysis

The independent variable in this study was the disclosure statement condition which contained four levels, i.e., the condition without disclosure, the condition with general disclosure of stuttering, the condition with disclosure of stuttering and speech therapy, and the positive disclosure condition. The dependent variable was the employers' ratings of each Likert scale and their responses to the open-ended questions. The following section provides information concerning quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures.

Quantitative Data

Descriptive statistical analysis used in this study included frequency counts, medians, interquartile ranges (IQR), and range of responses to each of the Likert scale questions. After descriptive analysis, the researcher conducted a Kruskal-Wallis test to determine if significant differences existed between conditions. Disclosure statement condition was identified as the grouping variable for the Kruskal-Wallis test. The Kruskal-Wallis test was chosen for this study as it is a non-parametric test that allows for comparison of mean ranks between groups of participants. The Kruskal-Wallis test is often used in place of a one-way ANOVA for a small sample size when normality of the data cannot be assumed (McDonald, 2014). All statistical analysis was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Qualitative Data

The researcher analyzed qualitative data using the following procedure outlined by Creswell (2014):

- 1) The researcher numbered returned survey documents and transcribed written responses verbatim into a Word document.

- 2) The researcher read through participant responses and recorded notes concerning general statements made by the participants.
- 3) The researcher generated a preliminary list of codes that described the participant's responses and refined these codes over time.
- 4) The researcher combined the generated list of codes to form major and minor themes for each question and condition based on the codes. A frequency count of the number of participants expressing ideas related to each major and minor theme was then completed.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis were conducted independently of each other.

Results for each type of analysis are organized with quantitative results presented first, followed by qualitative results.

Quantitative Results

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistical Results.

Descriptive Statistics				
	No Disclosure. Median (IQR)	General Disclosure. Median (IQR)	Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy. Median (IQR)	Positive Disclosure. Median (IQR)
This person is employable.	6.0 (2.0) (n=7)	6.5 (2.5) (n=8)	6.0 (2.0) (n=7)	7.0 (1.0) (n=7)
This person would be successful in a work environment in my establishment.	6.0 (1.0) (n=7)	5.5 (2.5) (n=8)	5.0 (3.0) (n=7)	5.0 (3.0) (n=7)
This person would have successful customer interactions.	6.0 (3.0) (n=7)	6.0 (2.0) (n=8)	4.0 (2.0) (n=8)	5.0 (3.0) (n=7)
This person would have successful interactions with coworkers.	6.0 (3.0) (n=7)	6.0 (2.75) (n=8)	6.0 (3.0) (n=7)	5.0 (3.0) (n=7)

Quantitative data collected from each Likert scale statement was analyzed using descriptive statistical measures and the Kruskal-Wallis test. Descriptive results for each question are discussed first, followed by the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test. A summary of the descriptive statistics measures is presented in Table 2.

Employability

The first statement on the survey asked participants to rate their agreement to the statement, “This person is employable.” Participants rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale in which higher values indicate higher agreement. Condition 4 (Positive Disclosure) had the highest median rating for the employability of the fictional job applicant (median = 7.0; IQR = 1.0). Condition 1 (No Disclosure) and Condition 3 (Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy) had the lowest median ratings for the job applicant’s employability (median = 6.0; IQR = 2.0 for each condition). Descriptive statistics for all conditions are shown in Table 2. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine significance of differences between the groups. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference between groups in relation to employability ($\chi^2 = 1.541$, $p = 0.673$).

Success in Work Environment

The second statement on the survey asked participants to rate on a 7-point Likert scale how successful they felt the participant would be in a work environment in their establishment. Condition 1 (No Disclosure) had the highest median rating concerning the success of the fictional job applicant in the work environment (median = 6.0; IQR = 1.0). Condition 3 (Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy) and Condition 4 (Positive Disclosure) had the lowest median ratings concerning the success of the applicant in the work environment (median = 5.0; IQR =

3.0 for each condition). Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated no significant difference between groups in relation to success in the work environment ($\chi^2 = 1.425$, $p = 0.700$).

Success with Customer Interactions

The third survey statement asked participants to rate on a 7-point Likert scale how successful they felt the fictional job applicant would be in customer interactions based on the cover letter. Participants in Condition 1 (No Disclosure) and Condition 2 (General Disclosure) descriptively had the highest median rating concerning the applicant's success in customer interactions (median = 6.0 for both conditions). Participants in Condition 3 (Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy) had the lowest median rating concerning the success of the fictional job applicant with customer interactions (median = 4.0; IQR = 2.0). Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that there was not a significant difference between groups in relation to success with customer interactions ($\chi^2 = 4.763$, $p = 0.190$).

Success with Coworker Interactions

The fourth statement on the survey asked the participants to rate on a 7-point Likert scale how successful they felt the fictional job applicant would be with interacting with coworkers. Participants in the No Disclosure Condition, the General Disclosure Condition, and the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy Condition were found to have similar median ratings concerning the success of the applicant in interactions with coworkers (median = 6.0 for all conditions). Participants in the Positive Disclosure condition had a non-significantly lower median rating concerning success in coworker interactions (median = 5.0; IQR = 3.0). A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine significance of differences between the groups.

Results indicated no significant difference between groups in relation to success with coworker interactions ($\chi^2 = 0.518$, $p = 0.915$).

Table 3.

Qualitative Theme Structure.

Qualitative Themes					
	This person is employable.	This person would be successful in a work environment in my establishment.	This person would have successful customer interactions.	This person would have successful interactions with coworkers.	Additional questions for applicant.
No disclosure.	(n=8) Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable. (x8) Minor Theme 1: Applicant is employable based on letter. (x1) Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable. (x4) Minor Theme 4: Applicant is employable, but need more information. (x3)	(n=8) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x2) Major Theme 5: Applicant would be successful in the work environment. (x6) Minor Theme 6: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment. (x5) Minor Theme 7: Applicant is likely successful. (x1)	(n=8) Major Theme 1: Not enough information. (x4) Major Theme 7: Applicant would have successful customer interactions. (x4) Minor Theme 12: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in customer interactions. (x3) Minor Theme 13: Work experience is an indicator of successful customer interactions. (x1)	(n=8) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x5) Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful coworker interactions. (x3) Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions. (x2) Minor Theme 18: Work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions. (x1)	(n=7) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x1) Major Theme 10: General interview questions. (x6) Minor Theme 19: Experiences in customer service and work experience. (x4) Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess the applicant's personality and goals. (x2)

General disclosure.	(n=7) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x2) Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable. (x5) Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable. (x1) Minor Theme 5: Work Experience makes applicant employable. (x4)	(n=7) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x3) Major theme 5: Applicant would be successful in the work environment. (x4) Minor Theme 8: Work experience is an indicator of success in the work environment. (x2) Minor Theme 9: General statement of success. (x2)	(n=7) Major Theme 1: Not enough information. (x2) Major Theme 7: Applicant would have successful customer interactions. (x4) Minor Theme 12: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in customer interactions. (x1) Minor Theme 13: Work experience is an indicator of successful customer interactions. (x3) Minor Theme 23: Stuttering could affect interactions, but work experience is helpful.	(n=7) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x2) Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful coworker interactions. (x5) Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions. (x3) Minor Theme 18: Work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions. (x2)	(n=7) Major Theme 10: General interview questions. (x7) Minor Theme 19: Experiences in customer service and work experience. (x2) Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess the applicant's personality and goals. (x4) Minor Theme 21: Business-specific questions. (x1)
Disclosure plus speech therapy.	(n=8) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x1) Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable. (x6)	(n=8) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x2) Major Theme 5: Applicant would be	(n=8) Major Theme 1: Not enough information. (x3) Major Theme 7: Applicant would have	(n=8) Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x3) Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful	(n=8) Major Theme 10: General interview questions. (x6) Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess the

	<p>Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable. (x3)</p> <p>Minor Theme 5: Work Experience makes applicant employable. (x3)</p> <p>Major Theme 3: Stuttering impacts employment. (x1)</p>	<p>successful in the work environment. (x5)</p> <p>Minor Theme 8: Work experience is an indicator of success in the work environment. (x2)</p> <p>Minor Theme 10: Environment is a good fit for the applicant. (x1)</p> <p>Minor Theme 6: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment. (x1)</p> <p>Minor Theme 11: Successful based on letter. (x1)</p> <p>Major Theme 6: Stuttering may affect success in the work environment. (x1)</p>	<p>successful customer interactions. (x2)</p> <p>Major Theme 8: Stuttering could affect customer interactions. (x3)</p> <p>Minor Theme 15: Stuttering may affect customer interactions, but ability to control stuttering is helpful. (x2)</p> <p>Minor Theme 16: Impatient customers may result in negative interactions. (x1)</p>	<p>coworker interactions. (x5)</p> <p>Minor Theme 10: Environment is a good fit for applicant. (x2)</p> <p>Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions. (x2)</p> <p>Minor Theme 18: Work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions. (x1)</p>	<p>applicant's personality and goals. (x2)</p> <p>Minor Theme 21: Business-specific questions. (x3)</p> <p>Minor Theme 22: General interview questions. (x1)</p> <p>Major Theme 11: Interview questions related to stuttering. (x2)</p>
Positive disclosure.	<p>(n=8)</p> <p>Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x2)</p> <p>Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable. (x6)</p>	<p>(n=8)</p> <p>Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x2)</p> <p>Major Theme 5: Applicant would be successful in the work environment. (x4)</p>	<p>(n=8)</p> <p>Major Theme 1: Not enough information. (x3)</p> <p>Major Theme 7: Applicant would have successful customer interactions. (x3)</p>	<p>(n=8)</p> <p>Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided. (x4)</p> <p>Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful</p>	<p>(n=7)</p> <p>Major Theme 10: General interview questions. (x5)</p> <p>Minor Theme 19: Experiences in customer service and</p>

	<p>Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable. (x1)</p> <p>Minor Theme 5: Work Experience makes applicant employable. (x3)</p> <p>Minor Theme 3: Stuttering disclosure is helpful. (x2)</p>	<p>Minor Theme 10: Environment is a good fit for the applicant. (x1)</p> <p>Minor Theme 8: Work experience is an indicator of success in the work environment. (x1)</p> <p>Minor Theme 6: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment. (x2)</p> <p>Major Theme 4: Statement not indicative of success. (x2)</p>	<p>Minor Theme 12: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in customer interactions. (x2)</p> <p>Minor Theme 14: Stutter would not affect interaction. (x1)</p> <p>Major Theme 8: Stuttering could affect customer interactions. (x1)</p> <p>Major Theme 4: Statement not indicative of success. (x1)</p>	<p>coworker interactions. (x4)</p> <p>Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions. (x4)</p>	<p>work experience. (x2)</p> <p>Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess the applicant's personality and goals. (x1)</p> <p>Minor Theme 21: Business-specific questions. (x1)</p> <p>Minor Theme 22: General interview questions. (x1)</p> <p>Major Theme 11: Interview questions related to stuttering. (x2)</p>
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Qualitative Results

Qualitative data was analyzed by the researcher using the methods outlined in Creswell (2014). The findings of each of the open-ended question are presented below. Results are organized by condition, and then by question. Overall, qualitative results indicate that employers may find disclosure of stuttering on a cover letter prior to a job interview helpful. Additionally, qualitative results suggest employers prefer general disclosure statements and positive disclosure statements over disclosure plus speech therapy statements. A comprehensive theme structure is presented in Table 3.

No Disclosure Group

Employability.

Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable.

All eight of the participants in the control condition felt that the applicant was potentially employable, although three of the participants felt that they would need to interview the applicant first. Participants felt that the applicant was employable based on the information provided in the letter and that the applicant possessed characteristics that made him employable.

Minor Theme 1: Applicant is employable based on letter.

One of the participants felt that the applicant is employable based on the cover letter. Participant 25 stated, “The cover letter was well written, informative, outgoing, yet the potential candidate was humble.”

Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable.

Four of the participants stated characteristics they felt the applicant had based on the cover letter that make him employable. The participants stated characteristics including “professional,” “polite,” and “skilled.”

Minor Theme 4: Applicant is employable, but need more information.

Three of the eight participants in the control condition stated that the applicant seemed employable, but that they would need to meet and interview the applicant before making a judgment. Participant 13 stated, “The cover letter is excellent, but would still need to interview John to confirm he is employable.”

Work environment.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Two of the participants in the control group stated that they would not make a judgement on how successful the participant would be in a work environment in their establishment without meeting and interviewing the applicant. Participant 13 stated that the applicant’s success is “unknown until interview.”

Major Theme 5: Applicant would be successful in the work environment.

Six of the participant in the control group indicated that the applicant was likely to succeed in a work environment in their establishment. One of these participants made a general statement that the participant would succeed, and five of the participants provided specific characteristics they thought that the applicant had that would allow them to succeed in the work environment.

Minor Theme 6: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment.

Five of the participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that make him successful in the work environment. These characteristics included “drive & determination,” focus on customers, “willing to work,” “willingness to learn and grow into a position,” and “knows how to talk to customers.”

Minor Theme 7: Applicant is likely successful.

One participant made a general statement that the applicant would be successful in the work environment. Participant 14 stated, “Most likely the candidate would be great but food service is different than fashion, so that could be the only caveat [*sic*].”

Customer interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Four of the participants in the control condition felt that they did not have enough information to make a judgment on whether the applicant would have successful customer interactions. These participants expressed an interest in meeting and interviewing the applicant. For example, Participant 14 stated, “I would have to meet the person face to face to determine this.”

Major Theme 7: Applicant would have successful customer interactions.

Four of the participants in this condition indicated that the participant would have successful customer interactions. These participants felt that the applicant possessed

characteristics that would make him successful in customer interactions and that his previous work experience was an indicator of successful customer interactions.

Minor Theme 12: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in customer interactions.

Three of the participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that would make him successful in customer interactions. These characteristics included “personable” and “knows what to do.”

Minor Theme 13: Work experience is an indicator of successful customer interactions.

One of the participants indicated that the participant’s previous work experience indicates that they would have successful customer interactions. Participant 25 stated that “Their experience seems great and their skills elsewhere would help their interactions to be more natural.”

Coworker interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Five of the participants in the control condition felt that they did not have enough information to make a judgement on the success of the applicant’s interactions with coworkers. These participants expressed an interest in meeting and interviewing the job applicant. Participant 2 stated, “Based on the letter this is a 7. But we have to base this question on how one does in the interview as to how well they would fit it.”

Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful coworker interactions.

Three of the participants in this condition indicated that the applicant would have successful coworker interactions. These participants indicated that the applicant possessed characteristics that would make him successful in the work place and that his work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions.

Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions.

Two participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that would make him successful in coworker interactions, such as “easy going,” and that his previous work experience indicated that he would have “easy interactions with coworkers.”

Minor Theme 18: Work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions.

One participant indicated that the applicant’s previous work experience was indicative of successful coworker interactions. Participant 4 stated, “Lots of experience with others in different positions would lead to easy interactions with coworkers.”

Additional questions for applicant.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

One of the participants made a general statement that they did not have enough information. Participant 13 stated, “I would still need to interview John to confirm his strong points indicated in his cover letter.”

Major Theme 10: General interview questions.

Six of the participants in the control condition indicated that they would ask the applicant general interview questions. The participants wanted to ask questions about the applicant's experiences in customer service and about the applicant's personality.

Minor Theme 19: Experiences in customer service and work experience.

Four of the participants in this condition indicated they would ask questions about the applicant's work experience and experiences in customer service. Some participants indicated they would ask for specific examples of interactions with customers in the applicant's previous job. Participant 4 indicated they would ask, "How long were they employed at their last position? Best customer services story? Worst, (customer service story) and how they handled it?"

Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess applicant's personality and goals.

Two participants indicated they would ask questions to assess the applicant's personality and future goals. These questions included asking whether the participant works "more efficiently by themselves, or in a group" and asking "the candidate to describe themselves."

General Disclosure Group

Employability.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Two of the participants in the general disclosure condition felt that they did not have enough information to make a judgment on the applicant's employability. The participants expressed an interest to interview and ask the participant more specific questions about their

work experience. Participant 20 stated, “I would make this decision after a face-to-face interview.”

Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable.

Five of the participants felt that the applicant was potentially employable. These participants felt that the participant possessed characteristics that made him employable based on the letter and that his previous work experience made him employable.

Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable.

One of the participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that made him employable based on the letter. These characteristics included “confident” and “communicates well.”

Minor Theme 5: Work experience makes applicant employable.

Four of the participants stated that the applicant’s work experience was a factor in determining the applicant’s employability. For example, Participant 30 stated, “This person has described their work experience and given detailed examples of their previous responsibilities, all of which make this person seem highly employable.”

Work environment.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Three of the participants in the general disclosure condition felt that they needed more information about applicant in order to make a judgement on whether the person would be successful in a work environment in their establishment. For example, Participant 6 stated that “I

would be looking for specific tasks, projects, facts that support his claims of being a ‘good’ worker.”

Major Theme 5: Applicant would be successful in the work environment.

Four of the participants indicated that the applicant would be successful in the work environment. These participants commented on the applicant’s work experience or made general statements that the applicant would be successful.

Minor Theme 8: Work experience is an indicator of success in the work environment.

Two participants commented on the applicant’s work experience as an indicator of success in the work environment. For example, Participant 26 stated that “This persons [sic] employment history seems relevant to the position of interest and therefore implies that they already possess the skills needed to succeed.”

Minor Theme 9: General statement of success.

Two participants made a general statement of the applicant’s success in the work environment. Participant 30 stated, “I think this person would be successful here.”

Customer interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Two of the participants in the general disclosure condition indicated that they needed more information to determine whether the job applicant would have successful interactions with customers. For example, Participant 20 stated, “I have no idea from the letter. I put little value on a cover letter.”

Major Theme 7: Applicant would have successful customer interactions.

Four of the participants indicated that the job applicant would have successful customer interactions. These participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that would make him successful in customer interactions and that his work experience indicates that he would have positive customer interactions.

Minor Theme 12: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in customer interactions.

One of the participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that would make him successful with customer interactions. These characteristics included “communicates easily,” and “confident.”

Minor Theme 13: Work experience is an indicator of successful customer interactions.

Three participants felt that the applicant would have successful customer interactions based on his work experience. For example, Participant 5 stated “This person has customer service experience and sounds very confident in his abilities in his cover letter.”

Minor Theme 23: Stuttering could affect interactions, but work experience is helpful.

One participant felt that stuttering could potentially affect interactions with some customers. The participant also indicated that previous work experience may suggest that he would not have unsuccessful interactions despite his stutter. Participant 26 stated, “This person has every opportunity to be successful but must be able to handle rude customers who may insult over stuttering in a heated moment. Their experience implies there would be not issue.”

Coworker interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Two of the participants in the general disclosure condition felt that the letter did not provide enough information about the applicant to determine their success in coworker interactions. Participant 20 stated, “Cannot tell that @ [sic] all from this letter.”

Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful coworker interactions.

Five of the participants in this condition indicated that the applicant would have successful customer interactions. The participants felt that the applicant’s letter exemplified characteristics that would make him successful in interactions with coworkers and that his work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions. One of the participants made a general statement that the applicant would be successful in coworker interactions.

Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions.

Three of the participants indicated that the applicant had characteristics that would make him successful in coworker interactions. These included that the applicant is a “positive person and professional” and that he “works well with others.”

Minor Theme 18: Work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions.

Two of the participants in this condition felt that the applicant’s previous job experience indicates that he would have successful interactions with coworkers. Participant 30 stated, “This person also describes working in many positions which leads me to believe that they would understand the importance of teamwork!”

Additional questions for applicant.

Major Theme 10: General interview questions.

Seven of the participants in the general disclosure condition indicated that they would ask the applicant general interview questions. The participants were interesting in asking the participant questions about his previous work experience and questions to assess his personality and goals.

Minor Theme 19: Experiences in customer service and work experience.

Two of the participants in this condition indicated that they would ask the applicant about their “qualifications and work experience.”

Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess applicant’s personality and goals.

Four of the participants were interested in asking the applicant questions to assess his personality and goals. Participant 6 stated that the would ask “Many questions involving, teamwork, company projects, responsibility, self motivation [*sic*], accountability, drive, etc.”

Minor Theme 21: Business-specific questions

One of the participants indicated that they would ask the applicant questions specific to their business. Participant 20 stated they would ask questions “specific to our business – mechanical, hands on experience.”

Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy Group

Employability.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

One of the participants indicated that they did not have enough information to make a judgment on the applicant's employability. Participant 17 stated, "I prefer to meet people in person."

Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable.

Six of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition felt that the applicant was potentially employable. The participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that made him employable and that his work experience increased his employability.

Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable.

Three of the participants stated that they felt the applicant was employable based on characteristics portrayed by the letter. These characteristics included "polite" and "qualified." For example, Participant 29 stated that the "Cover letter displays most of the basic qualifications that we would be interested in."

Minor Theme 5: Work experience makes applicant employable.

Three of the participants mentioned that work experience was a characteristic that made the job applicant employable. For example, Participant 12 stated, "This person does have experience handling cash and interacting with customers. Those skills are transferrable to many positions."

Major Theme 3: Stuttering impacts employment.

Participant 21 stated that stuttering impacts employment and that the ability to “work through” stuttering is a positive ability. The participant’s comment is as follows: “The applicant has a strong background in retail and has the ability to work through their stutter. Stuttering is something that cannot out weigh [sic] the benefit of their work ethic.”

Work environment.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Two of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition felt that they did not have enough information to judge how successful the participant would be in a work environment in their establishment. These participants indicated that they would need to meet and interview the applicant. For example, Participant 17 stated “I would interview them to see if they can tell me more about themselves and their sales goals.”

Major Theme 5: Applicant would be successful in the work environment.

Five of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition felt that the applicant would be successful in a work environment in their establishment. These participants indicated that the applicant’s previous work experience would make him successful and that the environment would be a good fit for the applicant.

Minor Theme 6: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment.

One of the participants indicated that the applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment. Participant 11 stated that the applicant “seems very personable and friendly.”

Minor Theme 8: Work experience is an indicator of success in the work environment.

Two of the participants felt that the applicant would be successful in the work environment based on previous work experience. Participant 18 stated, “Most of his experience is in the same field I hire for. If all the duties listed are truthful that’s exactly what I look for in a new hire.”

Minor Theme 10: Environment is a good fit for the applicant.

One of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition felt that the applicant would be successful in the work environment because the environment and job is a good fit for the applicant. Participant 21 stated, “My retail store does not work on commission and most of our customers do majority of the talking.”

Minor Theme 11: Successful based on letter.

One of the participants made a statement that the applicant is successful based on the cover letter. Participant 31 stated, “based on the information provided solely in the cover letter I would assume they would be successful.”

Major Theme 6: Stuttering may affect success in the work environment.

One of the participants felt that the applicant's stuttering may affect his success in the work environment. Participant 12 stated, "Depending on how difficult it would be to control his stuttering would affect sales."

Customer interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Three of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition indicated that they did not have enough information to judge whether the applicant would have successful customer interactions and expressed a need to meet and interview the job applicant. For example, Participant 3 stated, "People can present things well on paper but in order for me to get an adequate feel for how a person would interact w/ customers it would be necessary for me to interview her in person."

Major Theme 7: Applicant would have successful customer interactions.

Two of the participants in this condition felt that the applicant would have successful customer interactions based on the cover letter. For example, Participant 31 stated, "This candidate, I would assume who have successful customer interactions based on their current leadership position."

Major Theme 8: Stuttering could affect customer interactions.

Three of the participants indicated that the applicant would potentially have unsuccessful customer interactions. Two of the participants mentioned the applicant's stuttering directly in their response, indicating that stuttering could affect customer interactions but that the

applicant's enrollment in speech therapy and ability to control stuttering is helpful. The other participant indicated that impatient customers may result in negative interactions.

Minor Theme 15: Stuttering may affect customer interactions, but ability to control stuttering is helpful.

Two of the participants stated that the applicant's ability to control his stuttering would help him to have successful customer interactions. Participant 18 stated, "I think even with the stutter he would do well. Especially if he's in therapy for it and can at time control it. Believe it is something we could work through." Participant 21 stated, "As long as this person could control the stuttering to briefly assist the customer while smiling then they would be successful in this store."

Minor Theme 16: Impatient customers may result in negative interactions.

One participant stated that the job applicant would have potentially unsuccessful interactions due to impatient customers. Participant 12 stated, "Many of our customers are impatient and tend to get easily irritated."

Coworker interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Three of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition felt that they did not have enough information to judge whether the applicant would have successful coworker interactions. These participants felt that they would need to meet and interview the applicant prior to making this decision. Participant 17 stated, "Nothing in their letter shows me how well

they work with others. I always interview people in order to learn more and see more. You can't judge based on just a letter.”

Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful coworker interactions.

Five of the participants in this condition felt that the applicant would have successful interactions with coworkers. Two of these participants felt that the environment would be a good fit for the job applicant. Two participants felt that the applicant had characteristics that would make him successful in the work environment, and one participant felt that the applicant's previous work experience would make him successful in coworker interactions.

Minor Theme 10: Environment is a good fit for applicant.

Two of the participants felt that their work environment would be a good fit for the job applicant. Participant 12 stated that “we have an open and fun environment.” Participant 21 felt that the applicant's stuttering would not be an issue in their work environment. They stated, “Our employees are regularly interacting with people with major disabilities and speech difficulties, as well as family members. A coworker with a stuttering problem would not be an issue.”

Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions.

Two participants indicated that the applicant has characteristics that would make him successful in coworker interactions. Characteristics included “nice” and “good at working in a team environment.”

Minor Theme 18: Work experience is an indicator of successful coworker interactions.

One participant wrote that the applicant's work experience indicates successful coworker interactions. Participant 31 stated, "This candidate has worked in leadership position in team environments."

Additional questions for applicant.

Major Theme 10: General interview questions.

Six of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition indicated that they would ask the applicant general interview questions. These included questions to assess the applicant's personality and questions specific to the establishment.

Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess applicant's personality and goals.

Two of the participants in this condition indicated that they would ask questions to assess the applicant's personality and goals. Participant 29 stated that he would ask about the applicant's "Strongest attributes he would bring to our sales team. What are his ideas of great customer service."

Minor Theme 21: Business-specific questions.

Three of the participants indicated that they would ask the applicant questions specific to their type of establishment. Participant 3 stated, "Because I manage a fashion clothing store I would ask specific fashion questions."

Minor Theme 22: General interview questions.

One participant indicated they would ask general interview questions. Participant 18 stated, “We have an interview guide we use as a company when interviewing and everyone gets asked the same questions.”

Major Theme 11: Interview questions related to stuttering.

Two of the participants in the disclosure plus speech therapy condition indicated that they would ask interview questions related to the applicant’s stuttering. Participant 12 would ask the applicant “What triggers have they found most effects his speech.” Participant 21 stated that they would ask the applicant “How they handle situations with young children who may bring up their stutter.”

Positive Disclosure Group

Employability.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Two of the participants in the positive disclosure condition indicated that the cover letter did not provide enough information to judge the applicant’s employability and expressed a need to interview the applicant. For example, Participant 16 stated, “Every applicant is potentially employable on paper. It’s the in person interview that sets them apart.”

Major Theme 2: Applicant is employable.

Six of the participants felt that the applicant was employable. These participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that made him employable and that his previous work experience indicated employability.

Minor Theme 2: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him employable.

One of the participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that made him employable. Participant 23 stated, “The candidate seems very capable of doing the job.”

Minor Theme 3: Stuttering disclosure is helpful.

Two of the participants stated that stuttering disclosure is helpful. Participant 32 stated, “specific customer service duties described as well as disclosure of the stuttering. It is uncommon that a candidate will bring info like this forward & put a positive spin on it.” Participant 19 stated, “The letter was well crafted and has a coherent [sic] logical sequence. Explained his shortcoming and minimized the impact on his employment before being discovered in an interview.”

Minor Theme 5: Work experience makes applicant employable.

Three of the participants noted that the applicant’s work experience made him employable. Participant 22 stated that the applicant “has had prior experience in the customer service field.”

Work environment.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Two of the participants in the positive disclosure condition felt that they did not have enough information to judge whether the applicant would be successful in their work environment and expressed a need to meet and interview the applicant. For example, Participant 1 stated, “Need to interview. Need to assess personality. Anyone can look good on paper.”

Major Theme 5: Applicant would be successful in the work environment.

Four of the participants in this condition indicated that the applicant would be successful in their work environment. These participants indicated that their work environment is a good fit for the applicant, that the applicant's work experience indicates success in the work environment, and that the applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment.

Minor Theme 6: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in the work environment.

Two participants indicated that the applicant possesses characteristics that would make him successful in the work environment. These characteristics included "highly qualified."

Minor Theme 8: Work experience is an indicator of success in the work environment.

One participant mentioned that the applicant's work experience is indicative of success in the work environment. Participant 19 stated, "He has experience in the fundamentals of this position."

Minor Theme 10: Environment is a good fit for the applicant.

One of the participants indicated that their work environment is a good fit for the applicant. Participant 7 stated, "I feel that this environment is very easy going & would be conducive [sic] to this candidate."

Major Theme 4: Statement not indicative of success.

Two participants made statements that did not concern the fictional applicant. For instance, participant 32 stated “Customer service is #1 here & everything else comes later – some employees naturally grasp our goals as a store & the ones that don’t aren’t here long!”

Customer interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Three of the participants in the positive disclosure condition felt that they did not have enough information to make a judgment on whether the applicant would have successful customer interactions. These participants expressed interest in meeting and interviewing the applicant prior to making this judgement. For example, Participant 9 stated, “This candidate [*sic*] seems like they would have good customer service skills, but we would have to interview and I’d like real life experiences.”

Major Theme 7: Applicant would have successful customer interactions.

Three of the participants indicated that the job applicant would have successful customer interactions.

Minor Theme 12: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in customer interactions.

Two of the participants made statements that the applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in customer interactions. These comments were focused on the applicant’s ability to provide excellent customer service.

Minor Theme 14: Stutter would not affect interaction.

One participant stated that the applicant's stuttering would not affect their customer interactions. Participant 7 stated, "I do not think this person's stutter would affect his ability to interact with the customers."

Major Theme 8: Stuttering could affect customer interactions.

One of the participants in this condition stated that stuttering could potentially affect customer interactions. Participant 19 stated that the applicant's "controlled speech impediment could come to play."

Major Theme 4: Statement not indicative of success.

One participant made a statement that did not directly discuss the fictional job applicant. Participant 32 stated, "Again – great customer service is key & will make for smooth customer interactions."

Coworker interactions.

Major Theme 1: Not enough information provided.

Three of the participants in the positive disclosure condition felt that they did not have enough information to make a decision on the applicant's success with coworker interactions. The participants indicated that they would need to meet and interview the applicant prior to making this decision. Participant 7 stated, "There is no way to tell from a cover letter how this person will interact with other employees."

Major Theme 9: Applicant would have successful coworker interactions.

Four of the participants in this condition felt that the applicant would have successful interactions with coworkers. All four of these participants felt that the applicant possessed characteristics that would make him successful in coworker interactions.

Minor Theme 17: Applicant possesses characteristics that make him successful in coworker interactions.

Three participants felt that the applicant was a “team player;” a trait that would make him successful with coworker interactions. The other participant felt that the applicant’s “personality and ability to interact with others” would help him to be successful in coworker interactions.

Additional questions for applicant.

Major Theme 10: General interview questions.

Five of the participants in the positive disclosure condition indicated that they would ask the applicant general interview questions. Participants indicated they would ask questions about the applicant’s experiences in customer services.

Minor Theme 19: Experiences in customer service and work experience.

Two of the participants stated that they would ask the participant questions about his experience in customer service. Participant 1 stated that they would ask about a “Time they were successful w/in a team. Time they were successful about reaching a goal.” Participant 9 stated that they would ask the applicant to “Tell me a time when you had to deal with an unruly [sic] customer, and how you handled the situation.”

Minor Theme 20: Questions to assess the applicant's personality and goals.

One of the participants indicated that they would ask questions to assess the applicant's personality and goals. Participant 22 stated, "We always like to get to know our applicants during the interview, so we would ask him about his mentors, goals, greatest achievements, and their hobbies/interests."

Minor Theme 21: Business-specific questions

One participant indicated they would ask business-specific questions. Participant 32 stated, "Specific questions pertaining to what our business does and whether they (John) shops here/is familiar with our goals as a retail store. If not, he may not be an ideal employee."

Minor Theme 22: General interview questions

One participant indicated they would ask general interview questions. Participant 16 stated they would ask, "All of my usual questions. This person would be treated exactly the same."

Major Theme 11: Interview questions related to stuttering.

Two of the participants in the positive disclosure condition indicated that they would ask interview questions related to stuttering. Participant 19 stated, "Part of my interview would be looking for the severity of his speech issue." Participant 23 stated, "I would ask more specific questions relating to the problem."

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

Recall the purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of various types of disclosure statements in a cover letter on employer perceptions of a job applicant. Two research questions were proposed for this study,

1. Does the type of disclosure statement (general, speech therapy, speech therapy plus positive influence) have an effect on the perceptions of retail employers toward a job applicant?
2. What questions, if any, do retail employers have for potential employees based upon the different types of disclosure in a cover letter?

The methodology of this study is relatively novel; however, findings do align with previous studies that have explored perceptions of stuttering. This section will include a comparison of the quantitative and qualitative findings, discussion of this study and how it complements the existing literature base, limitations of the study, clinical implications, and considerations for future research in this area.

Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The following section provides a comparison of descriptive statistical results and qualitative results. The Kruskal-Wallis test returned a result which failed to support the existence of significant differences between the conditions. However, qualitative results suggest that employers may find disclosure of stuttering in a general or positive manner helpful.

Employability

A significant quantitative result was not found between conditions regarding the applicant's employability. Descriptively, the participants in the Positive Disclosure Condition rated the applicant as non-significantly more employable (median = 7.0) than the other conditions. Qualitatively, participants in the No Disclosure condition indicated that the applicant was the most employable as eight of eight participants made a statement that the applicant was employable.

The participants in the No Disclosure Condition and in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition rated the applicant as non-significantly less employable (median = 6.0 for each condition). In regard to qualitative data, the participants in the General Disclosure condition indicated that the applicant was the least employable as five of seven participants in the condition stated that the applicant was employable. However, the ratings of the participants in the Positive Disclosure condition and in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy were close to those of the General Disclosure condition in that six of eight participants in each condition made a statement that the participant is employable. It is noteworthy that one participant in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy mentioned that stuttering impacts employment, and two participants in the Positive Disclosure felt that disclosure of stuttering was helpful for employers.

Success in Work Environment

The Kruskal-Wallis test failed to support a significant difference between conditions related to success in the work environment. Descriptively, the participants in the No Disclosure condition rated the participant as non-significantly more successful in the work environment (median = 6.0) compared to the median ratings of other conditions. Qualitatively, participants in

the No Disclosure condition also ranked the participant as being most successful in the work environment as six out of eight of the participants in the condition made a statement that the applicant would be successful.

Participants in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition and in the Positive Disclosure condition non-significantly rated the participant as less successful in the work environment (median = 5.0) compared to other conditions. In regard to qualitative data, participants in the Positive Disclosure condition rated the participant as the least successful in the work environment as only four of eight participants made a statement suggesting that the participant would be successful in the work environment. It should be noted that one of the participants in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition qualitatively indicated that stuttering may impact success in the work environment.

Successful Interactions with Customers

A significant quantitative result was not found between conditions regarding the applicant's success with customer interactions. Descriptively, the participants in the No Disclosure condition and the General Disclosure condition rated the applicant as non-significantly more successful in interactions compared to median ratings of the other conditions (median = 6.0 for both conditions). Participants in the No Disclosure condition qualitatively ranked the applicant as having the most success with coworker interactions as four of eight participants made statements suggesting that the applicant would have successful customer interactions. The participants in the General Disclosure condition also felt that the participant would have successful coworker interactions as 4 of 7 participants made statements that the applicant would have successful customer interactions.

The participants in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition non-significantly rated the participant as less successful in customer interactions when compared to median ratings of the other conditions (median = 4.0). Qualitative results supported this finding as three of eight participants in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition made statements suggesting that stuttering could affect interactions with customers. Only two of eight participants in this condition indicated that the participant would have successful interactions with coworkers. Participants in the Positive Disclosure condition also made statements suggesting that the applicant would have unsuccessful customer interactions. Three of eight participants indicated that the applicant would have successful customer interactions, with one participant in this condition indicating that the applicant's stuttering could affect customer interactions.

Successful Interactions with Coworkers

The Kruskal-Wallis test did not indicate a significant difference between conditions regarding successful interactions with coworkers. The participants in the No Disclosure condition, the General Disclosure condition, and the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition non-significantly rated the applicant more positively than the participants in the Positive Disclosure condition. Qualitatively, the participants in the General Disclosure condition rated the job applicant as the most successful in coworker interactions as 5 of 7 participants indicated that the participant would have successful interactions. The participants in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition had a similar level of agreement, with 5 of 8 participants indicating positive coworker interactions and 3 of 8 participants indicating a need for more information.

Descriptively, participants in the Positive Disclosure condition rated the participant as less successful in interactions with coworkers compared to median ratings of the other conditions (median = 5.0). Regarding qualitative data analysis, participants in the No Disclosure condition

indicated the most uncertainty that the applicant would have successful coworker interactions as 3 of 8 of the participants indicated that the applicant would have successful coworker interactions. The remaining five participants indicated that they would need more information to make this judgment. Participants in the Positive Disclosure condition was similar in that 4 of 8 participants indicated that the participant would have successful coworker interactions and 4 of 8 participants required more information to make this judgment.

Additional Questions for Applicant

Additional questions that retail managers have for potential employees based on type of stuttering disclosure statement was a second research question for this study. Participants in the Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy condition and the Positive Disclosure condition were more likely to indicate that they would ask the applicant questions about stuttering compared to participants in the General Disclosure condition. This could indicate that providing additional personal information about stuttering in addition to a general disclosure statement (i.e., involvement in speech therapy or framing it in a positive manner) makes potential employers more interested in, or feel more comfortable about, asking questions about stuttering.

Relation to Previous Studies

Negative Perceptions of Stuttering

The general public has been found to have negative perceptions of stuttering (Evans et al., 2008; Franck et al., 2003; Ruscello et al., 1988; Silverman & Paynter, 1990; Van Borsel et al., 2011). Hurst and Cooper (1983) found that employers also demonstrated negative perceptions of employees who stutter when measured using the Employer Attitudes Toward Stuttering (EATS) Inventory. Approximately 60% of participants who completed the EATS

Inventory indicated that a typically-fluent person should be hired over a person who stutters who is equally qualified for a position, and close to 30% of the participants believed that stuttering affected performance in the workplace (Hurst & Cooper, 1983).

Several comments made by participants in the qualitative section of this study indicate that employers are concerned that stuttering may impact occupational success, which aligns with findings of previous studies. However, the Kruskal-Wallis test returned a result which failed to support the existence of significant differences between the conditions. Additionally, many of the participants in each condition stated that they needed more information about the applicant before making a judgment on occupational success. Overall, more information is needed to draw conclusions concerning employer perceptions of disclosure of stuttering on a cover letter.

Disclosure of Stuttering

Findings from the majority of disclosure statement studies suggest that disclosure statements can be used to offset negative perceptions of stuttering. The earliest of these studies found that participants rated videos of a person who stutters more favorably if they disclose their stutter in the video compared to not disclosing their stutter (Collins & Blood, 1990). Lee & Manning (2010) found similar results with audio samples of a person who stutters. Similar to this study, a recently conducted study has also focused on type of disclosure statement. Byrd et al. (2017) found that participants rated videos of a person who stutters more positively when they disclose their stuttering in an informative manner as opposed to disclosing in an apologetic manner or not disclosing at all.

The current study did not find a significant difference between disclosure and nondisclosure conditions. This may be related to the methodology of the current study. Past

studies have often used video or audio samples of a person who stutters either disclosing or not disclosing their stuttering in an interaction. The No Disclosure condition of the current study did not contain a reference to stuttering, unlike the videos presented in previous studies; therefore, participants in the no disclosure condition in this study did not perceive the person writing the cover letter as a person who stutters. This may have acted as a confounding variable, so further information is necessary to draw conclusions about the potential benefits of disclosure in a cover letter.

Disclosure Plus Speech Therapy

Gabel (2006) and Gabel et al. (2008) explored the effect of a disclosure statement plus mention of involvement in speech therapy on the perceptions of college students. Results of these studies are inconsistent. Gabel (2006) found that college students rated written descriptions of a person who stutters more favorably if participation in speech therapy was mentioned. However, Gabel et al. (2008) found that college students did not rate descriptions of PWS who acknowledge participation in speech therapy as more suitable for a job compared to descriptions of PWS who do not acknowledge participation in speech therapy.

Results from the current study support the findings of Gabel et al. (2008) as the disclosure plus speech therapy condition and the positive disclosure conditions were overall not rated more favorably than the general disclosure statement. However, more information is needed to draw conclusions about the use of disclosure of speech therapy in a cover letter.

Population

The majority of studies exploring disclosure have been conducted in a laboratory setting with college students. The current study is relatively novel in that it explores perceptions of

stuttering with a population outside of the laboratory setting. Few studies have examined the perceptions of general retail managers. The methods in this study differ from previous studies in that the researcher went into the field to recruit participants. All participants were employed as managers and they completed surveys in their business establishment.

McDonald and Frick (1954) conducted a study with a similar methodology and recruitment strategy. The researchers instructed a person who stutters to enter a store and block severely while speaking to an employee of the store. Following the interaction, a researcher approached the employee, explained the purpose of the study, and conducted a verbal survey. The current study is similar in that participants were employed in a retail setting and approached in their establishment. McDonald and Frick found that store clerks in their study rarely reacted with impatience or amusement after speaking with a person who stutters severely. Participants were more likely to react with feelings of surprise, embarrassment, and curiosity (McDonald & Frick, 1954). Results of the current study support this finding as several participants in the disclosure conditions indicated curiosity concerning the applicant's stuttering demonstrated by stating that they would ask interview questions about stuttering. However, due to non-significant quantitative results and qualitative results indicating that employers would like more information before making judgments on an applicant, more information is needed before drawing conclusions concerning employer perceptions.

Clinical Implications

Although quantitative results indicate nonsignificant differences between conditions of this study, qualitative measures may indicate that employers respond more positively to a cover letter that does not include a disclosure statement compared to cover letters that include some type of disclosure statement. This preliminary finding aligns with prior studies that have found

negative perceptions of people who stutter. This finding in itself does not suggest that people who stutter should not disclose stuttering on a cover letter, as the no disclosure condition in this study did not mention stuttering at all, meaning that the cover letter had no indication that it was written by a person who stutters.

Although the majority of participants qualitatively indicated that they would need more information to make a judgement on the applicant, two participants in the positive disclosure condition indicated that positive disclosure of speech therapy prior to the job interview was beneficial to the candidate. Participant 19 stated that the participant's disclosure statement "minimized the impact on his employment before being discovered during an interview." Participant 32 stated, "Specific customer service duties described as well as disclosure of the stuttering. It is uncommon that a candidate will bring info like this forward & put a positive spin on it." Participants in this condition, as well as the disclosure plus speech therapy condition, were also more likely to indicate that they would ask questions about stuttering in their interviews.

For these participants, the findings of this study reveal that disclosing stuttering in a general or positive manner on a cover letter when applying for a job was perceived favorably compared to a disclosure plus speech therapy statement. Additionally, findings suggest that a potential employer may be more interested in asking the job applicant questions about stuttering if they disclose speech therapy involvement or disclose stuttering in a positive manner. However, findings from this study are preliminary, and further research is necessary to draw conclusions on employer perceptions of disclosure on a cover letter.

Limitations

Limitations to the current study will be discussed in this section. The sample used in this study poses several limitations. The total sample size was small ($N = 32$), with 8 participants in each condition prior to exclusion of several participants. A larger sample size would allow for more valid comparison to the population. The sample also poses a geographic limitation as all participants were from the same city in Northwestern Ohio. A gender bias may also be a compounding variable as more than 60% of the participants were female.

A second limitation of this study has to do with the nature of exploring a topic related to disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 provides protection for people with disabilities against discrimination in employment (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2005). As it is illegal to discriminate against an employee or potential employee with a disability, participants may have been hesitant to respond to survey questions in a way that could suggest discrimination against a person who stutters. This could create a response bias that does not represent true employer attitudes.

Another limitation of this study is related to the structure of the cover letters. The cover letter was written to suggest a very competent applicant with work experience. All participants included in quantitative analysis rated all Likert statements with at least a 4 rating out of the 7-point scale, indicating neither agree nor disagree, or above, indicating some level of agreement. As none of the participants indicated any level of disagreement with the Likert statements, data was overall skewed. To attempt to reduce skewness of the data, a future study could investigate the use of a disclosure statement in a cover letter written by a typical entry-level applicant, rather than by a very competent applicant.

A final limitation is that the majority of employers indicated that they needed more information or an in-person interview with the fictional applicant to make a judgment on employability, success in the work environment, and success in workplace interactions. This could indicate that there may be a more sensitive means of determining the effect of disclosure of stuttering on perceptions of employers. Following the methodology trend of previous perception studies, use of audio or video samples of a mock job interview with a person who stutters in conjunction with use of disclosure of stuttering in a cover letter may provide more information that can be used to draw conclusions about the effects of disclosure on perceptions of retail employers.

Future Directions

Future research concerning use of disclosure in employment interactions can continue in several directions. Replication of this study with a larger sample size in a different geographical area could be useful in addressing limitations posed by the sample used in this study. Replication of this study using a slightly different sample is another potential future research direction. For example, a study similar to the current study could be conducted investigating the use of disclosure statements in cover letters for jobs that require a college degree or other technical training.

Many of the participants across all conditions indicated that they needed more information or an interview with the applicant to make a judgment of employability and success in interactions. A future line of research could include showing participants a video of a staged job interview with a person who stutters. Employer reactions could be measured as a dependent variable against an independent variable of type and location of disclosure statement used in the interview video. Additionally, employers could view an interview of a person who stutters

completing a job interview after reading a cover letter written by that person. The cover letter could vary in presence of a disclosure statement. Perceptions could be measured following viewing the video to determine if prior knowledge of stuttering as indicated by the cover letter affects perceptions of the applicant.

A final continuing direction for research in this area could be to complete interviews with people who stutter solely concerning experiences with job interviews. Although employment has come up as a theme in several qualitative studies of the effects of stuttering on quality of life (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Klompas & Ross, 2004), a study focusing specifically on interview experiences could provide valuable information concerning reactions of employers to stuttering. Participants could be asked about disclosure of stuttering and how, or if, they talk about stuttering during a job interview.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine employer reactions to different types of disclosure statements in the context of a cover letter. This study was novel in that it examined the use of a disclosure statement with people employed in a retail management position outside of a laboratory setting.

Quantitative findings of this study were found to be nonsignificant, indicating the need for further research on the topic of stuttering disclosure statements and job applications. Qualitatively, many participants indicated a need for further information on the fictional job applicant prior to making judgments on the applicant's employability. However, several participants in the disclosure conditions indicated that the presence of a disclosure statement was beneficial. Participants in the three disclosure conditions were found to have nonsignificant differing reactions based on the type of disclosure statement in the cover letter. Overall, these participants qualitatively rated the general disclosure and positive disclosure conditions more positively than the disclosure plus speech therapy condition. Participants were also more likely to indicate that they would ask the applicant questions about stuttering if they disclosed stuttering and participation in speech therapy or disclosed stuttering positively. Altogether, findings from this study suggest disclosing stuttering in a general or positive manner on a cover letter rather than only disclosing involvement in speech therapy if choosing to include a disclosure statement. However, results from this study are preliminary, and further information is needed to draw conclusions concerning employer reactions to disclosure statements on a cover letter.

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APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT



Bowling Green State University

Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders
Speech & Hearing Clinic

My name is Charity Yarzebinski and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Bowling Green State University (BGSU). With the assistance of my advisor, Dr. Charles Hughes, I am conducting a research study that examines how attitudes of retail managers toward different cover letters changes as the applicant discloses certain types of information. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least (1) 18 years old; (2) employed in a management position at a retail establishment in Northwest Ohio; (3) and have no difficulty comprehending reading material in English at the 12th grade level.

If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to read a brief cover letter and complete a short survey regarding your thoughts about the cover letter. No identifying information will be collected, such as your name or the name of your establishment. It is anticipated that participation in this survey will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to discontinue participation, or not answer questions at any time without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with BGSU.

Following completion of the survey, I will transport your data to a locked, secure area. Your responses will also be stored on a password protected computer and will be kept indefinitely. Only members of the research team will have access to your data. Your name or the name of your establishment will not be associated with this data, and individuals reading our findings will only know a general geographic region where the data was collected (e.g. Northwest Ohio).

I anticipate no more than minimal risk to you if you choose to participate in this study. You will not receive any direct benefit from participating, however your participation will contribute to my discipline's understanding of employer reactions to information provided on cover letters.

If at any time you have questions about your participation in this study, please feel free to contact me (cyarzeb@bgsu.edu) or my advisor (chughes@bgsu.edu). Our full contact information is provided at the end of this paragraph. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at 419-372-7716 or at orc@bgsu.edu if you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study. Thank you for your time and consideration of participation in this study.

Charity Yarzebinski, B.S.
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Your completion and return of the survey to me serves as your consent to participate in this study. Furthermore, you agree that (1) you have been informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the current study, you (2) have had the opportunity to have any questions answered regarding the study, and (3) you have been informed that your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

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APPENDIX B. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE AND COVER LETTERS

Version A-1

1. Gender: _____
2. Age (please provide in whole numbers): _____
3. Are you in some type of management position (please circle)?

Yes	No
-----	----
4. Are you able to comprehend reading material at the 12th grade level?

Yes	No
-----	----

Instructions: Please read the provided cover letter and respond to each of the following questions as if you were considering hiring this person for a **cashier position.**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to apply for an entry-level position at your business. My previous work experience has given me the tools necessary for success in a customer services field and makes me a strong candidate for a position at your business.

My most recent job has been rewarding because it taught me how to provide customer service in a team environment under time pressure. My duties included maintaining a clean and safe work space, working as a team with my coworkers, following a strict food-safety code, using a cash register and handling money, providing excellent customer service to a wide range of customers, being timely, learning many positions in the restaurant, prioritizing and carrying out a variety of tasks at the same time, and taking a leadership role in training new crewmembers.

I would very much appreciate the chance to meet with you to discuss my potential future at your business. I can start work right away and I am flexible in the hours I can work. My background in customer service will allow me to play a valuable role as an employee. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

John

Version C-4

1. Gender: _____
2. Age (please provide in whole numbers): _____
3. Are you in some type of management position (please circle)?

Yes	No
-----	----
4. Are you able to comprehend reading material at the 12th grade level?

Yes	No
-----	----

Instructions: Please read the provided cover letter and respond to each of the following questions as if you were considering hiring this person for a **sales associate position.**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to apply for an entry-level position at your business. My previous work experience has given me the tools necessary for success in a customer services field and makes me a strong candidate for a position at your business.

My most recent job has been rewarding because it taught me how to provide customer service in a team environment under time pressure. My duties included maintaining a clean and safe work space, working as a team with my coworkers, following a strict food-safety code, using a cash register and handling money, providing excellent customer service to a wide range of customers, being timely, learning many positions in the restaurant, prioritizing and carrying out a variety of tasks at the same time, and taking a leadership role in training new crewmembers.

I would very much appreciate the chance to meet with you to discuss my potential future at your business. I can start work right away and I am flexible in the hours I can work. My background in customer service will allow me to play a valuable role as an employee. Something that sets me apart from other candidates is that I am a person who stutters. I am in speech therapy to work on my speech and I can successfully manage my stuttering when necessary. I am the type of person who sets goals for myself in all areas of my life, including my speech fluency. I do not let any of the challenges in my life negatively affect my ability to succeed. My involvement in speech therapy, as well as my commitment to self-improvement, has shaped me into an excellent communicator. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

John

APPENDIX C. SURVEY

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

This person is employable.	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4 Neither agree nor disagree	5	6	7 Strongly agree
----------------------------	------------------------	---	---	---------------------------------	---	---	---------------------

Describe your reason for choosing your response to the question above.

This person would be successful in a work environment in my establishment.	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4 Neither agree nor disagree	5	6	7 Strongly agree
--	------------------------	---	---	---------------------------------	---	---	---------------------

Describe your reason for choosing your response to the question above.

This person would have successful customer interactions.	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4 Neither agree nor disagree	5	6	7 Strongly agree
--	------------------------	---	---	---------------------------------	---	---	---------------------

Describe your reason for choosing your response to the question above.

This person would have successful interactions with coworkers.	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4 Neither agree nor disagree	5	6	7 Strongly agree
--	------------------------	---	---	---------------------------------	---	---	---------------------

Describe your reason for choosing your response to the question above.

If you were interviewing this person for a job, what additional questions would you ask them?

Do you know someone who stutters? Yes No

If you answered “Yes” to the first questions, please respond below. If “No”, please disregard this question.

How well do you know this person?

1 Not at all well	2	3	4 Moderately well	5	6	7 Very well
-------------------------	---	---	-------------------------	---	---	----------------

END OF SURVEY – THANK YOU!

APPENDIX D. VERBAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

“Hi. My name’s Charity and I’m a graduate student at BGSU who is conducting research for my master’s thesis. May I speak with a manager please?”

If manager is unavailable:

“Okay. Is there a better time when I could come back to speak with the manager?”

If manager is available:

“Hi. My name is Charity and I am a graduate student at BGSU who is conducting research for my master’s thesis. Would you be interested in participating in my research study? I understand that you are busy and I appreciate your consideration of participation. It would take about 5-10 minutes to participate. You would need to read a short cover letter and write responses to a small number of questions. Are you willing to participate in my study?”

If no:

“Okay, thank you for your time.”

If yes, but not at this time:

Will return at a time that works for the manager.

If yes:

Provide consent document.

“Please read this informed consent document. It explains what you will be doing in the study as well as discusses your rights as a participant in this study.”

Wait for manager to finish reading letter.

“Your completion of the finished survey will serve as your consent to participate in this study. Do you have any questions for me? Are you willing to participate in this study?”

Provide manager with a randomly assigned cover letter condition and the appropriate rating portion of the survey questionnaire based on their type of establishment. Wait for return of questionnaire and cover letter.

“Thank you for your time. If you have any questions about your participation in this study, feel free to contact me, my advisor, or the Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board using the contact information provided on your informed consent document.”